

Writing 20 – Writing About Religion & Politics

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E4 – Research Proposal

Over the next several weeks you will be working on a research project about some aspect related to religion and politics in American history. My main requirement is that your focus be *historical*; I want you to use this opportunity to investigate a topic from the past that interests you.

Some examples of topics you might pursue:

The “Bible wars” and conflicts over religion’s role in public schools between Protestants and Catholics in the 19th c.

The debate over the teaching of evolution in the early or late 20th c.

The immediate context for the First Amendment: the relationship between Virginia Baptists, Jefferson, and Madison

Persecution of Muslim groups after 9/11

The emergence of an evangelical left in the 1960s

Religion and slave rebellions

The role of a particular religious community (e.g. the Catholic Worker) in fighting for labor and immigrant rights in the early 20th c.

Obviously this is just a small sampling of the topics you might choose, but I wanted to offer some examples so you can see what a general topic might look like. As you can see from the topics listed above, “politics” does not necessarily mean “electoral politics;” I consider a slave rebellion a political act. Likewise, studying religion does not mean you have to investigate an organized religious group. You may, for instance, study the emergence of the First Amendment. As you brainstorm for this project, I encourage you to look over the introduction to William Martin’s *With God on Our Side*, which provides a nice history of religion’s role in American political history. You might also look back through Martin and Chappell to see if there are aspects of the civil rights movement or the religious right you’d like to investigate further. But don’t feel constrained by the sources we’ve used in class. I want you to choose something that interests you, as long as it falls generally within the realm of religion and American politics and provides sufficient sources to support a historical research project.

As you’re thinking about topics for this project, you should read chapters 3 & 4 of Wayne Booth, et al, *The Craft of Research*. I have posted these chapters, entitled “From Topics to Questions” and “From Questions to Problems,” on Bb. As you will see, moving from a general topic to a research question (or series of questions), and from there to a problem, is essential as you begin a research project. The handout “Writing in History” further clarifies this crucial step. For this “essay,” I’d like you to develop a strong research question (or set of questions) that will guide your project. I’d also ask you to work on stating the research problem you’ll be addressing in your project.

To do this well, you must read sources ahead of time. Our library session next Thursday will provide you with much more extensive instructions on how to locate promising research sources. But I’d like for you to begin poking around on your own. I want you to find *one* secondary source (either a *journal article* or a *book chapter*) about your topic. (Note: this will probably *not* be the first article you come across! Skim the first few paragraphs of article to determine if your source will be helpful for your project.) You should look for articles in JSTOR (www.jstor.org), the ATLA religion database (available under “databases” on the library website), and Google Scholar. You should also scan the library catalog (www.lib.duke.edu) to see if there are books about your topic. Please select

a *scholarly* rather than a *popular source*. (This means you'll need to look primarily in peer-reviewed journals, like the *Journal of American History* or *Church History*, rather than popular periodicals like *TIME*, *Newsweek*, or *The Christian Century*. If you find a book, make sure it's either published by a university press or written by a scholar.) Please refer to the handouts I distributed in class to determine if your source is scholarly. You may choose either a journal article (10+ pages) or book chapter (10+ pages).

The "essay" piece you turn in for E4 will look different from other essays. Your document needs to contain two things:

- A 2-paragraph description of the general topic of your research, along with the question(s) and problem(s) you'll be addressing. The first paragraph of this section should describe how you arrived at this topic. What interests you? Why? The second paragraph should articulate a historical question (or series of questions) that will guide your project, modeled on the questions in the "Writing in History" handout. It should also state the main *research problem* your project will address. Use *The Craft of Research* to guide the drafting of this section. As you will see, it's often difficult to state a clear research problem at this early stage of your project. Nonetheless, give it a shot. You will have plenty of chances to revise along the way.
- A 2-paragraph annotation in which you "come to terms" with the article or chapter you have selected. Consider the following questions in order to write your annotation: What subject does the source consider? Who is the intended audience of this piece? Where and by whom is this piece published? What can I determine about the author? What sort of evidence and/or analysis is employed, if any? What assumptions are being made, if any? Does the piece have a primary claim? If so, does it persuade you as a reader? Why or why not? Write up a couple paragraphs that provide answers to some of these questions (you don't have to answer all of them). Please conclude your annotation (and your proposal) with a clear statement of how this source helped you refine your research project.

I will evaluate your proposal based on your success in formulating a *focused, specific* historical question, articulating a worthwhile research problem, and providing a thoughtful annotation of a scholarly source.

We will be working with a librarian on Thursday, October 30th, in order to learn about various library resources. Your source list will expand then; ultimately I will expect you to locate at least 8 sources, both primary (like Falwell and King) and secondary (like Martin and Chappell). I don't expect you to be able to find all those before our library day. But I want you to begin poking around on your own. Doing so will help you determine if your project is viable. Have fun – and be creative!

Purpose: A good research proposal is the foundation of a good research project. To write a good proposal, you must begin to engage with scholarly sources. Doing so will help you understand not only historical facts about your topic; it will help you think through *questions* and *problems* you'd like to address. Think of this proposal as the first (and very rough) draft of the introduction to your essay. You'll have plenty of chances to revise the question(s) and problem(s) you pose in this proposal, but it's important to begin articulating questions and problems so that you can research with a goal in mind.

