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Writing Sequence: Using a “Book Editing” Project to Unify a Course

History 100.31 Envisioning America: Images of a Revolutionary People, 1492-1865

Kathryn Clippinger Kosto

Fall 2001

The writing assignments in this course all built up to the final research project, which required crafting a research paper based on a “fragment” of history; that is, copies of primary sources that students received by week 3.¹ The assignments in the course were grouped into three levels of difficulty: assignments 1-3 involved close analysis and careful description; assignments 5 and 6 required synthesis and historiographical analysis; and the final assignments (7 and 9) asked students to engage in an independent research project. In all assignments (except the first), students chose their own comparisons by drawing from the primary sources we studied each week. Although the course was constructed chronologically, I wanted the students to develop comparisons across time; thus, some students continued to use a favorite source that we had studied during the early weeks of class, developing more nuanced readings as the semester progressed. Others were happy to move on, and wrote on new topics each time. Likewise, students chose which paper they wished to revise for assignments 4 and 8, thus encouraging them to make choices about their own writing.

Although the writing assignments for this course functioned as an overall sequence, I would like to highlight a technique used during the second half of the course. After developing primary source analysis skills, the students began preparations for their final research project via assignments 5 and 6. Though I provided some open-ended suggestions for comparisons at this point, I was delighted to find students wanted to form their own revealing comparisons. The week before each assignment was due, we discussed what the students were working on, and helped “plan” the papers of a few volunteers. This usually involved jotting down outlines on the board, or studying an image to see if it supported the student’s hypothesis.

Simultaneously, our chronological study of American history settled into the antebellum era for a few weeks: we considered Jacksonian politics, labor and

¹ Please see the course web site for assignments, weekly reading response questions, and selected final research papers: <http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/hist100.31/>

Login: hist100.31

Password: america

immigration, women's history, and abolition. Yet I wanted to present these case studies in a broader context; likewise, I wished to link the two middle-range assignments (5 and 6) to the final project. Although assignment 5 helped students polish their analytical skills, and assignment 6 allowed them to develop historiographical skills, I found some students wondered how they could make sense out of their "fragment" for the final assignment. They agreed they were proficient at primary source analysis at that point, but some were puzzled as to how they could "embed the fragment in a thick layer of pertinent historical context" as the assignment required. I also wanted the students to emerge from the strict separation of primary and secondary sources (which, of course, took some initial untangling) that previous assignments emphasized. My goal was that they learn to use both primary and secondary sources to support a thesis and recognize the different ways each source had to be used.

Accordingly, the in-class "book editing" project served both goals. Using the attached memo, students worked in small groups to consider the question: "How Democratic was Jacksonian Democracy?" This project allowed our class to look at the course as a whole, to learn how to make supporting arguments, and to evaluate which evidence was the best to prove a point. The book editing project helped pull together the case-studies of the final weeks of the course, and allowed students to use both primary and secondary sources as evidence for studying a historical period. By giving them a strong position to argue, it allowed each group to develop its own "voice," rather than be overwhelmed by historians' authoritative prose or a laundry list of primary source quotations (two common problems with novice history papers). As we worked in class, many students were surprised to find they interpreted the same sources very differently. This project allowed them to approach history as historians do: as a lively discussion of ideas and arguments drawn from primary source evidence.

Students emailed their portion of the book proposal to their editors, who were responsible for revising to achieve a consistent tone. I then posted the book proposals on the course web site, and asked them to read each other's work.² We revisited this project during the following weeks. I handed out copies of the proposals, and asked each group to add in one source from the "women's history" portion of the course to buttress their

² <http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/hist100.31/jackson.html>

argument. Modeling our discussion on a historians' colloquium, we then discussed how a fuller study of African-American and women's history brought issues of inequality into the forefront; this helped students see how these newer fields do not merely add to our understanding of history, but in fact transform the so-called master narrative of traditional history.

