

World History Connected: Sample Assignments

Matthew Schauer
Oklahoma State University

Modern World History: Orientalism Paper (50 pts)

Assignment Goals

- Students will have demonstrated the ability to analyze a painting as a historical source.
- Students will be able to connect the evidence you find in your paintings to textual primary sources.
- Students will create an argument with a clear thesis statement relating to Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism."
- Students will analyze how European conceptions of superiority were supported through visual imagery, and how they connect to ideas of gender and empire.

As you will remember from your readings in Edward Said's 1979 work *Orientalism*, he reevaluated the term "Orientalism" and examined the ways in which the "Orient" was characterized as the "exotic Other" in relation to a modern industrialized "West." Said also described the wide variety of modes of discourse used to convey these ideas to the public:

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, and experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. (Said, *Orientalism*, 1-2.)

Use these links and cite them for more background:

On Clothes: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/oric/hd_oric.htm

Read up on Orientalism Here: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/euor/hd_euor.htm

The Assignment

Using Said's ideas concerning Orientalism, and what you have learned in class, analyze TWO of the written excerpts and TWO paintings you have selected from these websites or the examples I have provided online:

Pick Two Paintings

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/euor/hd_euor.htm

<http://www.daheshmuseum.org/orientalists/#.WxYOmCPMwWo>

Choose Two Written Excerpts from the List:

George Thompson "A Market in Tripoli"

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/islam/1890tripoli.asp>

A Persian Wedding: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/islam/1885persianwedding.asp>

Justice in Arabia:

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/islam/1898arabiajustice.asp>

Life in Persia:

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/islam/1885persialife.asp>

Write a 3-5 page essay comparing and contrasting the different ways in which you see the attributes of Orientalism present in these visual and written sources. **3 WHOLE PAGES** is the minimum.

Answer these questions:

How do these paintings and written sources characterize the Orient as "exotic," "backwards," or "timeless"? How do they examine ideas of gender? How do these sources make the "West" seem superior to the "East" and how does this support the ideas that pushed and justified the rise of imperialism in the 19th century?

Things to consider:

Think about common images, motifs, colors, and arguments that you see in the sources. Think about ideas of class, gender, and race that these painters/authors convey. How do they make the “Orient” seem to be an “exotic Other” or fundamentally different from the “West”? How do these images eliminate the diversity of culture and society in Asia/Africa/ Middle East? How does this help European justifications for empire?

**Note: You don't have to address all of the questions under “Things to Consider.” These are just things to think about in an effort to help guide you to an argument. Email me if you want help with your essay/ thesis etc.”

Course: Modern World History since 1500

Unit: Global Imperialism

Assignment #1: Object Study

Assignment Goals:

- Students will have analyzed an object as a historical source.
- Students will have researched the history, provenance, and production of an object.
- Students will have examined the larger implications of the production, sale (if applicable), collection, and/or display of the object.
- Students will have examined how the object might connect to similar objects in other parts of the world.
- Students will have demonstrated how the object might tell us something about the history of imperialism in Southeast Asia

The Assignment:

1. Select one object photo from the list given on our online site.
 2. Utilize the database of the British Museum, the Troepenmuseum, and/or the Penn Museum to attempt to answer these questions:
 - Where was the object made?
 - How was it made?
 - From what type of material is it constructed?
 - Who made it?
 - Was this type of object “typically” made by a woman or a man? Why do you think this?
 - Who bought it? Was it expensive?
 - How is it used? Or is it ornamental?
 - Who used it? Where they wealthy, poor, somewhere in between?
 - Why do you think someone saved this object and it ended up in a museum?
 - How do you think it ended up in a museum?
- Write a 350-500 word essay that answers these questions and gives me the “history” of the object *to the best of your knowledge.*

*Remember much of this will be educated guesswork, but you should be able to find some answers from the museum databases. A historian’s job is often theorizing connections until you are able to gather more information. You will be gathering more information on these objects during your “Exhibit” project later in the course.

Assignment #2

Creating an Exhibition on “Imperial Objects”

Assignment Goals:

- Students will have used objects as historical sources to prove a thesis that provides an insight in modern imperialism.
- Students will have researched the provenance of objects, and have examined why/how an object was collected and subsequently donated to a museum.
- Students will have proved how objects can provide a historical insight into the way objects can provide insight into the ways in which imperialism affected ideas of gender and culture.
- Students will have analyzed the history of “universal” museums that hold colonial era collections from indigenous populations.
- Students will have connected the types of decisions made by museum curators today that work in former imperial museums.
- Students will understand how these decisions affect the ways a visitor experiences an exhibit or thinks about the topic of the exhibit.
- Students will have practiced concise writing by preparing exhibit labels.

You will be responsible for curating an “exhibition” on “ Empire, Gender, and Handicrafts in Malaysia and the Philippines ” using objects held in the British Museum.

1. Select one object from the “Mrs. Bland Collection of Lace and Basketry” at the British Museum.
2. Select one more object from Malaysia, and two objects from the Philippines from the link to the British Museum Collections that I have provided.
3. Formulate a topic for you exhibition that will broadly address these three questions:
4. Email your topic and objects for me for approval.

5. Use Powerpoint to Make an “Exhibition” with 11 Slides:

- An Introductory Title Slide
- An Introductory Label Explaining the Topic of the Exhibit
- Object #1 with Description
- Explanatory Label
- Object #2 with Description
- Explanatory Label
- Object #3 with Description
- Explanatory Label
- Object #4 with Description
- Explanatory Label
- Concluding Label

6. Write a 500-750 Word Essay Answering the Following Questions

- What does your exhibit tell us about handicrafts, imperialism, and gender? In other words, what is the central argument of your exhibit?
- Why did you select the objects you selected?
- What similarities or differences between the objects from Malaysia in the Philippines did you see?
- How do these objects tell us something about gender and empire?
- Why do you think these objects were collected and preserved at the time?
- What did you find out about the provenance of the objects and the background of their collectors? (You already know about Mrs. Bland. Tell me as much as you can find through the British Museum’s website.)
- Why are they still collected and preserved in the British Museum?

Things to Remember:

Think like a historian, not a curator in the 19th century. Do not model your exhibit on ones we have looked at in class from the 19th/Early 20th century, but think about why those curators selected the objects they did for those exhibits. In other words I do not want an exhibit on “Industries of the Malays” that tells me about all of their handicrafts. I want you to tell me “what colonial administrators thought of their handicrafts and what this has to do with imperialism”.

Be concise on your labels!

Try to give the general information about the object on the **Descriptive Label** (Who, What, When, What, How it connects to your topic briefly.)

For example: Lace Making Equipment, Malacca, Malaysia, Mrs. Bland Collection, 1925

Explanatory Label: This explains how the object connects to your argument and topic. If your exhibit is about colonial administrators collected objects and information relating to handicrafts to use in imperial schools. You might write:

For example: Lace was typically made by women in Malacca and was thought to be a good source of income for Malay women by British administrators. Malay Girls were taught lacemaking in British colonial schools as a way to “uplift” them. The collector of this was Mrs. Bland, who was the wife of a British colonial administrator and amateur ethnologist.

Be specific and think of connections between your objects!

Remember to point to similarities and differences in the ways the objects appear, were made, provenance etc. For example, how does a *kris* (knife) made by a Malay swordsmith and lace from Malacca both tell us about the ways the British thought about gender?

Use your sources as background knowledge! You are not experts on this, so use your in-class readings. I will not penalize you for getting something incorrect if you use the knowledge you have available to you. Remember historians will research questions like these for years. I want you to go through this process, but you do not have years to find all the answers! Please contact me if you need guidance or have any questions.