Historical Synthesis Essay  
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What is a “Synthetic Essay”?  
These essays demonstrate a student’s comprehension of a particular body of historical knowledge, and the themes, turning points, and patterns that characterize an era and/or aspect of a specific field. They are generally narrative in format while including analysis of the content they address. In addition to summarizing large amounts of historical information, they must discuss the relevant historical debates and differences in scholarly interpretation. These essays should also reflect students’ understanding of the relationships among historiography, research and narrative. Students are encouraged to develop their own perspectives on the historical issues and content, as well as the debates and interpretive trends among scholars.

Although there is considerable debate about the possibilities and pitfalls of “synthesis” in history, these essays help students to grapple the broad patterns of historical change, think about how that change occurs, and thus better ground your own work within a rich historical context. Understanding that context allows students to more clearly argue for the significance of a particular project, topic, and historical question. Finally, these essays enable students to work through the important literature and central debates in their given fields and that inform their own intellectual perspectives.

Instructions and Parameters for this Essay  
These essays should be 20 double-spaced pages, excluding end/footnotes. Essays must adhere to the citation and format guidelines of the Chicago Manual of Style (aka Turabian). As stated in the syllabus, students may use a maximum of 5 books from the class, while the total bibliography should be between 10-15 books and 5 essays. Students will also submit a rough draft of the paper, and we will “workshop” those drafts in class. When you submit the essays to me, I want the following information on the top of the first page: your full name, my name, and the semester and title of this course. Just below that, I want the title of the paper. Start your essay a few lines down on this page. Please number your pages. Please submit your bibliography for this essay, at the end of this essay. This is NOT the separate annotated bibliography that you will submit separately to me electronically.

The papers should focus on a particular theme and time period, broadly defined. For example, you might investigate “how racial paradigms impacted notions of citizenship in the early 20th century;” or you might “compare and contrast the impact of the creation of the international border on Indigenous peoples in the 19th century.” You could also “compare notions of gender and sexuality in Sonoran and British Columbian society between 1860 and 1940.” Papers must contain a significant comparative perspective, basing the content and analysis on different borderland regions. At least one of the regions should be the U.S.-Mexico or U.S.-Canada borderlands. Ph.D. students may use these essays in their borderlands field, as well as Latin America and the third field of comparative/transnational/global history. If you choose to submit this for the Third Field, you need to think about how this paper ties into your proposed emphasis on a non-U.S., Mexico, U.S-Mexico region.

September 7th  
100 word preliminary topic proposal  
September 28th  
250 word paper proposal, and annotated bibliography  
November 23rd  
First Draft of synthesis paper  
December 7th  
Final paper due electronically