Paper 2: Study of a Historical Issue

Method of Research: Finding facts and journalistic views of those facts from library sources

Probable Topics Due:

Possible Sources Due:

GOAL

To look at journalistic reporting of some person or event at least 20 years old, and to study either (1) the event and its place in history or (2) the way journalists interpreted the material they reported.

THE PROCESS

1. Locate, in your library's periodical room, the microfilm version of a major newspaper or magazine of at least 10 years ago. A good date to focus on may be, for example, your birthday. Let your own interest and curiosity be your guide. Read through the entire publication (using one of the microfilm scanners), and choose an article which especially interests you. If you can't find an article from the first issue of the publication that you inspect, look at other issues or at another publication entirely. You may choose your article from any section of the publication.

2. Once you've chosen an article, think up a topic for your paper that connects, closely or loosely, with your article. You might, for example, contrast some stories which indicate racial attitudes then and now; you might show how union and management stubbornness led to a long strike that neither side anticipated; you may be led to try to figure out why a certain event happened; you may show how several magazines or newspapers treated the same issue very differently. Readers of this kind of paper don't want you to tell them something that they could find out just as easily by looking in an encyclopedia. Your readers are curious about how people and events were viewed by the journalists or writers of their own time.

3. Your next step is to check the library's indexes for sources of further information on your topic. Note the sources. You probably won't use all of the sources for your final paper, and you may well use some others that you come across as you work.

Next week, bring to class the following information:

- A summary of the article you have chosen to work with (or the issue)
- A topic, connected with that article, that you think you'd like to write about
- A list of sources that you plan to use to find out more information about your topic

The class will compare topics, and suggestions will be made about where you can find more information on the topics you've chosen. You'll learn a great deal by comparing your plans with those of your classmates. When you leave, you should feel confident that you have a topic that is not too broad so that you can research it thoroughly and still meet the deadline for the assignment.

4. You will, of course, be noting facts from various sources in the course of your research. These must be acknowledged, using proper footnote form. Paraphrasing the ideas of others must also be acknowledged. The quality of your paper will depend in part on your careful selection of these items. But it will depend much more on the quality of inferences (judgments, or conclusions) you draw about the facts and about the journalists' or writers' opinions. Your introduction, your conclusion, and the comments you make on

each paragraph of material should show that you understand your material and that you, as a writer, are thinking and in control.

5. Before you begin writing, and as you sort through your notes, it may help to decide on an organizational patters (cause-effect, comparison-contrast, narration, problem-solution) which best accommodates your evidence.