

Historical Map Analysis

Historical Geography (GEOG0219), Fall 2013

For this assignment you are to write a short essay (maximum 1,000 words, spaced at least 1.5) in which you analyze a historical map related to the historical geography of some aspect of the American environment. I recommend you choose a map related to a topic you are considering for your atlas plate, if you can. You may choose any map that you find on an authoritative online map archive, such as the Library of Congress Geography and Maps Division via American Memory (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>), the New York Public Library Map Division website (<http://catalog.nypl.org/>), one of the other online historical map archives on Hans Raum's reference list (including maps in the Congressional Serial Set), or a published or manuscript map from Special Collections. You must provide a full bibliographic citation for whatever map you choose.

The main purpose of this assignment is to give you practice in analyzing a historical map so that you can apply those skills confidently to the maps you use in creating your atlas plate.

In your analysis, please consider the following points. You can delve most deeply into those that are most pertinent to your map, but do be sure to touch on each general topic.

1. Genre. What kind of map is this – a reference map, a survey, a property (cadastral) map, a thematic map displaying quantitative or qualitative data, a map intended to persuade or to amuse, or something else? How might the purpose of the map have influenced its content?
2. Author and probable audience. Who made this map? For whom was it probably intended? How does the map reflect the interests of the author and/or the audience?
3. Historical context of the map. When was the map made? What sort of place was the mapped area at that time? Do the content and emphasis of the map reflect local or regional events, problems, or preoccupations during the period when the map was produced? Does knowing when the map was published help one understand its cartographic style, accuracy, or other aspects of how it represents its subject?
4. The map as a source for historical geography. What historical and geographical information does the map contain? How could you use this map in researching a topic for this year's atlas on environmental change? What other kinds of sources would help you answer the questions this map raises?

Please write the paper as an essay, not as a string of answers to my questions. I will be looking for how well you think about the questions that are most germane to your map, how well you situate the map in its historical context, and the creativity of research ideas the map inspires. While I do not require additional research for this assignment (I hope that the map you choose, and its source, answer most questions), you are free to consult other sources if you wish.

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Lastly, please be sure to include a good print-out of your source map with a complete citation. The map print-out may be in color or black and white.

The map analysis is due in class on Thursday, Oct. 24. This assignment counts for 20 percent of your grade.