Although some of the book proposals were stronger than others, I think that the type of writing it encouraged helped the students with their final projects. In preparation for assignment 9, students had handed in draft titles for their final projects in week 8, and I posted the schedule of presentations on the web site, which helped make the research projects integral to the classroom, rather than additional, unrelated work. Assignment 7, which had students give "work-in-progress" presentations, encouraged students to complete their research earlier in the semester so they could then focus on writing. Students gave exceptionally helpful and respectful feedback to each other, and many took the opportunity for peer-editing during this stage. Additionally, scheduled meetings with the students at weeks 4 and 10 helped me guide their progress; I also commented extensively on the planning outlines or drafts they handed in the Thursday after their presentations. In conclusion, the book-editing project helped transform how the students approached their final research projects by letting them connect their skill in careful description to persuasive analysis within a historical context.

Cornell University Press
Ithaca, New York

November 1, 2001

To: Americanists, History Department

From: Editor-in-Chief, Cornell University Press *PC*

Subject: Book Contract for the series *How Democratic was Jacksonian Democracy?*

We are planning a book series around the question, "How Democratic was Jacksonian Democracy"? The expected audiences are undergraduates at upper-division universities, scholars in the field, and an interested public. We are looking for four texts that answer this question: one in the affirmative, one in the negative, and two as a synthesis.

The finished book will include the historians' preface and a collection of four (4) primary or secondary sources. For this initial planning stage, we ask that you submit:

1. A preface: your thesis and rationale for selecting sources (no more than 225 words). Some historical background may be included.
2. A list of the sources you propose, including brief introductions (about 50 words each) as a guide to readers.

As you know, we value works with a strong thesis, which are clearly and persuasively written for an academic audience. We welcome book proposals that emphasize a particular approach (e.g. economic, political, or social history), but recognize that other methodologies are appropriate. We particularly seek entries with an innovative use of visual sources.

Editors are to submit their group's finished proposals to me, **no later than 1 p.m. on Tuesday, November 6 via email** (kac36@cornell.edu).^{*} The most persuasive proposal has potential to win Cornell University Press's renowned Carl Becker Award.

Please see the attached form for submitting your proposal.

Thank you.

^{*} Reading responses for week 10 are waived *for editors only*, who are responsible for typing and emailing the group's work.

Book Proposal: *How Democratic was Jacksonian Democracy?*

Editor: _____

Contributing Historians: _____

Historians' Preface: (no more than 225 words)

Text/Image 1: (title, date)

Introduction: (about 50 words)

Text/Image 2: (title, date)

Introduction: (about 50 words)

Text/Image 3: (title, date)

Introduction: (about 50 words)

Text/Image 4: (title, date)

Introduction: (about 50 words)

**Envisioning America:
Images of a Revolutionary People, 1492-1865**

History 100.31

Fall 2001

Tuesdays and Thursday: 11:40-12:55

Instructor: K. Clippinger

Office: McGraw 365

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 12:00-2:00

e-mail: kac36@cornell.edu

Spanning the years from European contact with American Indians to the Civil War, this course explores American history through the close analysis of texts and images. We will focus on how Americans expressed ideas about race, ethnicity, family life, and the American landscape through the words and pictures they created over four centuries. Questions we will consider include: what are the stories that written documents and visual sources tell about the past? What is revealed about American culture by studying the art and objects Americans valued (or, in turn, rejected)? Major topics include the Columbian encounter; Dutch, English, French and Spanish settlements; African-American culture; and Jacksonian democracy.

This course emphasizes the development of clear, fluid writing based on the innovative analysis of historians' works and primary sources, including maps, letters, photographs, diaries and paintings. The analytic and writing skills developed in this class will help form a basis for students' future collegiate research and writing.

For the final course project, students will explore history through a "fragment," such as a slave-owner's journal, a military plan, a hand-sewn quilt, or other primary source about which little is known. Using these fragments from the past, each student will trace a string of clues to find their historical context and meaning. Students have the option of posting their final research project on the course web site.

