

Communication and Texts

What's the first thing you do when you receive a text on your cellphone? Look to see who it's from? Read the excerpt that pops up on the screen? Click on it and read the entire text?

Then what do you do? Re-read it? Let the message sink in and feel your emotional and physical bodies respond? Do you try to imagine what the person who sent the message was thinking, doing, feeling when they sent the message? Where they were/are and why they're sending it to you now? What they meant by a specific word or the order of their thoughts and sentences. Are they asking you about something? To do something? What do they want you to do, and why?

How long does it take to respond? Do you start forming your response in your mind and let it sit there, while you gather your thoughts? Or do you immediately start typing and hit send? Does your message include emoticons, or onomatopoeia like "Arghhhhhhhhhh" or "Arrrrrrrrghhhhhh"? Does it require further research, or include links to media content? Do you respond with a written or voiced message?

Reading and analyzing critical essays is no different from receiving a text message. It's just in another format. And like text messages, tweets, phone calls, emails, short or feature length films, songs, music videos, albums, or EPs, there are different expectations for each genre, or stylistic category.

Genres are a way to distinguish types of communication, just like **different categories** of music, fashion, or types of cuisine. And each **genre has a general structure and style**, that help readers/receivers to accept, interpret, understand, critique, and respond to the message.

Argumentative Essays

Critical essays are arguments, intended to inform and persuade readers about the writer's well-researched opinion on the subject. These are considered **secondary sources** that use a combination of **primary source** documents (original words of a speaker) and **additional research** (results of a study or other critical texts), to produce a new document that analyzes and responds to the primary source data, generating new ideas and understandings about the text.

For example, Ira Berlin's "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America" is an extensively researched historical essay (footnotes and bibliography), focused on the colonial period and development of African-American society in the British colonies of what came to be known as North America (clear from the title). Berlin is an academic scholar and professor, a major voice in the field of colonial studies, and his work is in conversation with the work of historians before him and those still yet to come. To write this article Berlin dug deep into the archives and historical records, read biographies and books, other critical academic articles, newspapers, and even scholarly dissertations (PhD final projects), in order to make his analysis.

Main idea + Purpose

- What + Why it matters

Berlin: Correct misunderstanding about the importance of time and space in analyzing colonial US History and Black Studies; to demonstrate how different historical timelines and regions have a huge impact on the ways societies develop (people/economies/laws/communities);

identify the 3 specific geographic regions in the US with slave economies and distinguish between them.

Thesis (Argument)

- Specific argument about this idea
- Correction/Presenting New Information/Remixing what's already been said

Berlin: Time and Space are critical and have been overlooked in colonial studies and in analysis of the influence of slavery on America **and** the influence of time and space on the development of slavery itself and therefore the development of "Afro-American Society", this is specifically demonstrated in the "three distinct slave systems" that evolved during the 17th and 18th c. (Berlin 45)

Thesis Statement

- Summarizing statement that introduces specific argument that people can agree/disagree with
 - May be more than one sentence
 - Appears in introduction and restated in the conclusion
- Clarifies the specific focus of the argument
 - May address how the essay will do this (methods/locations/time period/etc.)
 - May include why this is important

Berlin: "The development of these slave societies depended upon the nature of the slave trade and the demographic configurations of blacks and whites as well as upon the diverse character of colonial economy. Thus while cultural differences between newly arrived Africans and second and third generation Afro-Americans or creoles everywhere provided the basis for social stratification within black society, African-creole differences emerged at different times with different force and even different meaning in the North, the Chesapeake region, and the Low-country. A careful examination of the diverse development of Afro-American culture in the colonial era yields important clues for an understanding of the full complexity of black society in the centuries that followed." (Berlin 45)

Major Claims

- Main reasons why argument/thesis is true
 - Major claims will be the main points/categories that must be covered to persuade audience.
 - Each area/claim is supported with multiple reasons why these claims are logical/true, along with evidence to prove the reasons are accurate/true.

If Berlin says/argues that there are three major regional slave societies and these are different depending upon the type of residents, their origins, the type of crops and labor required to manage them, what does he have to prove?

- What the regions are
 - How they're different and why
- Who the members of the community are
 - How they're different from one another and why
- Clarify the types of agriculture/farming, labor required
 - How this impacts the economy.

Berlin's Major Claims

Uses three major sections: A) North B) Low-country C) Chesapeake and breaks each one down into claims/reasons/evidence

A. Northern Slave Societies

1. The way Northern Blacks were treated and shifted during the 17th and 18th century, including how the arrival of Africans increased awareness of African heritage and shifted culture.
 - “The nature of slavery and the demographic balance of whites and blacks during the seventeenth and first decades of the eighteenth centuries tended to incorporate Northern blacks into the emerging Euro-American culture, even as whites denied them a place in Northern society . . .” (entire 1st par. 45-46)
 - Translation: Type of slavery and B/W population in NORTH during the 1600s + early 1700s meant that blacks were part of developing white American culture, even though Northern whites pretended this wasn't the case. Changes in slave trade and arrival of Africans vs. creoles from other colonies (WI) changed Black community and institutions. By 1770-6, these black people had been acculturated and accepted into larger Euro-American society, but they were clearly aware of their African heritage and incorporated this into their daily lives and community.
2. Look at the difference between rural and urban societies.
3. Etc.... Check the major structure (Paragraphs vs. Sections)
 - Paragraphs are either new claim or additional points to support the previous claim.

