In Their Own Words: Essay #3

Working theses due 3/11, rough drafts due 3/16, final drafts due 3/20

The task: Choose one of the first two questions on page one of the syllabus and write a four to six page analytical essay that uses your topic and your research on your topic to address this question.

Here are those two questions:
1. How have race, class, and gender shaped the diverse and changing conditions of women in the “new world” (or in the U.S.)?

2. In what ways have trends and events in U.S. history, and the stories about them, affected women’s diverse roles in the family, labor force, and in societal formation?

Focus: These questions are huge—use your topic and research to focus in on an aspect of the question and write a smaller analytical question for yourself that you can explore in satisfying depth.

For example, if I were researching the Harlem Renaissance and women’s experiences in the movement, I might choose question 2 and tighten the focus by asking “In what ways, if any, did the Harlem Renaissance affect (some) African American women in terms of their work?” Or I might choose question 1 and ask “How did gender politics play out in the Harlem Renaissance in both its artistic and intellectual evolution?” (Or maybe I can’t do both artistic and intellectual evolution in the assigned page limit)

Analytical vs. informational research papers: Like your other essays this quarter, this one needs an arguable thesis, one that requires explaining, illustrating, proving. Here are some analytical prompts: how?, why?, causes?, effects?, benefits?, drawbacks?, what kinds of?, in what stages?, in what ways similar and in what ways different?

Do not simply write an informational report that summarizes what you’ve learned about your topic.

Sources: Your essay must incorporate material and ideas from at least three secondary sources and at least one primary source.

At least one of your secondary sources must be scholarly—
• written by scholars for students or scholars,
• written in the language of the discipline,
• peer reviewed by other scholars in that discipline.

Scholarly sources also incorporate other sources in their work and provide documentation for these sources.
All of your secondary sources must be reputable—written for well-educated, thoughtful and critical readers and published in respected sources. The New York Times is a reputable source in most cases because editors usually control the quality and reliability of the content.

Primary sources are those produced during the time or event that you are studying. They might be legal documents, newspaper articles, sermons, or plays... The short stories by Chopin and Perkins Gilman are primary sources from the late 19th C. The Witch of Blackbird Pond is not a primary source of the 16th C, however. Please ask us if you’re not sure if what you’ve chosen qualifies as a primary source.

Your audience: You must assume your readers have not read any of your sources! This means every source must be very briefly introduced the first time it is used. (A one sentence overview might suffice; it depends on how you’re using the source in your argument.) It also means set-ups for quotations must be complete but concise. You might also need to paraphrase after quoting some of your sources, depending on the complexity of the language and terminology the author uses. And of course, you will have to explain how that quotation relates to your claim in your argument for your thesis.

Avoiding Plagiarism: Whatever note-taking system you use, whether it’s scribbling in the margins of Xeroxed material, highlighting and saving electronic sources, or ye olde notecards of yore, YOU MUST BE SURE YOUR SYSTEM REMINDS YOU WHEN YOU’RE USING SOMEONE ELSE’S WORDING. ANY AND ALL BORROWED PHRASES, SENTENCES, PASSAGES MUST BE CITED IN MLA STYLE.

Even if you paraphrase another writer’s idea into your words, you still must give that writer credit for the idea.

Some facts, like the dates of a war or the name of a key figure, are so basic as to be “common knowledge.” These facts do not need citation.

You must include a Works Cited page in MLA format with your essay.

Helpful Hints:

Keep thinking about PIE
• open each paragraphs in your words with your point,
• offer illustrations of and support for your point,
• explain the illustrations and quotations and how they relate to the paragraph’s point
• explain exactly how the paragraph relates back to the thesis—close the paragraph in your words!
Beware of patchworking together a bunch of quotations into body paragraphs—most of the essay should be in your words.

Make sure your sentences link one to the next without leaps in logic. Use transition words to help readers follow the logic. All writing handbooks have a page of common transitional words and phrases: “however,” “nonetheless,” “on the other hand,” “also,” and many, many more.

**Grading criteria:**

- **Thesis**—is it clear, arguable, satisfyingly complex, and on task?
- **Development**—does the essay set out a compelling argument for the thesis? Does the essay offer convincing support and illustration for its claims?
- **Structure/organization**—does essay unfold, point by point, in a linear and logical way?
- **Signposting**—does essay make good use of key words, topic sentences, mini conclusions and transitional words and phrases to keep readers on track with the argument?
- **Selection of sources**—do sources meet the assigned requirements?
- **Integration of sources**—can readers easily identify whose words are whose? Are quotations set up and explained so that readers can easily see how they serve the claim? Attention to MLA system of citation?
- **Sentence level clarity and precision**
- **Mechanics of grammar, punctuation, spelling**
- **Stylistics like varied sentence length, varied sentence structure, effective word choice, economy of words, etc.**