Texts: (available at campus book store)

Course Packet

Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*

John Trimble, *Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing*

Optional supplemental reading: Mary Beth Norton, et. al., *A People and a Nation* (Vol. I)
on two-day reserve at Uris library; copies also available at campus book store

Course Requirements:

Eight short papers, including two re-writes and a planning outline (assignments 2-9):
80% of grade

Attendance and informed participation (including reading responses and in-class writing assignments): 20% of grade

To facilitate the development of their writing, students are asked to keep all of their writing assignments and bring them to discussions with the instructor.

Course Web Site:

The course web site (<http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/hist100.31>) contains many of the visual materials we will be discussing and writing about for class. The web site also contains the syllabus, copies of assignments, course updates, and related links.

Course Policies:

Informed participation means more than simply attending class. Come prepared **each Tuesday** (except as noted) with brief, typed comments and questions regarding the images and readings assigned for the week.

To prepare your weekly reading responses (no more than ½ page or one paragraph):
Read the class assignments carefully: jot down your observations and questions;
formulate ideas for future paper topics.
View the images on the course web site: how do they relate to the readings?
Participate in our e-mail exchange of writing tips.

Be prepared to share your writing with the class; in turn, be respectful of others' work (see some *words of advice* from Benjamin Franklin).

Please be on time.

Only two unexcused absences are permitted per semester, lest your grade be affected.

All assignments must be typed and double-spaced, using a 12 point typeface. Please use 1" margins, include page numbers, and staple your final product together.

Assignments are due at the beginning of class; all late papers are marked down one full grade. You must check with the instructor before submitting late work; no papers are accepted more than one week after the due date.

Course Schedule:

Note: brief reading selections from Hacker will be assigned as needed throughout the semester

Face to Face in Early America 1492-1775:

- Week 1
(9/4-6) **The Columbian Encounter**
Reading: Columbus; Aztec Account; Kupperman; Trimble, Chapter 1
- Tuesday: first meeting (no reading response due)
Thursday: **Assignment 1 due:** Image Analysis Paragraph
- Week 2
(9/11-13) **Ordering Settlements**
Reading: Bradford; Van Tienhoven; Merrell; Trimble, Chapter 2
- Tuesday: reading response
Thursday: **Assignment 2 due:** Text Analysis (2–3 pages)
- Week 3
(9/18-20) **Family Order**
Reading: Bradstreet; Mather; Byrd; Pinckney; Trimble, Chapters 3, 12
- Tuesday: reading response
Thursday: **Assignment 3 due:** Image and Text Comparison (3–4 pages)
- Week 4
(9/25-27) **The Enslaved**
Reading: Barbot; Equiano; Smith; newspaper ads; Trimble, Chapters 4, 10, 11
- Tuesday: **library session;** *schedule meeting with instructor*
Thursday: reading response
- Week 5
(10/2-4) **Ethnic Interactions**
Reading: Cotton; Crèvecoeur; inventory (class hand-out); Trimble, Chapter 5
- Tuesday: reading response
Thursday: **Assignment 4 due:** Revision of 2 or 3; preliminary discussion of final assignment

Visualizing A Nation 1775-1830:

Week 6
(10/11) **War and its Meanings**
Reading: Paine; Trimble, Chapter 6

Tuesday: *fall break*
Thursday: reading response

Week 7
(10/16-18) **Creating Order: Trumbull and the Constitution**
Reading: Taylor; Constitutional debates

Tuesday: reading response
Thursday: **Assignment 5 due:** Developing an Argument: Conflicting Evidence (3–4 pages)

Week 8
(10/23-25) **A Nation's Intellect**
Reading: D. C. Ward; Trimble, Chapter 9

Tuesday: reading response

Week 9
(10/30-11/1) **Jacksonian Democracy**
Reading: J. W. Ward; Trimble, Chapter 13

Tuesday: reading response
Thursday: **Assignment 6 due:** Developing an Argument: Discussing a Historian's work (3–4 pages)

A Growing Nation 1830-1861:

