*U.S. History (Gr. 11) New West Charter Instructor: Ms. Hynes*

**Semester 2 Research Paper:**

**“A Theory of American History” (CP)**

One of the greatest advantages that human beings have is pattern-recognition ability. This ability is one that is essential to reaching conclusions in historical studies. Based on the recognition of historical patterns, theories about history can be proposed and tested. Additionally, the human ability to recognize cause and effect is very helpful to historians in formulating academic theories about history. As stated at the beginning of the year, the social sciences, in many ways, is about starting a conversation, or, joining an existing conversation. Your essay should do **one** of those two things.

You will choose a topic and a research question or questions with a focus in an area of American history that interests you. You will conduct research using reliable, academic sources in order to answer those research questions, the answers to which will help to formulate your thesis and main arguments. Most important of all, try to stay away from supporting arguments with only the opinion of historians or other academic authors. Support your thesis using historical themes, events, and evidence that you identify and analyze. You will submit this essay in several stages:

* **Topic:** Due Monday February 25
* **Research question(s):** Due Friday March 8
* **Annotated Bibliography:** Due Monday March 25
* **Thesis and main arguments (Outline):** Due Wednesday April 3
* **First draft:** Due Friday April 12
* **Second draft:** Due Friday April 26
* **Final draft:** Due Monday May 6

**The final draft of your essay should meet the following criteria:**

* Discusses and gives clear evidence to substantiate a theory of American history
* 3-5 pages (800 - 1200 words)
* Typed, double-spaced, font size 12, 1-inch margins
* Uses at least FOUR reliable, academic sources
* Includes a properly-formatted bibliography on a separate page and citations in the body of the text (see Ms. Everett’s MLA Guide, 8th Edition – posted on her class website)

**Essay Example A: Construct your own theory**

**Topic:** Anti-immigrant sentiment

**Research Question:** What factors most consistently contribute to anti-immigrant sentiment?

**Thesis:** America’s long-standing reputation for being a country that welcomes immigrants with open arms and limitless opportunity has a darker side to it. Throughout American history, immigrants have often found themselves excluded from various opportunities and resources due to fierce competition for limited resources.

**Main Arguments:**

* American immigrants often encounter initial antipathy by the larger population, but cultural diffusion over time has helped various immigrant groups gain acceptance from the larger society (Irish, Italians, Russians, Chinese, Japanese). However, this basic bigotry cannot account for all anti-immigrant sentiment, or the most extreme policy examples of it. For a more complete explanation, we must cite examples in which economic competition for limited resources was present.
* Chinese Exclusion Act: Enacted in response to worries that Chinese immigrant workers were willing to work for a lower wage and might crowd out “native” workers.
* Mexican “Repatriation”: Enacted during the height of the Depression to provide more jobs to “native” Americans.
* The St. Louis Incident: Several hundred Jewish refugees were refused entry to the U.S. not only because of anti-Semitism, but because of a scarcity of jobs and resources available to support refugees during the Great Depression.
* All of this is not to say that anti-immigrant sentiment does not exist in the absence of economic competition, but some of its worst examples nonetheless consistently appear during periods of intense economic stress.

**Essay Example B: Add to or refute an existing theory**

**Topic:** Imperialism

**Research question:** What factors drove the growth of American imperialism in the latter half of the 19th century?

**Thesis:** While historians have traditionally placed America’s imperialist era in the late 19th century and insisted that America was a mere republic until then, it is much more accurate to say that America was always both an empire and imperialist from the earliest days of its founding.

**Main Arguments:**

* Early America was essentially an imperial extension of Europe to begin with.
* Early Americans engaged in empire-building and sought to expand their territorial and economic reach as far west as possible.
* 18th and 19th century Americans exhibited the same kinds of imperialist behavior toward Native Americans as they would exhibit in their conquests of Hawaii and the Philippines during the late 19th century “imperial” period.
* America’s early foreign policy formulations such as the Monroe Doctrine illustrate America’s intention to protect their expansionist interests in the western hemisphere from imperialist European powers. Moreover, their attempted invasion of Canada in the early 19th century clearly reveals an attempt at imperial annexation.
* While historians could reliably claim that internally, America functioned in many respects as a republic, they cannot deny that she simultaneously conducted herself as an empire, thereby making the term “imperial era” in reference to the late 19th century, a rather redundant term.

**Sample Research Topics and Questions:**

* Technology: What is the role of technology in American history?
* Drug and substance regulation: What factors prompt drug legalization or prohibition?

**Try to think of some interesting, open-ended research questions about American history for each of the following topics:**

* Environmentalism
* Civil rights
* LGBTQ history
* Economics
* Women's history
* Imperialism
* Military history
* Political history
* American elections
* Immigration
* Agricultural history
* The Constitution
* Labor history
* Crime, justice, and law enforcement
* Popular culture
* Religious history
* American youth culture

Essay Grading Rubric: Theory of American History (CP)

Category/Descriptor Points

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| --- | --- |
| Knowledge/Understanding:  The essay reflects a thorough and detailed understanding of the context and themes of American history upon which the topic and research were focused.  The text is written in a persuasive style, features a clear and well-supported thesis, and the essay is argument driven by the author rather than overwhelmed with quotes and paraphrases. | 5 4 3 2 1  5 4 3 2 1 |
| Research/Inquiry:  The essay is informed by at least FOUR reliable, academic sources which are used effectively to substantiate and support arguments.  Sources are properly cited within the body of the text, and a properly-formatted “bibliography” or “works cited” page is included. | 5 4 3 2 1  5 4 3 2 1 |
| Communication:  The overall structure and individual paragraphs are well-organized for clarity and a smooth flow of ideas.  Formal academic language is used throughout, vocabulary choices are sound, lending clarity and specificity to the paper, and there are virtually no grammar, spelling, sentence structure or punctuation issues. | 5 4 3 2 1  5 4 3 2 1 |
| Execution:  The essay is very interesting and informative, with enriching details which engage the reader. It is thoughtfully analyzed, artfully written, and well-edited.  The essay is complete, meets ALL assignment criteria, and shows evidence of planning and effort. | 5 4 3 2 1  5 4 3 2 1 |

Total: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_/40