Historiographic Essay and Oral History Paper

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History 1308: American History Since 1880

Paper #1
HISTORIOGRAPHIC ESSAY
Write an historiographic essay on "The Social Origins of the Progressive Reform Movement." An historiographic essay focuses on the interpretations of the historians rather than on the story of the past itself. Compare the answers which the assigned historians (Burnham, Rothman, Sklar, Mowry, Huthmacher, and Brown) provide to these questions:

1. Who were the Progressives: what social classes, occupations, ethnic or other groups did they represent?
2. How were various segments of American society impacted by their reform efforts? Finally, what interpretation (or blend) do you find most persuasive?

Your paper should be typed, double-spaced, and should be about 1000-1200 words in length. You may footnote the assigned readings simply by noting author and page number in parentheses.

Paper #2
ORAL HISTORY ASSIGNMENT

You are to interview someone who lived during World War II. Select a person who was at least 15 years old in 1940. They might have served in the military or they might have remained on the "home front." Establish the date, time and place of your interview a couple of weeks in advance. Clearly state the purpose of the interview from the outset, so that they have time to gather their memories and perhaps some old photos or other memorabilia.

Prepare for the interview by reading background information about World War II in your text and supplemental readings, including the Studs Terkel oral histories. Try to anticipate what types of experiences your interviewee might have had during the war (find out their general situation during your initial contact phone call).

Prepare your list of questions in advance. Start with basic biographical data such as name, age in 1940, location at the start of the war. Choose relevant questions from the list below and add others of your own. Keep most of your major questions broad and general so the interviewee will not simply answer with a word or two, and so that you don't lead them to your own conclusions. Then follow up their answers with more specific questions to get more details. If any of your questions involve more controversial matters, it is better to ask them toward the end of the interview, when the interviewee is more comfortable. Be sure to give the person time to think,
remember and answer. Never argue, although you can gently probe for other aspects or perspectives ("Did everybody in your community think [the Japanese-Americans were as harmless] as you did?")

If at all possible use a tape recorder during the interview. This will free you from frantic note-taking for all the details and allow you to listen to the person, jotting down brief notes for follow-up questions. Practice with the tape recorder in advance so that you are sure how to operate it, how to set the volume, etc. Then try to set it and ignore it during the interview, so that it doesn't distract your interviewee. Try to write up the results of your interview as soon as possible after completing it, while your memory of the conversation is fresh.

Write up your subject's oral history in your own words, using quotes and examples from your interview to illustrate your points. Then, in a page or two, compare your interviewee's experiences and attitudes during World War II with those revealed in Studs Terkel's interviews and with general patterns described in the Nash text. (You can work such comparisons into your earlier pages as well, if you wish.) The whole paper should be about five pages long (typed double spaced).

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS ON WORLD WAR II

MILITARY EXPERIENCE:

1. In which branch of the service did you serve?
2. Describe your experiences in basic training.
3. Where did you serve during the war and what did you do?
4. What was your attitude toward the draft?
5. Did your attitudes toward war change during WWII?
6. Did you know how your part of the war related to the rest of the war?
7. Did your views toward race relations change during the war? Any specific experiences?
8. Did you gain skills from your military service?
9. Did you take advantage of the G.I. Bill after the war?
10. How well were you able to adapt to the routines of military life? Were there any which you especially liked or disliked?
11. Is there anything or anyone you especially remember from your service time? Why?
   (These could be military people or civilians.)
12. If you served overseas:
    a. What impressions do you have about the people, buildings and culture in the areas you served?
    b. Are there any combat experiences that you specifically recall?
    c. What are your memories about being under fire?
13. Thinking back, was World War II actually "the good war," as Studs Terkel has named his book?
HOME FRONT: FAMILY LIFE

1. Were there changes in your family's housing situation during the war? Did people outside the immediate family live with you?
2. How did the war affect your family's economic circumstances? Do you remember difficulties in getting food, clothing or other consumer goods during the war? Affects of rationing? Were there any black market activities?
3. Did your family participate in War Bond campaigns? in other savings programs?
4. Other family efforts to support the war? home crafts? gardens? volunteer activities?
5. Was anyone in the immediate family separated because of military service or war work? How did you try to keep in touch? Did the separation have a significant affect on the family-- changing roles, creating distance, or more appreciation?
6. Did the war affect your dating, courting or romantic relationships? Do you think unrealistic “war time romances” took place, or were people more serious about their relationships? Did dating patterns change?
7. In an unstable time, what gave stability to your family? What became of particular importance to you? What activities did you enjoy as a way of "getting away" from the war? Any memorable vacations or travel?
8. How did women's roles and responsibilities in your family change during the war? Work outside the home? If so, what about wages and conditions of work, and your attitude toward them? What child care arrangements were made? What happened to the women's roles after the war ended? How did you feel about any of these changes?

HOME FRONT: COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL LIFE

1. Were there any neighborhood organizations to watch for blackouts, or to make special collection drives? Any special events related to war efforts?
2. Was your community affected by industry conversions, war plants or other special employment conditions?
3. If you were in school or college, do you remember special events connected to wartime activities? Did school curriculum or extra-curricular activities seem to change? Do you remember any attitudes of students toward enlistment or the draft?
4. Did different ethnic groups exist or appear in your community? What were race relations like in your community, and were there any changes during the war? What were your own attitudes or reactions at the time?
5. How did you or your family react to news about the Holocaust? the relocation of Japanese-Americans?
6. How did your family find out about the news of the war? Did you listen together during broadcasts or talk over the paper at regular times?
7. Do you remember how movies reflected the war, and how they portrayed home life during the war? How did they seem to portray expected gender roles?
8. How did you illustrate your attitude toward your country during the war? Were there people with whom you disagreed on how loyalty or patriotism should be shown? Were you a part of any voluntary organizations for the war effort?

9. Were you aware of attempts at censorship or cases of news distortion during the war? Do you recall your attitudes, or those of your friends, towards Germans? Japanese? Russians? Why did you feel the way you did.