Varieties of Radical Dissent:: Pitch & Prelim

Following William Cronon, this essay asks you to "rethink" environmentalism. And like Cronon, in order to rethink it, you will have to discover and walk your reader through what others have thought or are still thinking about environmentalism. You will enter their ongoing conversation and claim your position within it.

These research prelims will help you to discover a portion of this conversation which makes sense and speaks to you—and yet one which you can critique as well.

Part 1: Exploration:

Your first round of library work is exploratory. You'll set out to find out what scholars are thinking and see which threads of conversation interest you. This takes some time and no small bit of patience. What follows, however, are some tips to direct your exploratory work.

Preparation

• Learn the tools at the library. These tools begin with online databases and the catalog, which I will spend some time explaining. The library web site has additional resources including "Painless Library Research" (www.warren-wilson.edu/~library/painless2.htm). And librarians are available by phone, by email, and face-to-face at the Reference Desk.

• Learn the difference between the popular press (newspapers and newsstand periodicals) and academic sources (scholarly and "peer-reviewed" journals). Your initial bibliography must be scholarly resources.

• Allow yourself time. Finding preliminary sources will take time and you will likely meet some dead ends. To come up with a preliminary set of 4 sources you will have to look at perhaps four times that many. This assignment cannot be completed the night before.

Read opportunistically

Researchers read opportunistically. Don't just download articles—read them as you go:

• The title is your first clue—Is it your topic? Does it interest you?
• The abstract can confirm if this article will work for you.
• If things seem promising, locate the complete source and read the first pages (article) or the Introduction (book) to learn the thesis and direction of the source.
• If you find a good source, check those first pages for the names of others the author is responding to. Use the Works Cited page to follow those leads or to find others involved in the same conversation.
Part 2: Pitch Paragraph & The Pitch

Whether you had an idea for your topic or not, your early exploration will help you prepare to pitch your topic idea to the class. Before the Pitch Class, write a paragraph that describes the environmental idea or issue you want to explore and explains the problem surrounding the issue (i.e. what are the questions? why is it controversial?). Include a reference to your one best source so far in your paragraph.

See the Calendar for Pitch Class Date.

Part 3: Preliminary Annotated Bibliography

Read, Cite, Paraphrase, and Headnote:

Read:
Your preliminary bibliography needs 4 scholarly sources, and as an annotated bibliography you'll need to understand and paraphrase each source. So, sit down and read each of them.

Cite:
Begin with full bibliographic information on the source. Consult the Field Guide, but if you are in doubt, include as much detail as you can: author, title, name of publication, city of publication, volume, number, year, pages, online URL.

Paraphrase:
Now, summarize the argument in one precise paragraph of about half a page. Reducing an entire article to a single paragraph is a challenge and one that will help you understand the text yourself.

Do this for all four of your preliminary sources. Then...

Headnote:
Finally, go back to the top of your word processing document and write a headnote. This headnote, of about a page in length, should introduce and begin to evaluate the four pieces contained in the annotated bibliography. Your work is still exploratory: you want to see if you can find connections and/or conflicts among the main ideas of these authors. You also want to evaluate their value in your research—and to seek new sources if it becomes apparent that some of these won't work.

See the Calendar for Due Date.