Evidence

- Facts and details from reputable sources to support points
 - Point : “Throughout the colonial years, blacks composed a small fraction of the population of New England and the Middle Colonies.” (Berlin 46)
 - FACT: “Only in New York and Rhode Island did they reach 15 percent of the population.” (Berlin 46)

Introduction and Conclusion

Think of these as the bread on the essay sandwich. They go together and hold the argument in place. The same information will more or less be in them. The introduction intends to draw you in and the conclusion intends to wrap up and send you off with all the information you need to agree (or at least accept the writer's argument as logical, valid, and interesting, and make your own move.

Look here for the thesis statements and clarification of what the author really wants you to walk away with. This is also a place where the writer might ensure you're aware of their limitations and what they weren't able to cover, or what you think they might have forgotten to consider. They will assure you that they have considered this, and they're still right! Or right enough for you not to rip their argument to pieces and their words to shreds.

Bibliography and Citations

Beyond inspiring ideas from innovative thinkers, the bibliography and citations are the golden keys embedded in the text. Providing sources and credit to the authors who created them (**attribution**) is an equalizing force in education, a torch we share and pass on. Like they say, “there's nothing new under the sun”, but there are new ways of thinking about things, and new conclusions to draw, which lead to more questions, further research, understanding and development.

Citations provide credit to those who have already done this work and point readers in the direction of where to go to continue their own research. Here you see the sources the author used, which in academic texts, will most likely include the major voices in the field and

most widely-accepted theories on the subject. This is why citations are critical and not only important for ethical purposes, but to literally ensure that education and intellectualism have homes in our minds and on the pages. Sources empower you to continue the work and to create your own texts that will inspire and inform others in the future yet to come.

Like genres, bibliographies and citations come in different styles, depending upon the discipline the author is writing in. Each style is formatted to highlight the information with which their discipline is most concerned. This is most obvious in the **in-text citations** (citations embedded in the sentences or paragraphs like (Berlin 45)). Regardless, all styles require some sort of acknowledgement of where the idea/data comes from, otherwise it's considered plagiarism and cheating. Humanities work, like English and ethnic studies, generally use **MLA** (Modern Language Association) format, though some historians and journalists use **CMOS** (Chicago Style). Sciences are generally in **APA** (American Psychological Association) format.

Publishing and Credibility

After scholars have created their response, a secondary source on the subject, the intended publishers (for Berlin it was *The American Historical Review*) will review the text, using experts in the field to fact-check and potentially suggest improvements on the writing. This is the Peer Review process, and why academic journals are considered **peer-reviewed journals**. Major mass media journals like *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, and highly public news sources also employ fact-checkers and researchers to ensure their work is credible and accurate.

Finally, Berlin's text is published, through *Oxford University Press*, and put out in the world for you to read, absorb, and for us to discuss in class, alongside, the primary source documents and subjects we are examining.

Annotations

We're all in conversation. Annotations are your notes, analysis and response to a text. Also known as **marginalia** when written in the margins of a book or essay, there is evidence dating back to 4th or 5th century BCE. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scholia>)

Your annotations help you figure out what you think about a text and why. What do you agree/disagree with, and why? What evidence you think is critical, and why? What are the major claims the author is trying to make? Is there enough evidence to support them? Why/why not? Is there a specific part of the argument that's unclear or needs more development? What did the author forget to consider? Are they biased in any way that is impacting their ability to think rationally or logically, or accurately assess the situation?

Annotations are also the beginning of how you will construct and support your arguments. Taking notes is part of critical thinking and helps you to respond to content, and synthesize your ideas with the data/information that already exists. When writing outlines and searching for places to begin, your annotations are a great place to start. Look there to select major claims and quotes, as well as your opinions on sections or a specific line from the text.

Our goal is to clearly understand and examine:

- **Content** (Overall Message + Purpose)
- **Argument/Thesis** (Specific Perspective)
- **Evidence** (Data/Statistics/Experience/Methods)
- **Significance** (Importance/Connections)

- **Structure** (Genre/Format/Essay Organization)
- **Language** (Key Terms/Lexicon/Tone/Style)
- **Context** (Author/Audience/Publisher/Publication)

Let's briefly compare and contrast a few similarities and differences between the Ira Berlin and Michael Gomez essays.

Similarities:

- Cover large historical time periods and significant developments in the discipline of Black Studies.
- Chock full of details and historical facts.

Differences (not only in terms of content, but also their style and structure):

1. Structure

- a. Berlin's thesis is clear from the beginning and written as a journal article.
- b. Gomez' thesis statement doesn't show up clearly until the last few pages and written as a speech.

2. Content

- a. Berlin focuses on geographic regions and detailed analysis of the economic and social conditions within, across specific time periods.
- b. Gomez moves from region to region, tracing the development of the concept of a Black and African Diaspora, connecting this to the pioneering work of W.E.B. Du Bois, while arguing for a larger understanding of double consciousness, one that is not limited by notions of race and black inferiority.

Your analysis should identify these areas, and push further, with probing questions about any of these areas or making connections to other texts, theories, historical moments, facts, and/or disciplines.

- What did the text not fully address or totally ignore?
- Is there a more important aspect of this subject that needs to be focused on?
- Are the causes or effects of this issue accurately identified and what are the larger influences or impacts?
- What does more recent scholarship say about this issue? Do you agree/disagree? What additional studies need to take place?

Sources:

Berlin, Ira. "Time and Space and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Northland America" *American Historical Review.* vol 85, no. 1, Feb. 1980, pp. 44-78.