INTERPRETIVE ESSAY 3

★★★ COMPREHENSIVE THEME ★★★

**PURPOSE** ★ This assignment asks you to demonstrate the knowledge and interpretive skills that you have acquired in this course. You are required to make a comprehensive argument in response to the question “what is the *single most important theme* in the history of Early America?” You may argue for any political, social, economic, or cultural theme, so long as you can discuss its development throughout the period 1600-1877. You must assemble primary sources (documents from the time period) and secondary sources (modern scholarship) as evidence for your argument. This assignment stresses skills of value to most university majors and careers: (a) original interpretation of sources/texts/data with reference to existing knowledge, and (b) evidence-based argumentation in favor of a particular view. These are “transferrable skills” with application beyond the field of history, as they demonstrate critical and creative thinking. The interpretive essay is due on Tuesday, 30 April 2019 (11:59pm).

**SKILLS** ★ The purpose of this assignment is to practice historical-thinking in terms of primary-source analysis and secondary-source synthesis. You will practice the following skills.

1. Identify the *single most important theme* in the history of Early America (Bloom II)
2. Interpret primary-source documents that speak to the theme (Bloom III)
3. Appraise primary-source documents in terms of secondary-source scholarship (Bloom IV)
4. Argue for the overarching significance of the theme (Bloom VI)

**KNOWLEDGE** ★ You are already familiar with the content needed for this assignment (lecture, primary-source sheets, and secondary-source readings). That content enables you to develop a “big picture” view of Early America (1600-1877).

**TASK** ★ You should complete the following tasks in order to (a) select evidence and (b) develop your argument.

1. Identify a prominent theme that stands out among the many people, events, and ideas we have discussed throughout the semester (e.g., “liberty,” “capitalism,” “national expansion,” etc.). Be sure to choose a theme that is visible:
   1. Throughout the time period (discuss change over time).
   2. In primary-source sheets (make an original argument).
   3. In secondary-source readings (argue in terms of existing knowledge).
   4. Use *only* materials provided in this course.
2. Select course materials to support your argument:
   1. Use a minimum of 5 primary-source excerpts.
   2. Use a minimum of 5 secondary-source readings.
   3. Create a minimum of 3 primary-secondary pairings around discrete subtopics.
3. Develop an argument (thesis) that explains the significance of the theme:
   1. Throughout the period.
   2. With brief reference to key events, individuals, and ideas.
   3. With brief reference to how/why sources confirm your views.
4. Craft an essay that develops the argument:
   1. In chronological order.
   2. With original interpretation of primary-sources.
   3. With reference to secondary-source readings.
5. Provide consistent citation of all sources in your preferred format (APA, MLA, or Chicago).
6. The essay must conform to the following format:
   1. Minimum of 3 full pages (not including title page, header, bibliography, etc.)
   2. Maximum of 5 full pages.
   3. 12-point Times New Roman Font.
   4. Double Spaced.
   5. 1-inch margins.
   6. Bibliography page including all sources
7. Submit your finished document to D2L by Tuesday, 30 April 2019 (11:59 PM EST).

**CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS** ★ The finished product should be concise and include adequate context (who, what, why, how, and “so what?”) to substantiate your argument about Early America. A strong thesis is the starting point for development of your essay. See the “poor” and “excellent” examples below.

[“POOR”] The most important theme in Early America is race. The issue of race has troubled each generation of Americans since the beginning of the country, and there were lots of different opinions going around on things like slavery. We looked at a number of people in this course who discussed race, and scholars like the topic as well.

[“EXCELLENT”] The issue of race dominated everyday life, political disputes, and conflicts throughout the history of Early America. From the establishment of African slavery in British America, to the incorporation of Mexican territory, and through the Civil War and Reconstruction, the struggle to create a free and just society was a challenge for each generation. Although the institution of slavery benefitted wealthy planters, it caused tremendous suffering among enslaved persons like Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth. Similarly, perceptions of racial difference were one source of difficulties for persons considered “outside” white America, such as John Ross or Mariano Vallejo. Period accounts, such as John Brown’s statements, reveal that Americans held many views of race—as a tool of social control, a threat to liberty, or the source of contradictions that only be settled through violence. Modern scholars, too, have concentrated upon the importance of race as the “original sin” of the American Republic.