Week 10
(11/6-8) **Westward Visions**
Reading: images on web site; Trimble, Chapter 7

Tuesday: **museum session**; reading response;
Assignment 7*: presentations; *schedule meeting with instructor*
Thursday: Revised outline due (for presenters only)

Week 11
(11/13-15) **Women's Rights and Women's Lives**
Reading: Torchia; Z. W. Longfellow letter (class hand-out)

Tuesday: reading response; **Assignment 7***: Presentations
Thursday: **Assignment 8 due:** revision of 5 or 6; update on final assignment; revised outline due (for presenters only)

* Approximately four students will present each Tuesday; an introductory paragraph and preliminary outline with questions are due the following Thursday.

Week 12
(11/20)

People at Work

Reading: Rubenstein

Tuesday: reading response; **Assignment 7***: Presentations; revised outline due as scheduled (for presenters only)

Thursday: *Thanksgiving recess*

Week 13
(11/27-29)

Yearning to be Free

Reading: Stroyer; Pennington; Lane; Douglass; Lapsansky; *Liberator* (class hand-out)

Tuesday: reading response; **Assignment 7***: Presentations

Thursday: Revised outline due (for presenters only)

A Nation Divided 1861-65

Week 14
(12/4-6)

War: through whose eyes?

Reading: Chesnut; Anderson [*Tribune* article];

Short selections from *The Army Life on an Illinois Soldier*, available on-line:

<http://campusgw.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/ebooks.cgi?bookid=11579>

Tuesday: reading response

Thursday: **Final Assignment 9 due:** Writing History (4–5 pages)

Envisioning America, 1492-1865

History 100.31

Fall 2001

Instructor: K. Clippinger

Assignment 1: Image Analysis Paragraph

Examine the image before you closely. Consider the following questions to get started, and jot down your ideas (we will discuss some of them as a group):

What is happening?

What is the relationship between the figures and the landscape or background?

How is the image composed? What sorts of lines exist? How do they draw your eye? How are areas of light and dark used? (or color, if applicable)

When was the image produced? What else was occurring at the time (historical context)?

How or where would the image originally have been seen? What is the size of the original image? What effect would this have had on the viewer?

What purpose did the image serve?

Iconography: based on your reading, and class notes, how is symbolic imagery used?

What might these symbols mean for the audience(s) that viewed the image? (use Kupperman's chapter as a guide to decoding symbols, and the varying meanings they had for different audiences)

Thinking as a historian, why is this image significant? What does it tell you about cultural contact?

Next, return to your rough notes. What common themes emerge? Which do you think is your strongest point? Do your observations agree with or differ from this week's readings?

Write **one paragraph** developing your best observation based on careful use of visual evidence (check the web site to view the image again). Support your argument with observation, but avoid a purely descriptive paragraph. A simple test is to ask yourself: do I simply "tell" what is going on in the image? Do I answer how and why? Why are my observations important?

Some pointers: as noted on the syllabus, all assignments must be typed and double-spaced, using a 12 point typeface with 1" margins.

Due date: **Thursday, September 6**, at the beginning of class. Please hand in this sheet (with notes) with your assignment.

Goal: to mine visual primary sources for historical evidence, and develop writing skills that combine description and analysis in a strong paragraph structure. Writing clear analytical paragraphs is the groundwork for the longer papers in this course. In other words: our goal is to think and to write like historians!

Please refer back to these questions, and apply them to images you will encounter over the next few weeks.

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Assignment 2: Text Analysis (2–3 pages)

Select a written primary source from either Week 1 or 2, and write a two to three page analysis of the source. To help get you started, jot down responses to the following questions, and incorporate ideas from your weekly reading response:

What is the subject matter?

What purpose did the text serve?

When was the document produced? What else was occurring at the time (historical context)?

How is the document organized? Why?

Does the writer present an argument or narrate an event? How is this done?

Was it a private or public document? Who was the intended audience?

