

BOOK REVIEWS

If you have never written a "book review" before, you may find the following guidelines helpful. If you have any doubts about what you are doing, or if you need some guidance, do not hesitate to ask me for help. But please do not wait until the "last minute."

I have assigned book reviews for several reasons. First, writing is an important skill, which improves only with practice. Book reviews give me an opportunity to evaluate your formal writing abilities. Second, they increase your familiarity with the library, and improve your ability to find information about a particular topic. Third, they allow you to do in-depth reading about a topic of particular interest to you.

General Guidelines

1. You may select any book of your own choosing. However, all titles must be approved by me. I will not accept reviews of books which I have not approved. (If the book you choose is listed in the "Suggested Readings" or "Bibliography" section of your textbook, you may consider that "approved." If it is not listed in your text, however, you must have it approved by me personally.) In selecting your titles, there are several aids at your disposal: in addition to the computerized search facilities in the library, there are bibliographies in your texts. If you are unable to find a book, please ask me for assistance, and I will help you locate an appropriate title. (I will not approve books by phone or e-mail.)

The book you select should fit the following general criteria: it should generally be at least 200 pages in length, its original edition must have been published since 1945, and it should be a **monograph**. What is a monograph? It is a book written on a specific subject by a single author. It is **not** a collection of essays edited by an author, **not** a memoir by someone who took part in the events, **not** a collection of documents (primary sources) edited by an author, and **not** a general history of a country in any given period. It is also **not** a novel or a work of "historical fiction." (Some books published before 1945 would be very appropriate, while others would be considered "outdated"—if you find an "older" book that you would like to review, check with me to see if your choice is suitable for this assignment.)

2. Your book reviews should be approximately 3 - 5 pages long (generally not longer than 7 pages). They should be typed (or computer-generated), and double-spaced.

3. All book reviews are due on the date announced in class. Late papers will be penalized, unless a valid excuse is provided. PLEASE NOTE: "computer problems" are not acceptable excuses. If your computer "swallows your paper," or malfunctions in some manner, your paper can be accepted late only if a draft of the paper is submitted by the announced deadline. (Moral: always have backup copies of your computer files, and print "hard copies" to be certain that computer problems do not jeopardize your work.)

4. A book review is not just a "summary" of the book's contents. As the name implies, you are to "review" the book you have selected. You should include the following points:

A. What are the aim and scope of the book?

B. What is the author trying to say? In other words, what is the author's "thesis?"

C. Was the author successful in presenting his or her thesis? What evidence is used to support the thesis? Is the book well-documented? Is the author's evidence clearly presented?

D. Does the author meet the goals he or she set out to achieve?

E. Does this book provide new insights into the topic? If so, what were they? If not, where do you think the author failed?

F. Was the work well written and well organized?

G. What are your personal conclusions about the topic, the work, and the author? (If possible, include a brief statement about the author: birth [and, if applicable, death] dates, education, occupation, etc.)

H. Be sure to include the "publication data" for the book you review: publisher and place of publication, and copyright date, in addition to the title and the author's name. (If you look for examples of reviews in scholarly journals, you will see samples of how and where to include this information.)

A book review is more than just a "book report;" it is a piece of criticism. Look for the book's weaknesses and strengths. It should also be a well-written, coherent essay that will interest the reader. Assume that you are writing the review for an academic journal, and that it will be read by a scholarly audience. You can find examples of such reviews in the many scholarly journals that are available in the library, such as the *American Historical Review*, *Journal of Modern History*, etc.

Good writing is not easily achieved. Rewriting and editing are important parts of the writing process--do not leave them out of yours. Your review will be evaluated both for content and writing style. If you submit the final version (not a draft) by the deadline announced in class, I will grade it, and you can revise it and resubmit it (by the regular deadline) for a higher grade.