Due: Wednesday, 10/29, at 12:00 noon. 500-750 words. Post under "Assignments." Please provide a URL for your scholarly source. If you use a source that is not available online (e.g. a book section), you should provide me with either a photocopy or a PDF file.

E5 – Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography provides a snapshot of your research by offering a list of the sources you have collected, alongside a brief commentary on each source. The commentary you provide on each source should run only 3-5 sentences; you want to offer a brief summary of the source as well as a comment on the source's relevance to your project. I expect your bibliography to include at least **three primary sources** and at least **five secondary sources**. Primary sources for historical projects include newspapers, letters, pamphlets, periodicals, interview transcripts, personal papers, books and articles written (or spoken) by participants in the historical movement you are studying. Secondary sources include books and articles written by historians and journalists about the movement you are studying. In our class readings, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and his book *Stride Toward Freedom* are both primary sources. David Chappell's analysis of King is a secondary source. It is important to know the difference, and to know how to find each type of source. Our library session will help you do that.

At the top of your annotated bibliography, you should post a revised research question, modeled on the template at the end of chapter 3 of *The Craft of Research*.

The annotated bibliography should look something like this:

Revised Question

I am planning to study ___ because I want to find out ___ in order to help readers understand ___.

Primary Sources

Malcolm X. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1964.

Malcolm X's autobiography covers his upbringing in Detroit, his incarceration in Boston, his career as a minister for the Nation of Islam, and his eventual conversion to orthodox Islam. I plan to analyze it at length in my essay to show how the most prominent black militant in 1960s America rejected Christianity as "the white man's religion."

Secondary Sources

DeCaro, Jr., Louis A. *On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.

This book provides a religious biography of Malcolm X that focuses on his two "conversions" (to the Nation of Islam and then to orthodox Islam). I will use it to provide historical context for Malcolm's life, and I will also forward its appraisal of Malcolm's relationship to Christianity.

Please format your citations according to the Turabian style. Details about how to format Turabian citations are available at: <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/workscited/index.html>.

I will evaluate E5 based on the quality and coherency of your source list. I want you to work hard on finding sources that address your research question. This might mean that you revise your question significantly after reading your sources. It will almost certainly mean that you have to discard interesting sources that don't fit with your other ones. That's all part of forming a good research project.

Logistics: Due Friday, November 7, at 9:00 AM. Please post under Assignments.

Research Essay prompt

This is the project we have been building towards all semester. I hope you're excited to take it on!

For this essay, I would like for you to become a historian. You have already devised a research question and found sources for your project. As you read the sources, I encourage you to think about how they respond to (or perhaps reshape) your research question. You should look for prominent themes, issues, characters, and events mentioned in both primary and secondary texts. Be sure to document change over time; remember that historians attend to the evolution of people, ideas, and groups. Also be sure to provide historical context for your readers; historians tell stories that are situated in certain contexts. I encourage you to read and re-read the handout "Writing in History" as you construct this essay. The most important part of this essay is ***your close reading of primary sources***. I want you to explain and analyze the sources you uncovered in your research. Use secondary texts to set the scene and to advance your argument, but don't rely too heavily on their interpretations. By the end of this process, you should produce an essay that features a **strong academic argument, close reading of primary sources, judicious use of secondary sources, a logical and dynamic structure, and clear and accessible prose.**

This project builds on the skills you have used in your previous essays. I expect you to come to terms, forward, and counter other writers. I expect you to revise your essay thoughtfully and thoroughly in response to criticism. I expect you to read primary texts closely. I expect you to build the entire essay around a significant academic claim. And I expect you to pitch your project as a response to a research problem, frame it as a coherent answer to a thoughtful question, and articulate the rationale behind your work. While I suspect this description sounds daunting, you have acquired the tools to meet and exceed my expectations. As you work on this project, I encourage you to review Harris, *Rewriting*, and Booth, et al., *The Craft of Research*, in order to hone your research and writing process. And I also encourage you to talk to me at any point for further assistance.

Logistics

All drafts should run 2500-3500 words and feature citations formatted according to Turabian style (this means you will cite sources using footnotes rather than in-text parenthetical citations). Please edit and proofread every draft – there are no "rough" drafts, only a first draft!

FIRST DRAFT due 11/18 at 9:00 AM – Post on Discussion Board – Two of your peers will provide written and oral critiques of this draft during workshops on 11/20.

SECOND DRAFT due 11/25 at 9:00 AM – Post under Assignments – I will provide written feedback or oral feedback in a meeting during the week of 12/1. Please specify which type of feedback you would prefer at the top of this draft. (Written feedback provides you with a clear record to refer to, but conferences allow you to ask questions and clarify my critique in person.) Please include a 100-200 word memo at the end of this draft highlighting the major changes in the paper after your small group workshop.

FINAL DRAFT due 12/9 at 9:00 AM – Post under Assignments – Please include a 100-200 word memo at the end of this draft in which you discuss the major revisions that took place from first draft to second draft to final draft.