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HIS 336
F 2020

Final Paper Assignment

For your final paper in this course, you will write a paper of at least 3500 words (~12 pages) on a topic of your choosing that is related to the course topic. You can choose, that is, any issue related to the September 11th attacks and the subsequent domestic and foreign policy responses, or some element of the prior history that is distinctly related to the attacks. Your essay must be based on significant research in primary sources (media coverage, government documents, archives of various groups, popular culture, etc.) and should also draw on relevant secondary sources (peer-reviewed scholarship in the form of journal articles and books) that may include, but should not be limited to, resources on the syllabus. Based on your research, you will develop a thesis and argument that provides an original analysis that addresses your issue, question, or problem. This paper should be about 4,500 words (15 pages), exclusive of footnotes and a bibliography. This assignment is worth 200 points, which is about 25% of your grade.

The range of topics is wide open, but ultimately I must approve your choice. Some issues that you might want to consider include:

- U.S. policy towards the greater Middle East in the period before, during, and after the events of September 11th or the Iraq or Afghanistan Wars, including the activities of the Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, or Trump administrations.
- Domestic attitudes towards the wars (anti-war sentiment, pro-war sentiment, congressional attitudes and actions, the responses of particular groups or communities, etc.).
- U.S. military policy (recruitment, training, deployment, strategy, tactics, etc.).
- The significance of a particular military engagement (e.g. the Battle of Falujah, the killing of Osama Bin Laden) to larger military, political, or cultural issues related to the War on Terror.
- The representation of the attacks, wars, or other events in U.S. media or popular culture, whether fiction, film, television, memoir, or other form(s).
- The legacies of the wars in U.S. culture, politics, military strategy, etc.
- The political, military, or cultural response to a particular event or set of events (e.g. Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, the PATRIOT Act, the killing of Osama Bin Laden, etc.) in the domestic or foreign-relations sphere.
- The intersection of policies related to the War on Terror with other issues (immigration, privacy, etc.)
- The local (e.g. Washington PA, Pittsburgh, Western PA, your hometown) dimensions of some aspect of these events.
- Local or national efforts to memorialize the attacks or wars.
- Veterans' issues

Any of these topics is sufficiently broad as to require that you narrow the topic to something more manageable while still ensuring that there is a sufficient amount of primary sources to develop an argument. With that in mind, consider that good papers:

- Have a clear thesis that answers the central question of the paper.
- Are framed around “How” and “Why” questions, rather than “Who” and “What” questions. Thus, David Simpson’s essay is valuable because it asks “How did the *New York Times* ‘Portraits of Grief’ contribute to a culture of innocence that legitimated retributive violence after 9/11?” and Libby Anker’s essay asks “How did the conventions of melodrama shape the media coverage of 9/11, and how did that in turn shape the way Americans made sense of the event?”
- Are framed around questions that cannot be answered with a “Yes” or a “No,” because such questions call for either a value judgement or an oversimplification. Thus, “Was George Bush a strong leader?” is a bad question; “How did the Bush administration’s approach to the War on Terror expand executive power?” is a good question. “Is *Generation Kill* an accurate representation of the Iraq War?” is a bad question, while “How did *Generation Kill* shape Americans’ perceptions of the Iraq War?” is a better question.
- Have a clear answer to the “So What?” question. That is, explain why this argument adds to our understanding of the event.
- Are based substantially in primary source research. Your job is not to summarize existing scholarship but to analyze new sources. How many sources? It depends on your topic.
- Engage substantially with the existing research. We are all standing on the shoulders of those who came before us, and we are both indebted to them and can use them to our advantage. How many secondary sources do you need? Again, it depends.
- Well-written, free of substantive grammatical and structural errors, and fully-cited according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

As always, I am happy to offer advice and suggestions at any stage of the writing process. Please feel free to contact me.

Due Dates For NON-Capstone Students:

1. Friday 9/25: A list of three possible topics for your research paper is due by email at 5:00PM
2. Friday, 10/16: A one-page précis of your topic that identifies your argument along with a bibliography of primary secondary sources is due via email by 5:00PM
3. Friday, 11/13: COMPLETE Draft of Final Research Paper Due by 5:00PM– Schedule Zoom meeting with DK to discuss revisions
4. Thursday, 12/3: Final paper due by 5:00

Special Instructions for Students Completing the Capstone

If you are planning to complete your History Capstone in HIS 336, you should plan on writing a paper of about 20 pages (~6,000 words) that adheres to the departmental guidelines (I will provide these on request), with an accelerated schedule:

1. Friday 9/25: A list of three possible topics for your research paper is due by email at 5:00PM.
2. Friday, 10/9: A one-page précis of your topic that identifies your argument along with a bibliography of primary secondary sources is due via email by 5:00PM.
3. Friday 10/23: Draft of introductory paragraph and outline of paper due by 5:00PM – Schedule Zoom meeting with DK to discuss.
4. Friday, 11/6: COMPLETE Draft of Final Research Paper Due by 5:00PM – Schedule Zoom meeting with DK to discuss revisions.
5. Friday, 11/20: Second draft of paper due by 5:00PM – Schedule Zoom meeting with DK to discuss revisions.
6. Friday 11/27: Final draft of paper due by 5:00PM.
7. Capstone presentations TBD.