How does the writing style or word choices of the author reflect his or her concerns (allowing for translators' license)? Is the document terse? Laudatory? Authoritative? Anxious? Which words would you use to describe the document's tone?

What are some of the major concerns of the writer? Which are overt? Which are unstated? Why?

Do you "believe" the writer? Or do you think parts of the story are left out? Why?

Thinking as a historian, why is this document significant? What does it tell you about the settlement process?

Some pointers: If you work from your “brainstorming” notes, you probably will not be able to cover **all** of the issues from our class discussions, the weekly readings, and your own notes!

Pay close attention to organization. Consider how the text addresses a historical question, and plan your paper as an answer to this query (review Trimble, Chapter 2).

Choose two to three interrelated main points, and develop each in a paragraph. Arrange them so they will flow together, and develop a brief introduction and conclusion that frames your argument (you might want to read ahead in Trimble, Chapters 3-5).

Back up your argument with properly quoted and cited evidence. Use Hacker’s *Pocket Style Manual* as a guide.

Please note: include a brief “Acknowledgements” section at the end of your paper if you have incorporated ideas or suggestions from our class discussion or conversation with others.

Due date: **Thursday, September 13**, at the beginning of class. Include this sheet (with notes) with your assignment.

Goal: again, we are plumbing the depths of some well-known (and some rather obscure) historical texts to write about history. Hopefully, you will find that you have too many points to cover, but this is a good thing: it is better to make one point convincingly than many points poorly.

Something to consider: how would you define “history”? Is it facts? Trained historians’ (professors’) interpretations? The sources themselves? Or are there other definitions?

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Assignment 3: Image and Text Comparison (3-4 pages)

Chose one primary source text and one visual source from Weeks 1-3, and write a three to four page paper analyzing and comparing them.

Comparisons are central to writing history. Making a good comparison, however, takes quite a bit of thought. Are the primary sources too similar? Dissimilar? How can the contrasts illuminate historical questions? You are encouraged to make your own selections, but we will discuss some possible pairings in class.

Some questions to start your selection and writing process:

1. Choose a pairing from two different time periods or cultures. What differences are apparent? (It is best to chose similar topics if you go this route)
2. Use the questions from **Assignments 1 and 2** to draft some observational notes.
3. How does the author or artist convey his or her ideas? Do texts and images reveal similar or different insights into the past? Can texts and images be “read” the same way?
4. How does this pairing reveal new insight into a subject? How have some of the historians you have read approached this subject? Would their work have benefited from the comparative approach you are using?

Some pointers: Organization is key. Consider some of the formats for writing comparative papers we discussed in class. Also, you cannot fit every idea into this paper! Winnow out your ideas, and chose the one(s) that will make the best paper. Include a brief “Acknowledgements” section at the end of your paper.

Due date: **Thursday, September 20**, at the beginning of class.

Goal: you will not be able to make perfect comparisons. Images and texts come from different regions of America; decades separate some materials, and sources are very much a product of an individual’s psyche. But comparing apples and oranges *can* be a fruitful process – so long as you acknowledge and consider these variables.

Professional historians often aspire to write comparative history, but find it a monumental task. So, don’t be discouraged if you find your comparisons cannot provide a tidy answer; part of writing history is knowing when something is unknowable.

Something to consider: what would be some primary sources that would answer the unanswerable questions you encountered? Would these sources exist in today’s society?

Envisioning America: Images of a Revolutionary People, 1492-1865

History 100.31
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Assignment 4: Meeting and Revision

Please sign up for an appointment to meet with me either during Week 4 or 5 to accomplish the following:

1. Discuss strategies for revising either Assignment 2 or 3 (your choice). Please **attach your original paper to your revised assignment** when you hand it in.
2. Preliminary discussion of final assignment (Assignment 9): Your primary source: what is it? What does it mean?

Due date for revised paper: **Thursday, October 4**, at the beginning of class.

