

## Article Review

### **Prompt:**

Our shared past is vast, far too vast for any one person to study alone, so historians spend a large amount of time analyzing and assessing the historical interpretations of other scholars. This review assignment is designed to give you an introduction into this dimension of historical work. Rather than reviewing an entire book, you will be reading and reviewing a historical article, a piece of scholarship similar in its length and complexity to a single chapter in a historical monograph.

### **Assignment:**

**I.) Find a historical article to review.** Below, I have included a step-by-guide to searching for historical articles in the two historical journals we'll be using for this assignment, the *Journal of the Early Republic* and the *William and Mary Quarterly*. Both journals are accessible through a scholarly database our university library subscribes to: JSTOR. Since I want to help you avoid any mishaps, I am requiring that you turn in an annotated list of three possible articles that you would like to review, due in hard copy when we have our individual meeting on Tuesday, June 3rd or Thursday, June 5th. The citations for these articles should be done in Chicago/Turabian style, and by "annotated," I just mean a few sentences explaining what the article is about. (See the example below in the "Citation Instructions" section). If none of the articles seem viable, I may ask you to submit another list, which will be due by the next class.

**II.) Read and review the article.** Below, I've given you advice on how you might structure your review, including questions to focus on. I've also provided instructions on how to format the review, as well as your citations.

**III.) Present your review to the class.** On the same day that you email me your finished review (June 12th by noon), you'll be asked to present a form of your review to the class. This presentation can be relatively informal (there's no need to wear a suit or create a PowerPoint), but you will be expected to give a coherent overview of the article as well as your assessment of it. Below, I've included advice on how you should approach your presentation.

**The final, written review should must be at least 1800 words long (or five pages, standard formatting), and it must be emailed to me by 12pm on Thursday, June 12th. Your oral presentation will be due during class on Thursday, June 12th.**

## **Review Instructions:**

An outstanding academic review must accomplish two things. First, it needs to reconstruct the article's contents with enough detail that your reader will understand the scholar's historical interpretation. Your reader should finish the review with a good grasp of the article's topic, its arguments, its structure, the sources the author calls upon to support his or her argument, and the ways in which the article fits into the existing scholarly conversation surrounding the topic.

Second, a review needs to critically assess the author's argument. You'll need to discuss whether and how the author's argument fits our class definition of a "historical interpretation," the strength or weaknesses of the article's structure, how well the author chooses and uses sources to support the his or her, and the overall originality and persuasiveness of the author's historical interpretation. Below, I've given you a list of questions to help you construct your review.

### ***Content Questions***

The first half of the reviews asks you to reconstruct the author's historical interpretation. Although you don't have to go through all of them in order, one by one, (that would be dull) addressing all of them to some degree will demonstrate to me that you have actively read the article and can reconstruct it effectively. This half of the review lays the groundwork for your analysis and criticism.

- Who's the author? This can be brief, but near the beginning of your review, you should introduce the scholar who wrote the article.
- What is the topic of the author's historical interpretation? Be specific. Instead of saying the article is about "slavery," explain that it's about "the effects of the slave trade on political life in rural Mississippi in the 1850s."
- What is the author's main argument or point? Usually, academic articles have one major argument (also called a thesis), which the author states in the opening pages of the article. Often, these arguments can be broken down to a series of smaller arguments, or claims, all of which the author tries to "prove" over the course of the article.
- How does the author structure his or her article? The structure of historical article can range widely. To name just a few examples, historians can organize their argument by chronology, by theme, by case study, or by comparison.
- What sources of historical evidence does the author use? How does the author use her or his evidence to support the main argument? Remember, sources can be both primary (newspaper articles, legal records, diaries, and much more) or secondary (other academic articles, monographs, and published biographies). You'll need to describe the author's sources and, just as importantly, give specific examples of how the author uses the sources – primary and secondary – to support the argument.

