

Monograph review instructions

(History 105 Fall 2008)

- 1) The first step is choosing an appropriate book. You should look for a scholarly monograph (a detailed study of a single specialized topic) on an issue of interest to you. In most cases, you should look for a work published by a university press. Good places to look for recent works are in the book review sections of major historical journals (e.g. *American Historical Review*, *Journal of Modern History*, *Journal of Asian Studies*) or even in less specialized publications like *The New York Review of Books*. Advertisements in these publications may also be helpful. Investigate several books before choosing the one that you will read and review. By the deadline listed in the syllabus, submit a "monograph review prospectus." This should include the full publication information on the volume (author, title, place of publication, publisher, date of publication). You must also provide a list (with full publication information) of the books you considered but did not choose and a one paragraph account of why you chose the book that you did. Please also include a photocopy of the reviews you read of your book prior to choosing it. You must read (and thus include) at least one review of the book.
- 2) The review should consist of four parts. In part one, you must identify the thesis of the book, noting as much of the complexity of the argument as you can while still clearly stating the main point. In part two, you must provide a chapter by chapter summary of the book, showing how the argument proceeds and indicating what sorts of evidence the author uses to make his or her point. In part three, you should analyze the strengths and the weaknesses of the book. Which parts of the book were particularly convincing, and why? Be sure to indicate what aspect of logic or evidence made the book good or bad: it's not enough to say "I liked it," or "I thought it was boring." In part four, you must explain how the book fits into the themes of the course as a whole. You may want to cite other sources we've read or topics we've discussed in this section. I will also expect students to read books or articles other than the one under review in order to appreciate the broader context of the monograph that's under particular study.
- 3) The paper should be typed and double-spaced.
- 4) Use footnotes (not in-text citations) and include a bibliography. Both of these should be formatted in the "Turabian" style. Refer to your St. Martin's Guide for instructions. If the information you need is not there, ask at the reference desk at the library for Kate Turabian, *A Manual For Writers Of Term Papers, Theses, And Dissertations* (7th edition) or for the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
- 5) By the deadline, you must submit the paper in TWO forms.
 - a. Hard copy must be delivered to my mailbox in the History Department office at Ramer House.
 - b. You must email me an electronic version of your paper. The document should be either in Microsoft Word format (a ".doc" file) or in Rich Text Format (an ".rtf" file). The file name must be in the following format: "2008-105-YOURLASTNAME.doc"

I will be asking the following questions when reading and grading these papers:

- 1) Has the student accurately identified the thesis of the book and summarized the contents well?
- 2) Has the student done enough reading of other sources to identify the particular strengths and weaknesses of the volume he or she is reviewing? Is the student insightful and fair in his or her praise and criticism?
- 3) Has the student made connections between the topics and arguments in the book he or she is reviewing and the broader context of the course? Are those connections meaningfully drawn and coherently expressed?
- 4) Is the prose clear, or are the ideas of the author buried beneath grammar mistakes, poor spelling, unclear diction, and other sources of sloppy writing and sloppy thinking?