Thinking Like a Historian
## SkillBuilders

Historians use evidence to construct a story or interpretation about the past, and often that evidence is fragmentary, partial or conflicting. A careful historian asks critical questions about her or his evidence and acknowledges the potential strengths and weaknesses of those sources for constructing plausible stories (histories) about the past. Historians make knowledge rather than just consume it.

For each of your six "SkillBuilder" papers, you will practice using a primary source in these ways. In each unit, I'll provide some links to reliable online repositories or collections of historical artifacts. You'll write a concise, 2-page paper critically analyzing ONE source and connecting it to a specific passage in the textbook. Both the evidence and the textbook passage MUST BE CITED in your paper using correct Chicago-Style footnotes.

Let me stress, these are NOT opinion pieces but brief works of historical analysis. As you do this over and over, you will develop stronger critical thinking skills, approach primary sources with greater confidence, and understand how historians use such sources to construct their interpretations of the past. You will also be able to contribute more thoughtfully in class discussion. In other words, as you model what they do, you will begin thinking like a historian.

Criteria and grading: A SkillBuilder should be a full 2 pages long (double-spaced) and thoroughly proofread for spelling and grammar. It should contain at least two correctly formatted footnotes (one to the original source and one to the textbook passage). Give your paper a catchy title, not "SkillBuilder #3." Do not include a title page or a separate Works Cited page – what you turn in should be exactly 2 sheets of paper, no more and no less. Each SkillBuilder is worth 6 points on your final grade. You may submit your SkillBuilders electronically or as printed papers (see sidebar).

SkillBuilders are due at the beginning of class on the specified date. You can drop one without penalty since only 5 of the 6 are required, but you will get the full credit for all 6 if you turn them all in. **There are no makeups on SkillBuilders**.

Plan ahead: I will not grant extensions or makeups or allow late submissions on SkillBuilders. This includes printing/ sending after classtime on the same day it is due, which is not permitted. I am happy to read and comment on late work but it will not receive credit.

Comments: When I return your graded SkillBuilder, I attach a document with the grading rubric and my cumulative comments on ALL your SkillBuilders. I do this so you can track your improvement and have a record of your past feedback throughout the semester. I like to see general improvement over the course in both your writing and your analytical skills, and I find that it helps students to see all the previous comments each time.

The paperless option: if you submit your paper electronically, you will receive it back electronically by email. If you submit it as a printed paper, you will receive it back with printed comments attached.