- How does the author's historical interpretation fit into or (hopefully!) change the existing scholarly conversation surrounding the topic? If you're lucky, the author may discuss what other historians have said about this topic overtly. Where does this author seem to agree or disagree with the other historians? How does his or her historical interpretation try to break new ground or ask new questions?

### ***Analysis Questions***

The second half of the review gives you an opportunity to assess the author's interpretations. Answering this second set of questions will show me that, in addition to comprehending and reconstructing the article, you can also thoughtfully consider its strengths and weaknesses. You will not receive a grade higher than a low C if you do not demonstrate an ability to give substantive thought to these questions.

- How does the author's article fit (or complicate) our class's definition of a historical interpretation, that is, a "reasoned argument about the past by which we seek the fullest possible understandings of actions, thoughts, and feelings"?
- Does the structure of the article help or hinder the author's argument? Is the article well-organized and easy to follow? What could make for improvements? For example, a thematically-organized article may let the author delve into several interesting topics, but it might not do a good job showing change over time. Moreover, even a well chosen structure will break down if the article is disorganized or poorly written.
- Are there any limitations or difficulties with the author's sources? How well does he or she use them? As we discussed in class, historians need to be sensitive to the disabilities of their sources; there may be instances where you feel the author came to conclusions the sources don't support, or that the author could have done a better job identifying his or her sources for different parts of the article.
- A good article has originality; it raises new questions about old topics. Does this article suggest any new questions or issues to you? More broadly, do you find the author's argument persuasive? Do you think he or she built a convincing argument to support his or her claims?
- After spending so much time picking it apart, what do you think of the article? Could you see yourself using it later, or being interested in other works by the same scholar?

**Presentation Instructions:**

As I mentioned in the prompt, our shared past is far too vast for any one person to study alone. Seminar classes and academic conferences give historians a place to share their discoveries with one another, to refine each other's interpretations, and to chart new directions for their field. Your presentation is an opportunity to experience this process firsthand, to learn about what your colleagues have been investigating and to educate them about the interpretation you've spent so much time analyzing.

A good presentation will not be a rote recitation of your written review. Instead, it will streamline your review for a listening audience, putting extra emphasis on key points (the author's main argument, for instance) and picking out telling details – stories and examples that illustrate what you're saying more abstractly about the article's structure, sources, originality, and persuasiveness. In the space of five to ten minutes, your colleagues and I should be able to develop a meaningful understanding of the article (though nowhere near as deep or thoughtful as your own, of course).

**Formatting Instructions:**

As in our previous assignment, in the realm of formatting, there's a few academic standards you should follow:

- After your title but before your review, insert the full citation for the article you are reviewing. (This is common practice for scholarly reviews).
- No subheadings. Use transitions between paragraphs to guide your reader through the text.
- Include a header with your name, the date, the class number, and the assignment (Article Review) in the top right corner of the first page.
- 12 point, Times New Roman font.
- 1 inch margins (the standard in Microsoft Word).
- Double or 1.5 spacing.
- Page numbers (first page optional)
- No cover page, but I'd love it if you gave your review a unique title.

## Citation Instructions

For this report, please cite your source (the article) using the special student-friendly subset of the Chicago Manual of Style called "Turabian." Turabian is the most common footnote-citation style used by historians, so learning it will help you both write your own historical arguments and critically assess the arguments of professional scholars. Purdue University's Writing Lab has a robust [online guide](#) that combines the Chicago Manual/ Turabian style, which I highly recommend. There are [many others](#) online, as well. In bibliographic Turabian style, instead citing your sources through parenthetical citations (Grant 2009) you'll put all of your citation information into a footnote (as I've done below).<sup>1</sup> Footnotes always go at the end of sentences, outside any punctuation marks. If you want to cite multiple pages in the same sentence, create one footnote and separate the different citations, in the order they appear, by a semi-colon (;").

