Guidelines for Historiographic Paper

Due April 6 in Class

1. A historiographic paragraph(s) analyzes the interpretations of scholars on a particular topic. It is NOT a summary of events but rather a summary of what historians have theorized about a particular event, person(s), or period. You will examine the debates, questions, themes, and sources used by particular historians. Your reader wants to know how interpretations of past events have changed and, possibly, what caused those changes. For example, how did the emergence of social history affect the arguments concerning your topic.

2. The length of this paper will be 2-3 pages.

3. Choose the main historians on your topic. You may have to think in a larger context if your topic is too specialized. For example, if you are examining poor whites on the southern home front, you will focus on how others have approached the topic (family, community studies, factory work, and/or political voice). Once you have narrowed down the major historians on your topic (usually about 3), begin to read their works, giving close attention to the introduction and conclusion where the argument is often laid out.

4. When constructing this section, consider the following questions:

a. How has the historiography of your topic evolved over time?

b. How have the major developments in historiography (such as Marxism, feminism, and postmodernism) affected your topic?

c. What is the author trying to contribute to our understanding of the past?

d. What new idea or argument is the author trying to develop?

e. Compare the way the authors deal with the material (evidence, motivations for study, scope)

7. Segue into the body of your paper with a statement or two, or a brief paragraph on how your analysis differs from or is similar to the mentioned historical works. For instance, are you concentrating on a different time period, geographic scope, specific people? Or, do you disagree with the conclusions of the historians or are you asking a different question(s) about the topic?