

California History Book Reports

Each student is required to write three book reports based on the assigned monographs. The reports should be 1100-1700 words in length. Papers that are too long will be returned to be shortened. All papers should include **pagination** and **word count**. Do not use an overly small print font. For late paper penalties see [Late Paper Policy](#). The papers are due on the following dates:

- Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers* (March 1)
- Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (April 18)
- Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors* (May 22)

Please note that these are book reports rather than book reviews. We are less concerned with the quality of each book (the writing, the style, its readability) than with its content (its thesis, arguments, and supporting evidence). It is also necessary to place the subjects covered in these books into historical context, using specific examples from the course textbook (Rice, Bullough, and Orsi, *The Elusive Eden*), and comparing and contrasting the how topics are dealt with in each monograph and the textbook. Students also should follow the guidelines for writing laid out in the handout, [Writing Papers](#). A sample book report may be found on the class web page.

Your book reports should follow the following format and address the following issues:

PREPARING TO WRITE THE REPORT

When reading each book, be sure to underline the subject, central theme, and key points and arguments made by the author. Note carefully which items of evidence presented by the author you will use in the book report. After you have read the book review your underlinings and arrange them into an outline that you will use in writing your report. In general, the more detailed the outline, the less time it will take you to write your paper. It is a good idea to use an outline program, such as the outline facility in Microsoft Word to organize these notes.

CITING THE BOOK

The book report should begin with an appropriate citation of the book. The citation should include the author's name, the full book title (italicized or underlined), the place of publication, the publisher, and the date of publication. This information may be found on the title page of each book and the page immediately following it. For example, an appropriate citation for *Thrown Among Strangers* would be:

Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.

INTRODUCTION

Your introduction should indicate the subject of the book, i.e., what the book is about. It should also include your own central thesis, the argument that you will be making about

the book . Your central thesis should describe the ways that the book enhances or detracts from our understanding of California History. For more on creating a central thesis, see [Writing Papers](#). You should be able to express these ideas without writing in the first person. ("I am going to discuss..." "My central theme is...")

The introduction (or the second paragraph at the latest) should also identify the central theme and purpose of the book under discussion. You usually can find this in the book's introduction and conclusion. Read the book's introduction and conclusion carefully in order to find these concepts. Try to locate and use the quotations that best demonstrate the author's intent and thinking.

THE AUTHOR'S ARGUMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The major part of your paper should be devoted to showing how the author has developed his central theme throughout the book. What are the arguments she advances in support of this theme? What is the evidence that he presents to prove this? To achieve this you must summarize the books. In a good book review, you demonstrate that you thoroughly understand the book and that you are able to present the author's interpretations more succinctly and clearly than they appear in the book itself.

In some books, particularly those like Monroy or McGirr that have relatively few chapters, you might adopt a chapter-by-chapter approach, summarizing the arguments and evidence offered in each chapter. You might also address this through a more topical approach, identifying major themes and subjects and then seeing how the author returns to them throughout the book. This might be a more appropriate approach for a book like McWilliams which has many chapters and subchapters. In any event what you choose to summarize should relate to and stem from your own central theme.

The summaries should be specific rather than general. Use specific historical examples to back up your own arguments. Be sure to indicate dates of eras and events. Select appropriate quotations that best illustrate the author's intent. Keep in mind that in order to keep within the paper length limits, you must select and choose the best examples and quotations.

INCORPORATING THE TEXTBOOK

You **must** also make reference to the course textbook in these essays. Note how the text book addresses the issues raised in the monographs. Use specific examples from the text to make these points. Describe and attempt to resolve any differences that arise between the two accounts.

CITATIONS

It is not necessary to use footnotes or endnotes in your reports. However you should use parenthetical citations to indicate the source of quotations or specific information. For example if the information comes from page 15 of Monroy the citation should appear as (Monroy, 15). A reference to an item taken from page 222 of the textbook should read (Rice, 222). Footnotes or endnotes are required if you use information from books not assigned for this course.