

ASSIGNMENT

“Writing Of” & “Writing By” Essay

Final Due: xx/xx/xx



In one of our first readings for this class, *Riots in Literature*, Bell et al. writes that “all riots become immediately mediated and interpreted, translated and transformed... the common factor in these accounts of crowd behavior is that they are examples of *writing of* rather than *writing by*” (Bell et al. x, xiii). Throughout our course, we have used literary portrayals of protest crowds throughout the 19th century to gain a better understanding of how histories of social change are written and remembered. However, most of these accounts were written, as Bell et al. point out, from an outsider’s perspective—whether at **a historical remove, a political one, or through mere lack of experience**. For this assignment, we will compare similarly “outside” or “writing of” accounts of real-life protests to parallel “insider” or “writing by” accounts, thus gaining a better perspective of **how organizing actually works and how written accounts may or may not reflect those realities**.

For your final project, you will write a short essay (1500-2000 words) comparing and contrasting a “writing by” perspective of **a real (non-literary) political protest, rally, or demonstration** with a “writing of” perspective of the same event. You will analyze the differences between these texts with the help of at least TWO additional secondary sources, one of which should provide a **theoretical framework for your argument**.

Due Dates

- DAY xx/xx, TIME:** Topic proposal
- DAY xx/xx, TIME:** Outline & 2 paragraphs
- DAY xx/xx, TIME:** Peer Review
- DAY xx/xx, TIME:** Final draft due

<p>What counts as a “writing by” source?</p> <p>“Writing by” perspectives may come in the form of your personal experience and attendance at a recent event or meeting, an interview with an organizer, or a primary source found in an archive.</p> <p>These sources should speak directly to the process of planning and organizing, and/or the experience of participating in a mass action. “Official” materials published by an organization will not count on their own, if not supplemented by, for example, letters, meeting minutes, or other logistical documents.</p>	<p>What counts as a “writing of” source?</p> <p>“Writing of” perspectives may come in the form of journalistic or literary responses to the same event.</p> <p>These sources must be at some kind of remove from the original event—usually by someone that was not present at all, from a different identity group, and/or written years after the event took place.</p>
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What counts as an “additional secondary source?”

Secondary sources are, broadly speaking, **interpretive** texts. In the realm of **historical writing**, they are generally at least a few degrees removed from any events that they describe, drawing on and synthesizing multiple “primary” sources such as firsthand accounts. However, you may also use secondary sources from other disciplines such as **literary studies**, **critical theory**, **sociology**, or **psychology**. These texts might not be directly “about” your subject matter, but they will provide a framework through which you can interpret and analyze it.

For this essay, you must use at least **TWO** secondary sources to analyze your “writing by/writing of” sources, one of which should provide a theoretical framework for your argument. It is not enough to tell us that two accounts of the same event are different or alike—your essay should argue why those differences and similarities are **significant**! Your secondary sources will help you to achieve this.

EXPECTATIONS FOR COMPLETE DRAFT

➤ FORMAT & GRAMMAR

- 1500-2000 words
- Legible, accessible font (size 11-12); 1-inch margins, double spaced
- Save as DOC or DOCX
- Precise, clear, and coherent prose. Your grammar does **NOT** have to be perfect, but readers should be able to understand it, and it should be **proofread**.
- Citations should follow **MLA** or **Chicago** style (either is fine, but be consistent throughout)

➤ CONTENT

- **Original, in-depth exploration** of two texts describing the same historical protest movement
- Acute **attention** to and **interpretation of** specific **details** from the chosen texts
- Coherent **analysis** of your comparison's meaning and significance, resulting in an **argument** about, for instance, historiography, the history of the protest movement itself, or a specific disciplinary or philosophical debate
- Utilization of at least **two secondary sources** to frame and support your argument
- All ideas and text should be authored by YOU alone and **not AI-generated** (see class policy)

Tips for Making a Compelling Argument

- ★ **Select sources that disagree in some way.** Even if they're aligned politically, keep an eye out for how perspective, genre/form, and/or theoretical approach impacts a given portrayal
- ★ **Go beyond "this version is inaccurate."** All historical writing is biased in some way. Your next questions might be: what does this bias tell us? What is its impact? What is the author's explicit or implicit goal?
- ★ **Don't write a policy paper. Remember this is a textual analysis.** I encourage you to embrace and name your political perspectives. However you should be able to engage with the political substance of your chosen protest movement without making your *primary* argument "for" or "against" its aims.

