

History 307
Professor Chad Black

Primary Source Analysis

3-4 pages maximum, double spaced

The purpose of this assignment is to enable you to turn the repertoire of critical skills you've been developing this semester on a primary source document. Ideally, this will be a source that you plan to use in the research paper you'll be writing next semester.

Your first task is to choose a primary source related to your general topic. This should be discrete and well-bounded (i.e., not *The Chicago Tribune*, 1865-1965); it should be a manageable length (preferably not the size, say, of Marx's *Das Kapital*); and it should bear more or less on the subject you think you want to pursue. If you end up not using it in either the research proposal or the final paper, that's okay too. **The crucial task at this stage is to focus in on a source and to begin to think with, against and through it.**

Your paper should be a **critical review** of the source that contains the following components:

- attention to what the source is doing (over and above what it is saying); in other words, you should talk about its agency in and as history;
- description of its context – social, political, local, regional, national; in other words, where has it come from, what is its genealogy, how do you come to have it in your hands (and in what form it is: reprint, translation, “original”); under what conditions, in short, was it originally produced and/or read?
- analysis of the histories you think it yields – and those it does not; analysis of whom it speaks to and about -- and whom it excludes; analysis of how you might use it to build a historical argument yourself – and what else it would have to juxtaposed with in order to make such an argument; treatment of how you picked it and how it picked you
- and last but not least, a discussion of the method you are employing to use it as evidence of whatever historical phenomenon or problem you are reaching for.

****Please don't schematize your paper into subsections. I am looking for an essay that engages all the above questions, but not necessarily in that order, and that does so with narrative momentum and analytical force. So, as always, you want to have an argument about the source in which you address all the above components.**

Your essay should end with a paragraph on how the source relates to either the book or article (or both) of your own choosing that you have written on thus far in this class. If it doesn't fit, say why.