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Assignment 5: Developing an Argument: Conflicting Evidence (3-4 pages)

Choose two primary sources from Weeks 1-6, and write a three to four page paper analyzing and comparing them. Develop an argument that considers how the two primary sources do *not* reveal the same story about early America. You are strongly encouraged to review the course textbook (*A People and a Nation*) for historical context.

Please make your own selection **based on the topics listed below**. If you have another topic in mind, please discuss it with me during office hours.

- Compare the debate at the Constitutional Convention over representation to Samuel Jennings's *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences*. What does this comparison reveal?
- Crèvecoeur answers the question, "what is an American?" Choose another primary source that answers his question differently. Why do you think Crèvecoeur and your source differ?
- What was life like for slaves on a plantation? What was the slaveholder's point of view? What was the enslaved person's experience? What might this indicate about Southern society?
- What does Thomas Paine consider the role of freedom in America? Choose another primary source that counters his claim. How do definitions of freedom differ? Why?
- Compare the role of women in early America. Are women powerful mothers? Weak daughters? Victims? All of the above? Why or why not?

Some questions and comments to help you get started:

1. Use the questions from Assignments 1 and 2 to draft some observational notes on both primary sources. Consider the questions about differing time periods and regions from assignment 3.
2. Did you find two points of view in your primary sources? Are the two points of view equally represented, or is one "hidden" in the text or image? If so, why do you think this is true, drawing on historical context?
3. You may use brief references to other primary sources (other images or texts) to support your argument, but 90% of the paper should focus on a close analysis of the two sources you have chosen.
4. Which point of view do you think is closer to historical reality? Is it possible to say? Why or why not?

5. How does this pairing reveal new insight into a subject? If applicable, how have some of the historians you have read approached this subject? Did they consider the conflicting evidence you have uncovered? **No direct quotations from other secondary sources may be used in this paper; instead, paraphrase and cite (footnote) these sources.**

Due date: **Thursday, October 18**, at the beginning of class.

Some pointers: Please be sure to follow the University of Chicago style for writing papers (see Hacker, p. 169 and following). This includes a title, page numbers, footnotes, a bibliography, and citations for works of art. See the terminology guide on the course web site for more information on vocabulary and techniques for working with images. As before, include a brief “acknowledgements” section at the end of your paper, if you have incorporated ideas from classmates, roommates, people at the writing center, and so on.

Goal: You have developed and honed your analytical skills with assignments 1-3 (including working on the art of revision in assignment 4). Draw on the skills you have developed to “read between the lines” to probe these sources. Focus on crafting a strong thesis supported by primary source evidence.

What are some areas of American history that have been overlooked? Why? Are there some aspects of life in early America that can never be discovered, or do you think that we as historians just have to look harder?

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Assignment 6: Developing an Argument: Discussing a Historian's Work (3-4 pages)

Your previous assignments have focused on analyzing primary sources, using historians' writing as supplemental information. This assignment reverses that relationship: make a historian's work the center of your analysis, and use primary sources as evidence to support or counter his or her argument.

Choose from **one** of the following secondary sources:

- Diamond, Chapter 18, from *Guns, Germs, and Steel*
- Kupperman, "Reading Indian Bodies" from *Indians and English*
- Taylor, "America as Symbol" from *America as Art*
- D. C. Ward, "Democratic Culture: The Peale Museum, 1784-1850," from *The Peale Family: Creation of a Legacy, 1770-1870*
- J. W. Ward, "The Man of (Malleable) Iron," from *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age*

Some comments and questions to help you get started:

1. Summarize the historian's argument. What are its strengths?
2. What sorts of evidence does the historian use to support his or her argument? Do you agree with the interpretation of this evidence? Has other evidence been overlooked? If so, what is it?
3. Is the argument limited in validity? Does it apply to another era, class, race, ethnicity, gender, or region of America? Is this limitation a potential weakness or strength?
4. If you pose a counter-argument, is your argument sustainable?
5. **Limit your direct quotations to no more than three (3) quotes, up to ten words each** for the entire paper. Rely on your own paraphrasing – it is the best way to really think about something thoroughly.