When you decide you'd like to cite the article for the first time, simply create a new footnote and then copy and paste the citation into it at the bottom of the page. (You can create a footnote by clicking on References, then "Insert footnote" in Microsoft Word. The keyboard shortcut on a PC is ctrl+alt+f; on a Mac the shortcut is option+command+f). After you cite the article once with its full citation, you can abbreviate the citation for the every subsequent entry.<sup>2</sup> The first abbreviation includes the author's last name, a shortened version of the article's title. and the page number.<sup>3</sup> Every subsequent citation should include the word "Ibid." and the page number.<sup>4</sup> (Ibid. is an abbreviation of the Latin word, *ibidem*, meaning "in the same place"). Look at the bottom of the page to see examples of how this works.<sup>5</sup> You do not need to include a bibliography or works cited page for this assignment.

*Example annotated citation:*

Edward E. Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men': Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (Dec. 1, 2001): 1619-1650.

In this article, Baptist explores the topic of "fancy maids," enslaved women bought specifically to serve as concubines and prostitutes for slave-owners and their workers. Baptist argues that understanding these women, as well as the larger role of coerced sex and rape in Southern slavery, should transform our understanding of Southern society and the domestic slave trade.

<sup>1</sup> Jordan Grant, *Article Review* (Washington, D.C.: American University, 2014), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Edward E. Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men': Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (Dec. 1, 2001), 1619.

<sup>3</sup> Baptist, "Fancy Maids," 1625.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1629.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1630.

## Finding Articles in JSTOR:

You'll need to find an article you'd like to review from two historical journals, the *Journal of the Early Republic* and the *William and Mary Quarterly*. Both are available through the database JSTOR. Below, I've put together a brief guide for using JSTOR. Even if you've used the database before, I suggest you read through the list.

- 1.) American University's library purchases annual subscriptions that give you and other students access to online databases and libraries like JSTOR. To start, go to the library's website.
- 2.) On the right side of page, you'll see a list of blue links. Find the link for "Search Databases" and click on it.
- 3.) Now you're in the library's subject guides, on a page that says "Databases A to Z." You'll see a purple list of letters from A-Z. Click on "J."
- 4.) On the "J" page, scroll down to the bottom. The last database listed is JSTOR: The Scholarly Journal Archive. Click on the link.
- 5.) The library may ask you to supply your credentials (your last name and student number). Once you've submitted them, you should be redirected to JSTOR's home page. At the top of the page, you'll see a line of tabs, one of which says "Search." Hover your cursor over the arrow, and a list will drop down with links to Advanced Search, Beta Search, and Citation Locator. Click on "Advanced Search."
- 6.) You're now at the advanced search screen. Before you search for articles using the search fields, you'll need to limit your search to the correct historical journals and exclude non-articles. To start, look for a list of checkboxes under the title "Narrow By: Item Type." Check the box for "Articles."
- 7.) Scroll down further, and you'll see another list of check boxes next to different subjects. Look for the box that says "History." There should be an arrow next to the check-box; click on it.
- 8.) Clicking the arrow should open up a list of 400+ history journals. You'll need to scroll down and check the boxes for the "Journal of the Early Republic" and the "William and Mary Quarterly." The easiest way to do this would be to use the search function in your browser ( ctrl+f for Windows and command+f for a Mac). Note: If your first search fails to turn up what you want, and you go back for a new search, make sure the two boxes remain checked.
- 9.) Now, you're ready to start your search. Scroll back up to the top of the page and, using the first search field (under "Advanced Search") type in your search terms the same way you would on Google or another search engine. The possibilities here are endless; you can search for anything, from wine to monsters to gambling to journalism. I recommend spending some time exploring. Tip: When you start, don't make your search terms too specific. Then, once you get a handle on the process, don't be afraid to use multiple terms to narrow your results.
- 8.) You're going to need some patience as you sift through the results that come back. Some will have very little in common with what you thought you were getting, and others will seem just plain dull. You might wind up with an article about a topic quite different from what you started out thinking about. Hopefully, you'll discover something new that you'd like to investigate further.

