

Historical Book Review



A historical book review is a critical analysis of a piece of historical writing. It is different from a book report in that it requires more than a mere summary of the book, it forces the reader to interact on some level with the work. This particular method requires a summary, background research, analysis, and an evaluation. You will choose one book from the attached list for study. Then you will compose and submit, on the prearranged due date, an analytical research paper in which the following aspects of historical analysis are addressed. Your paper must cite *no fewer than six sources* (textbooks and encyclopedias not allowed), must include an annotated Works Cited list as well as text citations, and must conform to standard MLA format.

I. Summary (10%)

Summarize the major points of the book or give a concise summary of the content. This is a factual retelling of the information and should not include criticism or analysis.

II. Background Research (40%)

Research the historical time period addressed in the book. What is the “backdrop” against which the drama of your book is played? Who are the major players and what are their roles? This step is essential and should be completed before any analysis is attempted.

III. Analysis (40%)

Historical analysis involves an in-depth look at the knowledge, judgment, organizational skill, and writing ability of the author. You must also analyze the historical context for greater clarity as well as to evaluate the book’s usefulness in providing an understanding of the period. The following questions should be considered:

- What is the topic and does the author cover the subject adequately? Does the author cover all aspects of the subject in a balanced fashion? What is the approach to the subject- topical, analytical, chronological, and descriptive?
- What is the thesis, interpretation or point of view? Is the author biased in favor or in disfavor of the subject? Is the thesis clearly stated or did you have to struggle through a mass of facts and opinions to get to it? Does the professional background of the author (from info on the back of the book or your own good research....) affect the thesis of the book?
- What is the nature of the book’s content? Is it theoretical or mostly factual? Is the theorizing or fact-building mostly political, economic, social, or cultural in nature? Are the theories or facts organized in such a way as to support the thesis of the book most effectively?
- What conclusion (s) does the author make? Does the conclusion agree with the thesis or stated purposes? Does the conclusion differ from the textbook or background research?

IV. Evaluation (10%)

How well has the author achieved what he/she set out to do? Do you have a better grasp of the period after having read the book? How has the book helped you understand American history? Would you recommend the book? If so, to whom? Would you warn certain readers to watch out for particular elements of the book? Was it worth your time (given the fact you had no choice...)?