Instructions for Primary Source Analysis Essay
Annotated Bibliography Due: Monday March 30, 2015
Essay Due: Monday April 20, 2015

Reading a source critically is one of the historian's most fundamental skills. First read the
document(s) for content. What is the document saying? What is the story line? Glean the source(s)
for the essential information about the main characters, events, ideas, and arguments. Once you
have mastered the content, it is helpful to write a short summary of the document in your own
words. Then re-read the document(s) for context. Think about the following questions as you
critically examine the source(s):

Authorship: What do you know about the author's background? Why did the author write the
document? What motives did he or she have in putting pen to paper? What personal, class, ethnic,
religious, gender or cultural beliefs and assumptions might have influenced the author's viewpoint
and writing?

Genre: Does the source fall into a distinct genre (defined as "a category of literary composition
characterized by a particular style, form, and content")? Examples of literary/historical genres may
include novels, biographies, poems, petitions, newspapers, popular songs, speeches, laws,
government records, and pamphlets.

Audience: For whom was the author writing? Did he or she address any particular person or group?
Did the author's audience have any effect on the document's content? Was the author speaking for
(or representing) a particular audience? Was the author trying to silence another audience? How
was the document received?

Language: What is the tone? How does the style contribute to the source’s meaning? Are there
particular metaphors used that illuminate the theme?

Reliability: What can the source tell you about the past? How useful is it for understanding the
past? How trustworthy is the source? Does it exclude, downplay, or ignore evidence or issues that
you can verify through other sources? What is the author leaving out?

Influence: How important or influential was the source in its own day and age? Was it widely
disseminated and read (e.g., a magazine article)? Was it more personal (e.g., a diary) Did the
document's publication have anticipated and unanticipated consequences?

YOUR TASK

1) Compose an annotated bibliography containing two primary and three secondary sources you
will consult to understand the author’s background, the historical context and significance of your
source. In an annotated bibliography, each source is followed by a summary of it and its relevance
to your paper topic.
DIRECTIONS FOR ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
(Source:http://www.trentu.ca/history/workbook/annotatedbibliographies.php)

Library Research (you will receive the librarians’ assistance the week of March 2)

- Identify and gather the sources that you will use. They do not have to be scholarly sources but they do have to be relevant and reliable. No blogs, wikis or any other source whose author cannot be guaranteed as credible.
- Read each source and take some general notes on it.

Format of the Annotated Bibliography

- Each source is listed in correct bibliographic form, according to Chicago Style (Turabian)
- Sources are listed in alphabetical order by the author's last name.
- Each source is followed by a 3-5 sentence summary.

What to Include in the Summary

- A sentence or two on the general topic or research question that the work addresses.
- A sentence or two on the thesis or argument of the work.
- A sentence on the author's methodology: What kinds of sources are used? Is it a case study or an overview of scholarship on the subject? How is the book/article organized?
- A sentence on how this source is relevant to your paper topic.

2) Compose an essay (5-6 pages) analyzing the source relying on the sources in your bibliography

In structuring your essay, you should have a distinct introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion. Use 12-point font and correct grammar, style and spelling.

- Introduction: A brief description of the historical period or of the issue which the essay will address that ends with a ….
- Thesis: Your "Answer" expressed in 1 or 2 sentences. This is what you will try to prove in the body of the essay.

EXAMPLE OF INTRODUCTION

Source: George Kennan, Long Telegram, 1946

In 1946, American diplomat George Kennan was serving in the U.S. Embassy-Moscow. A respected Russia expert who spoke Russian fluently, Kennan became alarmed by the anti-American rhetoric he read in the Soviet press and the assertive foreign policy pursued by the Stalin regime. He worried that President Truman and his advisers in Washington were not fully aware of these ominous developments. If unchecked, the Soviets would undermine U.S. efforts to create the conditions for what publisher Henry Luce termed the “American Century.” With these thoughts in
mind, Kennan drafted a very long telegram (4000 words) to the State Department that portrayed Soviet intentions in the most pessimistic terms, arguing that Soviet territorial ambitions were insatiable. Given the exaggerated rhetoric Kennan employed, one can see why President Truman subsequently embraced a policy of military containment rather than engaging in negotiations to balance the aims of the U.S. and the USSR.

- Evidential Paragraphs: The purpose of this section is to support the thesis and critically analyze the source. The evidence is the inferences you have drawn from information drawn from relevant primary and secondary readings identified in your bibliography.
- Conclusion: A restatement of the argument which restates your thesis, refined in light of the evidence you have presented.