Some pointers: Continue to use the University of Chicago style, and include a brief "acknowledgements" section at the end of your paper. When criticizing, use grace! (Remember Franklin's admonition.)

Due date: **Thursday, November 1**, at the beginning of class

Goal: Developing the skills to evaluate historians' work is key to grappling with historiographical issues, and will prepare you for integrating secondary sources into your final research project. In addition, the analytical skills practiced in this assignment are central to most university disciplines.

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Assignment 7: Presentations; introductory paragraph and outline (read this in conjunction with **Assignment 9**)

You have just received a fragment from the past – a piece of history. But what is it? What does it mean? As you research more about this primary source, you will develop an area of expertise in American history. Plan a presentation of no more than 5 minutes on your primary source. Then, open your discussion to fellow historians (our class) for comments and suggestions.

Some suggestions:

- Spend a few minutes giving an overview of your project: what is it? Why is it significant?
- Pose some specific questions to the class for which you would like feedback; you might want to share a sample paragraph or your thesis for helpful commentary.
- Check to see if a slide of your source is available, or make copies so we can see what you are working on (we can share to save paper). If you bring in materials to me during my office hours the week before, we can use the history department copier.

Based on our comments and questions, **revise** your planning outline, and turn it in on Thursday. You may hand in whatever you wish: from a thesis statement and outline to a rough draft. Do keep in mind, however, that the more complete your work is, the more feedback you will receive. Students who are among the earlier presenters will likely not be as far along in the writing process, but will have the advantage of more time to revise.

Your grade will include an evaluation of your presentation skill: conciseness, clarity, and ability to answer questions.

Due date: as noted for the week.

<p>Goal: historians write up and present their research long before it takes final shape as a scholarly article, book, or museum exhibit. Presenting work-in-progress allows writers to see new angles, clarify their points, and sometimes take entirely new directions. And of course, giving constructive criticism is an art form in and of itself.</p>
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Assignment 8: Meeting and Revision

Please sign up for an appointment to meet with me either during Week 10 or 11 to accomplish the following:

1. Discuss strategies for revising either Assignment 5 or 6 (your choice). **Please attach your original paper to your revised assignment when you hand it in.**
2. Please update me on your progress on the final project (Assignment 9). How is it going? Please bring your thesis questions, draft outline, and all of your research notes to this meeting.

Due date for revised paper: **Thursday, November 15**, at the beginning of class.

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Assignment 9: Writing History (4-5 pages)

You have just received a fragment from the past – a piece of history. But what is it? What does it mean?

For your final assignment, use the observational, analytical, and argumentative skills you have honed to uncover the significance of your primary source. Update your research and writing strategy based on feedback from your class presentation, conferences with me, and comments on your planning outline (or draft) from **assignment 7**.

Include an **author's note** at the conclusion of your research paper, that is, a brief paragraph on the use of sources, key works in your bibliography which changed your opinion, as well as the information which you have normally included in your "acknowledgements" section. Answer these questions: did your thoughts change on this material? How? Why?

Some pointers:

Don't try to do this paper overnight; be attuned to clues, sources, and comparisons that will emerge over the semester. The best papers will embed the fragment in a thick layer of pertinent historical context: they will address the object as a specific angle on American history, but also place it within a larger narrative. You might want to use a comparative approach (like assignments 3 or 5).

First, locate some relevant secondary sources (two to three sources should be adequate), and then become better acquainted with the time and social milieu from which the object came. Don't overlook scholarly articles as a source (try using JSTOR).

Next, track down the specific: how does the fragment relate to the larger historical narrative? Does it reinforce what is already known? Or does it present a different point of view? How typical is your fragment? Is it representative? How have historians addressed (or ignored) your topic?

Due date: **Thursday, December 6**, at the beginning of class.

Goal: The finest history comes from close study of compelling primary sources that probe major questions in America's past. By writing history, you have become a historian. Congratulations!