RESOURCES

Below, you will find a small selection of potential sources for your essay.

“Writing By” Sources

- Local In-Person Archives
 - [Emory Library Archives](#)
 - [Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History](#)
 - [Georgia Archives](#)
 - [National Archives at Atlanta](#)
 - [Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum](#)
 - [Fulton County Public Library Special Collections](#)
 - [National Center for Civil and Human Rights](#)
- Online Archives (some of these may be helpful for “writing of” sources as well!)
- [Library of Congress Digital Collections](#)
- [Digital Library of Georgia](#)
- [Emory Digital Collections](#)
- [Age of Revolutions Archives](#)
- [Archives of Riots, Revolutions, and Revolts](#) (UIUC Lib)
- [Protest & Social Movements Primary Sources](#) (Kalamazoo Lib)

“Writing Of” Sources

- [Emory Library News databases](#)
- [The British Newspaper Archive](#)
- [IMDB list of “Best films of protest/ rebellion / revolution”](#)

Other Resources

- [Make an appointment with an Emory research librarian](#)
- [Preparing for a Visit at the Emory Archives](#)
- [A Guide to Archival Research](#)
- Library Subject Headings
 - [Riots in Literature](#)
 - [Social action in Literature](#)
 - [Crowds in Literature](#)
 - [Mobs in Literature](#)

EXAMPLES

In the examples below, the “writing by” source is highlighted in pink, the “writing of” source is highlighted in yellow, the secondary source/theoretical framework is highlighted in green, and the thesis statement is highlighted in blue.

Keep in mind that all of these statements would appear somewhere in an introduction, rather than a body paragraph! The evidence you provide from each source should be more specific and detailed than what is included here.

1. **Helen Maria Williams’ firsthand account of the French Revolution in her Letters from France** invites us to consider the many singular and intimate moments that made up its early days, and to experience her personal horror at the emergence of state violence in its later years. However, in **A Tale of Two Cities, Charles Dickens** flattens the events of the revolution to happen seemingly all at once, equating the fall of the Bastille in 1789 with the Reign of Terror in 1793, and refusing to depict the counterrevolutionary movements or civil and international wars that happened in the interim. Doing so illustrates the tendency for literary riot scenes to depict, in **Jukka Tiisanen’s words** “a rupture of time where fear and disorder break the preceding moments from future ones.” **I argue that Williams’ account works against this flattening narrative, instead asking us to consider the revolution as a series of complex historical moments acted out by complex historical actors.**
2. The **New York Times coverage of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests** largely depicts the protests as a monolithic response to the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, and represents their aims through broad slogans such as “defund the police.” However, **what I experienced in Louisville, KY’s BLM chapter** were protests whose aims, strategy, and organization were, by necessity, extremely localized and specific due to their focus on the murder of Breonna Taylor in Louisville earlier that year. **In this essay, I use my experience to argue that even international protest movements like BLM are grounded in local networks, causes, and aims, ultimately disproving social and political theorists** like **Elias Canetti, who claimed in his 1960 book Crowds and Power** that “the crowd is the same everywhere, in all periods and cultures; it remains essentially the same among men of the most diverse origin, education and language.”
3. Though significant for its portrayal of AIDS activism in the 1980s, **David France’s documentary How to Survive a Plague** nevertheless depicts the movement itself as white, male, and dedicated to a single united strategy. **The ACT UP Oral History Project** provides a vital counternarrative by reflecting the movement’s gender, racial, and strategic diversity. In **Let the Record Show: A Political History of Act Up New York 1987-1993, Sarah Schulman** argues that this diversity is how the movement itself succeeded. **My analysis of Jamie Bauer’s 2004 oral history supports Schulman’s thesis by illustrating the vital contributions of trans activists to ACT UP.**