QHQT Essay [Research Paper Assignment - Phase 1]

This assignment will be the chance that everyone in the class will have this term to exercise your historical question-forming skills and practice some of the research skills needed to pursue that original idea. The optional research paper assignment (for some of you) will be your opportunity to develop, argue, and refine your own coherent thesis about the history of some aspect of the life sciences.

1) You should begin your essay by introducing an issue or question that you have encountered in the course (or thought of independently), which has the potential to be reframed as a historical “problem” capable of being investigated. In the first paragraph of this essay, try to convey the following:
   a. What is the original issue or question that provoked your curiosity?
   b. Why did it provoke your curiosity?
   c. How did this issue/question come into your awareness (be sure to cite one of more sources, using proper historical footnoting technique)?
   d. Does your question have more than one possible answer (room for evidence and interpretation to matter)?

2) Then, write 2 or 3 paragraphs in which you explore that first question, in order to develop and support an initial hypothesis (or claim) about what you think is a plausible answer to the question (based on what little you already know), and what you expect to learn by examining this question through an examination of historical evidence. Describe briefly the first few primary and scholarly secondary sources that you can find, that seem to have any relevance to your question. What do they say, and how easy is it to foresee manageable boundaries to what the research paper would require, to assess your initial hypothesis and answer your original question?

3) Third, you should try to refine your original question to be more precise.
   a. Is there a chronological window within which your research can be confined, that captures the most interesting piece of the issue you wish to explore?
   b. Is there a particular geographical boundary or cultural setting (or two) where the main activities or controversy was happening, or where an example of the dynamics of the historical event/change you are examining was particularly well illustrated?

Reframe your original question into a new form that will retain what interested you in the first place, but also provide some helpful boundaries to the research task. Explain in a paragraph how and why you feel that this way of restating the question meets these two criteria.
4) After you have reframed the question, investigate this new version of the issue question. This portion of the essay should occupy 3-4 pages and should reveal all of the interesting pieces of historical evidence that you can find by searching for relevant primary sources and scholarly secondary journal articles and books. I expect to see lots of historical footnotes, and a reason for the essay to contain a well-organized bibliographical listing of all the relevant sources (even including the ones you did not specifically cite in any footnotes).

5) Conclude the essay with a paragraph that poses a provisional thesis claim, for what your ultimate research paper would try to argue and defend, as an interpretation of the evidence you are finding about the question you have framed and revised. You may even find it useful to mention some new interesting historical issue(s) raised by your research.

Important reminder about footnotes and bibliography:
Students should use proper historical footnotes rather than parenthetical social science or natural science citation practices. In addition to the footnotes (which identify sources for specific information that you have located in particular sources, direct quotations, and interpretive or analytical frameworks you have found written by other historical scholars), every essay must also include a comprehensive bibliography which fully describes all of the relevant research materials that were consulted in the preparation of the essay.

The QHQT assignment (a hard copy double-spaced, with footnotes included and bibliography appended) must be turned in by 3:00 PM on Monday, December 2, 2013 to avoid a lateness penalty. If turned in later, your maximum essay grade (out of 15 possible) will be decreased by 2 points per day. Feedback to these essays will helpfully inform anyone who chooses to do the optional research paper assignment (to replace a low exam grade); but may also be used by anyone who chooses to revise the QHQT itself for an improved grade on this essay assignment. Papers turned in late will not be eligible for revision.