

## **HIS 104: Creative Paper Assignment**

Although the Middle Ages are well-documented, the vibrancy and vitality of this earlier era can feel very distant from our own day and time. As one scholar explains, “Historians are left forever chasing shadows, painfully aware of their inability to ever reconstruct a dead world in its completeness however thorough or revealing their documentation.” And yet, even though the men and women who lived during the Middle Ages died long ago, their legacies continue to haunt our own day and time . . . and the voices of their ghosts can sometimes still be heard to whisper from the dust. For your assignment, please bring the Middle Ages to life in a creative and thought-provoking manner, writing a creative paper based on one of the three options below:

### **Option #1: The Investiture Controversy (from Week #10)**

During the early Middle Ages the papacy struggled to assert its influence across Europe and was forced to make alliances with secular kings who frequently used the Church for their own ends. Beginning in the mid-11th century, however, a new generation of religious reformers rose up to cleanse the church from secular interference. Among these was Pope Gregory VII who asserted that papal authority was universal, declaring that secular kings did not have jurisdiction to appoint or dismiss bishops or other religious leaders as had been practiced for hundreds of years. Notwithstanding this papal assertion, a young German king Henry IV continued to appoint religious leaders within his domains. As he later explained, “I Henry, king not through usurpation but through the holy ordination of God, to Hildebrand, at present not pope but false monk . . . do say unto thee with, together with all our bishops: Descend, descend to be damned throughout the ages.” Thus began a war of words and deeds that has come to be known as the Investiture Controversy, a dramatic tale in which a pope and king each challenged the secular and religious authority of the other, attempting to bend a stubborn and self-righteous opponent to his will.

For this option, please draw upon the documentation contained in Item #19 of the Electronic Reader (which includes primary source letters and other documents about the Investiture Controversy), crafting a creative paper that brings the story of the Investiture Controversy to life for a modern audience in a creative and thought-provoking manner.

### **Option #2: The Black Death (from Week #11)**

In the mid-14th century, a terrible plague swept across Europe leaving heartbreak and devastation in its wake. Over just four years, it is estimated that somewhere from 30-60% of Europe’s population died. As one contemporary recalled, “Father abandoned child, wife husband, one brother another; for this illness seemed to strike through the breath and sight. And so they died. And none could be found to bury the dead for money or friendship. Members of a household brought their dead to a ditch as best they could, without priest, without divine offices ... great pits were dug and piled deep with the multitude of dead. And they died by the hundreds both day and night. And as soon as those ditches were filled more were dug . . .”

For this option, please draw upon the documentation contained in Item #20 of the Electronic Reader (which includes a series of primary source documents relating to the Black Death), crafting a creative paper that brings the story of the Black Death to life for a modern audience in a creative and thought-provoking manner.

### **Option #3: Medieval Gender Relations (from Week #11)**

In the early 12th century, a young girl named Heloïse fell in love with her Latin tutor, a university professor named Peter Abelard. As this future nun would later recall, “So sweet to me were those delights of lovers that they can neither displease me nor pass from my memory. Whatever I am doing, they always come to mind. Not even when I am asleep do they spare me. At Mass, when prayer ought to be pure, the memory of those delights thoroughly captivate my wretched soul rather than heed my prayers. And although I ought to lament what I have done, I sigh rather for what I now have to forgo. Not only the things that we did, but the places and the times in which we did them are so fixed in my mind that I reenact them all . . .”

For this option, please draw upon the documentation in Item #21 of the Electronic Reader (which includes a series of letters between Heloïse and Abelard), crafting a creative paper that speaks to larger questions about gender relations in the Middle Ages, bringing the story of these two lovers to life for a modern audience in a creative and thought-provoking manner.

### **General Instructions**

This is not a typical history paper, but rather, a creative assignment, and could take any number of different forms, depending upon the option and approach that a student chooses. For example, you could bring Pope Gregory VII and King Henry IV to the 21st century to debate their differences on a television talk show. (Jerry Spring, anyone?) Alternatively, you could feign to be a historian who has “discovered” some new account of the Black Death, presenting your discovery to a modern audience with commentary. Other options include writing a short story with historical (and/or fictional) protagonists, bringing historical characters from the Middle Ages to the present-day to participate in a podcast, etc. The main point is that the paper should not only be historical (with references and footnotes to explain your reasoning and back up your approach), but also creative, providing the reader with a perspective that is otherwise missing from the distant past.

The paper should be approximately 6 pages in length (approx. 1800 words) and **MUST** include FOOTNOTES that back up your approach and point of view, making specific references to relevant primary source material from the Electronic Reader. In this regard, the paper **MUST BE BASED** upon the documentation contained in Items #19, #20, or #21 of the Electronic Reader (depending upon the particular option that you choose to write about). You are welcome to do outside research if you feel you need more material to successfully recreate the events of the period, but this is not required.

A major focus of this assignment is to develop skills that foster creativity in writing, argumentation, and critical thinking. Accordingly, students may not plagiarize someone else’s work and turn it in as their own. Beyond plagiarism, students may not use generative AI technologies for any stage of the assignment (e.g. ChatGPT or other GenAI software). It is expected that the creative paper will be generated entirely by the student submitting the assignment. **PLAGIARISM AS WELL AS THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI TECHNOLOGIES WILL BE CONSIDERED ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT AND WILL RESULT IN AN “E” IN THE CLASS.** If you have questions about this policy, please contact Dr. Myrup.

Given the length and nature of this assignment, I would encourage you to begin by choosing a single point that you would like to make about the Middle Ages, then craft a paper that dramatically illustrates this point in a creative and thought-provoking manner.

Due Date: Friday, April 10