When writing your essay, consider using this essay structure

1. Introduction (4-6 sentences maximum)
   1. Thesis: what is central significance of the theme, why and how? (1 sentence)
   2. Context: introduce key people, characters, events, or ideas. (2-3 sentences)
   3. Sources: how primary and secondary sources will confirm your ideas. (1-2 sentences)
2. Evidence (3 pages)
   1. Structure your argument logically, using clear topic sentences for each paragraph.
   2. Each paragraph should:
      1. Explain how the primary sources reflect your chosen theme (3-5 sentences). *Do not summarize! Interpret!*
      2. Discuss secondary-source context for your interpretation (1-2 sentences)
      3. Place your interpretation in context of the overall thesis.
3. Conclusion(2-3 sentences maximum): how your interpretation supports the thesis.

★★★ RUBRIC ★★★

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|  | 10 POINTS | 8 POINTS | 6 POINTS | 4 POINTS | 2 POINTS |
| 1. FORMAT | Exceeds basic formatting requirements (e.g., title page, pagination, notes as appropriate) | Meets basic formatting requirements (e.g., length, font, size, margins, spacing, etc.) | Meets most formatting requirements | Meets some formatting requirements | Does not meet formatting requirements |
| 2. SOURCES | Incorporates materials above and beyond requirements | Incorporates all required materials | Inconsistent or unclear incorporation of required sources | Partial incorporation of required sources | Does not incorporate required sources |
| 3. THESIS | Clear argument set in terms of evidence | Argument unclear—requires reconstruction from evidence in text | Author attempts, but fails, to make an argument (e.g., question, anecdote, or statement) | Argument does not address the topic question | Does not present an argument |
| 4. CONTEXT | Clearly states the importance or relevance of all evidence | Importance or relevance of some evidence is unclear | Evidence is presented without adequate context | Includes factual errors, omissions, or simplifications | Provides little or no context |
| 5. EVIDENCE | Evidence supports thesis in a logical and meaningful manner | Most evidence supports thesis, but some gaps in reasoning remain | Interpretation of evidence or reasoning is unclear | Evidence does not support thesis | No evidence is presented |
| 6. COUNTER-EVIDENCE | Identifies and responds to counter-evidence or alternate interpretations | Identifies counter-evidence but does not effectively respond | Identifies counter-evidence but makes little attempt to respond | Does not adequately identify counter-evidence | Ignores counter-evidence or alternate interpretations |
| 7. CITATIONS | Consistent citations in all appropriate areas (e.g., quotations, statistics, special knowledge, etc.) | Consistent citations in most areas | Inconsistent usage, format, or placement of citations | Inadequate or improper use of citations | Lacks citations |
| 8. ORGAN-IZATION | Conforms to essay format (i.e., introduction, main body, and conclusion) with logical sequence of ideas | Conforms to essay format with adequate sequence of ideas | Conforms to essay format, but sequences ideas improperly | Improper sequencing of essay components and ideas | Demonstrates little or no organization |
| 9. STYLE | Purposeful writing that shows a nuanced command of history (i.e., concepts, trends, and events) | Competent writing that shows a general understanding of history | Adequate writing that shows some understanding of history | Weak writing that shows a limited grasp of history | Poor writing or a misunderstanding of history |
| 10. LANGUAGE | Consistent use of academic language and grammar (i.e., word choice, syntax, and mechanics) | Consistent use of academic language with minor grammatical errors | Conversational in tone or significant grammatical errors | Severe or persistent grammatical errors | Improper or incomprehensible use of language |