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US Religions Information Literacy Assignment

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Blog/Discussion Leading
       Each student will lead a discussion section, typically as a part of a pair or group of three. Your job (with your partner) will be to isolate the main themes of the primary sources as well as its importance, and to get the class talking about it. You need to come to the discussion prepared to do the following: 1. Lead the class through the actual material of the primary source (meaning make sure everyone is clear on what happened in the text) 2. Address the main religious-cultural themes of the primary source, and connect them with the lecture (this is where the annotated bibliography in the blog comes into play.) 3. Get the students to talk about what they thought about the source—what is intriguing, frustrating, wonderful, annoying, etc. By the end of this assignment you should be a mini-expert in your little section of American religion and know how to access information and evaluate the information.

The class will have a class blog through Google Sites that you will all have access to (will give you the address later). For each discussion section the discussion leaders will do the following.

1. Give a thoughtful read/analysis of a section of two or three (two if you are a pair, three if you are a group of three) of the primary sources that you are assigned for that week. (You choose which two or three.)
2. Give 2 discussion questions each (so if there are two of you there will be four questions, three, there will be 6 questions and try to make all the questions original, don't overlap.) that focus on the other primary sources (aka, the ones that you did not analyze)—these questions need to be "big idea," thought-provoking questions.
3. Post a short annotated bibliography of secondary sources that relate to this time period/theme in American religion. The annotated bibliography needs to have 3-5 popular articles, (like from the NY Times, or other magazines, newspapers) and 3-5 scholarly articles, or scholarly books (peer reviewed, not usually found via google, but found via the library.) The annotations will explain how you link these articles to this class and why you found them interesting/informative/pertinent to that week's discussion.

   So before you panic, it will look something like this—if you are leading the discussion say on American Judaism, you might find newspaper articles on some theological tensions within the NY Orthodox community—those would work as your "popular" articles. Then you need to find some scholarly articles on American Judaism, from a respected scholar of Judaism. Then you need to list the bibliographic information of these articles in your blog post and your annotations as to why you found these particular articles interesting. It needs to be a thoughtful annotation, not just an "I found this interesting because…" sentence.

4. You need to then lead discussion for that day. Now having done all this work, you should have tons of thoughtful questions to ask your classmates about the primary sources that you have read. You will be graded on how smoothly you keep the class going. The point of the blog is to create conversation before the discussion in the hope that people are primed to go into discussion with something to talk about.

5. Make your blog post pretty—you can put pictures that you find on the internet, or even link to the popular articles that you find. You may play with the fonts and presentation (I am going to set up a very plain blog template—you do with it what you wish.) Be creative. Just remember that any picture that you take from elsewhere on the internet, you must cite.

All of this will help you to learn how to run a discussion, how to ask meaningful questions and give a close reading of a source, and how to use the library for popular and scholarly research. This must be posted by noon two days before your discussion day. (You will choose what day/topic you want to lead.) Before you panic, I will run the first discussion, do the first blog post, etc, to model for you.

Places to look for tips on scholarly books—the book reviews section of *The Journal of Religion and American Culture* or *Books and Culture* or *Church History* (journals.) Also the blog, Religion in US History updates frequently on new scholarly stuff that is coming out. http://usreligions.blogspot.com