9.) Once you've found an article you'd like to check out, click on the link to it and try reading through the first few pages. Most articles state their thesis early on, and you should be able to get a sense of whether this is a workable article rather quickly. Above the article, you'll see a box marked "Tools." If you click "View PDF" and then click to accept JSTOR's terms of service, the article will be downloaded to your computer (and saved in different places based on your browser).

10.) If you'd like to simplify the process of writing out the article's citation later on, click on "View Citation" (also under Tools) and copy the citation from the pop-up. (Note: You don't have to save the last two lines in the pop-up, which begin with "Published by:"). The copied citation will be slightly incorrect (the information is not formatted correctly), but it should make putting together a list of possible articles easier.

**Rubric:**

	<i>Excellent Mastery</i>	<i>Good Mastery</i>	<i>Some Mastery</i>	<i>Minimal Mastery</i>	<i>No Mastery</i>
<b>Reconstruction of Interpretation</b>  40%	After introducing the author, the review successfully reconstructs the article's historical interpretation. Readers gain an in-depth understanding of the article's topic, arguments, structure, sources, and place within existing literature. The review uses numerous specific examples drawn from the text to illustrate its points.	After introducing the author, the review successfully reconstructs the article's historical interpretation, with some minor oversights. Readers gain a good understanding of the article's topic, arguments, structure, sources, and place within existing literature. The review uses several specific examples drawn from the text to illustrate its points.	The review successfully reconstructs the article's historical interpretation, with a few serious oversights. Readers gain an acceptable understanding of the article's topic, arguments, structure, sources, and place within existing literature. The review uses a few specific examples drawn from the text to illustrate its points.	The review successfully reconstructs the article's historical interpretation, though with several serious oversights. Readers gain a cursory understanding of the article's topic, arguments, structure, sources, and place within existing literature. The review uses a few general examples drawn from the text to illustrate its points.	The review does not successfully reconstruct the article's historical interpretation. Readers gain almost no understanding of the article's topic, arguments, structure, sources, and place within existing literature. The review uses almost no examples drawn from the text to illustrate its points..
<b>Assessment of Interpretation</b>  20%	The review successfully assesses the article, rigorously examining how it fits the criteria of a "historical interpretation," its structure's strengths and weaknesses, its sources' reliability and the author's skill at using them, its originality, and its persuasiveness. Numerous specific examples taken from the text illustrate the writer's judgments.	The review successfully assesses the article, carefully examining how it fits the criteria of a "historical interpretation," its structure's strengths and weaknesses, its sources' reliability and the author's skill at using them, its originality, and its persuasiveness. Several specific examples taken from the text illustrate the writer's judgments.	The review successfully assesses the article, adequately examining how it fits the criteria of a "historical interpretation," its structure's strengths and weaknesses, its sources' reliability and the author's skill at using them, its originality, and its persuasiveness. A few specific examples taken from the text illustrate the writer's judgments.	The review successfully assesses the article, casually examining how it fits the criteria of a "historical interpretation," its structure's strengths and weaknesses, its sources' reliability and the author's skill at using them, its originality, and its persuasiveness. A few general examples taken from the text illustrate the writer's judgments.	The review does not successfully assesses the article. Few if any examples taken from the text illustrate the writer's judgments.
<b>Citation and Evidence</b>  10%	The writer correctly and thoroughly cites sources throughout the review.	The writer usually cites sources, though there are some gaps in citation and possible errors in their construction.	The writer offers partial citations for much of the review and a few citations are constructed incorrectly.	The writer offer little to no citation and almost all the citations are constructed incorrectly.	The writer did not cite sources.
<b>Mechanics</b>  10%	Spelling, punctuation, grammar all correct; proper sentence and paragraph construction.	Occasional errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence and paragraph construction; not severe enough to hinder an understanding of the review.	Weaknesses in spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence and paragraph construction make sections of the paper unintelligible.	Problems in spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence and paragraph construction make sections of the paper unintelligible.	Problems in spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence and paragraph constructions severe as to make the paper unintelligible.

