Thomas Carlyle: "The history of the world is but the biography of great men."

Leaders of Antiquity: The “Great Man Theory” of History Seen Through the Prism of Ancient History

INTRODUCTION:

This semester we shall explore how the narrative of ancient history actually unfolded. What roles did forceful personalities, opportunism, and luck play in history? Did powerful and dynamic individual leaders in antiquity exercise control of events and shape the course of destiny during the eras in which they lived, or was the course of history driven by ineluctable forces to inevitable ends? In short, we shall examine the so-called “great man” theory of history through the prism of classical antiquity? Can the watershed events or the hinges of ancient history be best understood in terms of the actions taken or the decisions made or not made by the leaders of antiquity? Or did Dr. Seuss get it right when he said history just “happened to happen?”

ASSIGNMENTS:

In our assigned readings and class discussions, we shall examine the careers of several
major political leaders of antiquity in the historical contexts in which they lived with a view to discussing the above questions.

1. You shall be expected to participate actively in our discussions. I may assign specific assignments for readings to individuals before the next class. If so, these students will be expected to answer questions about their material and/or to help lead discussions about the material they have been assigned.

2. Since participation in our discussions can only happen if you attend class, your final grade will be reduced by 2 points for each unexcused class you miss. Classroom participation counts for 20% of your final grade.

3. Each of you will select some historical figure (other than one discussed in class) and prepare a detailed study of his/her life and times in which you will address the basic premise under consideration in this course, i.e., to what extent did the historical personage you have selected influence the events of his/her age. You will present your research both in an oral report (c. 20 minutes) and in a formal research paper (10-20 pp.) following the “Paper Guidelines” for writing and presenting research papers available on the Department of History’s webpage.
I shall discuss the organization and scope of your research assignment in class on 25 February. You will submit a prospectus of your paper by the beginning of class on 4 March. Dates for oral reports will be assigned in class (to be determined by a lottery); your final paper is due no later than noon, Monday, 27 April (in my mailbox in Hellems 204). In preparing your final paper, you must consult the History Department’s guidelines for writing papers and for presenting footnotes/endnotes and bibliography. See http://www.colorado.edu/history/guidelines/index.html. Your paper should be c. 10-15 pp. plus footnotes or endnotes and bibliography. You will be graded on content and analysis (the critical thinking component) and your grammar and style (the critical writing component). Your overall grade will also be diminished in you fail to follow these History Department Guidelines for preparing papers. I shall discuss my expectations for your oral reports on 25 February when I discuss this assignment in more detail.

Your oral report will count for 20 % of your final grade; your written report is worth 30%.

4. Leaders of Antiquity Essay. In his critiques of recent works by Jared Diamond, Guns, Germs and Steel and Collapse, Victor Davis Hansen has argued against Diamond’s environmental determinism and his “... efforts...to reduce history to biology and geography...” while deprecating “the power and mystery of culture.” He goes on to say that “... Land, climate, weather, natural resources, fate, luck, a few rare individuals of brilliance, natural disaster, and more---all these play their role in the formation of a
distinct culture, but it is impossible to determine exactly whether man, nature, or chance
is the initial catalyst for the unfolding of history.” (italics portion is my change to
Hansen’s observation).

Based on the material we have read and discussed this semester, are you in support of
Hansen’s contention that it is impossible to discover the “initial catalyst” for the
unfolding of ancient history? Do you think a case can be made that the leaders we have
studied were primarily responsible for shaping of course of the world in which they lived
or do you think that they were subordinate to other forces or factors at work?

This is a difficult question and will require considerable thought and possibly some
additional research (beyond what we/you have covered in your readings and in our
discussions). Your interests will not be best served if you wait until the night before the
due date to begin writing this assignment.

Your essay should be at c. 10 pp in length and should follow the “Paper Guidelines” for
writing research and presenting papers available on the Dept. of History’s webpage:
http://www.colorado.edu/history/guidelines/index.html. You will be graded on your
content and analysis (the critical thinking component) and your grammar and style (the
critical writing component). This essay is due at the beginning of our last class on 1
April. You may be required to read and discuss your essay so please bring two copies of
your paper to class. This essay is worth 30% of your final grade.
OPTIONAL TEXTS:

S. Pomeroy et alii, A Brief History of Ancient Greece.
M. Boatwright et alii, The Romans: From Village to Empire.

These texts are recommended for students who need a historical background or context for the topics to be discussed below. Any general survey of ancient Greece and Rome will be sufficient, or you may have adequate background from courses or study already completed. In short, I do not care how you acquire an understanding of the eras in which the individuals we are to discuss lived, but you must demonstrate that you have command of the necessary material.

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS:

Week 1 – 14 January Introduction to our course.

Week 2- Overview of Classical Antiquity – Periodization, Problems, and Personalities
Read or review as much of Pomeroy and Boatwright as you can.

Week 3 -21 January “Agamemnon, Achilles, Hector and the Homeric Vision of Great Men”
Read as much of the Iliad as you can, plus the relevant background material from Pomeroy. Any modern translation of Homer’s poem will do, but the best is by Robert Fagles.

Week 4 -4 February “Did Themistocles Save the Ancient Greeks and their Culture?”
Read - Plutarch, Themistocles; Herodotus, Books 7&8; Thucydides, Book 1: 89 and 1:135-138; Aeschylus, The Persians; plus necessary background material from Pomeroy.

Week 5 - 11 February “Pericles and the Inevitability of the Peloponnesian War”
Readings to be assigned on 4 Feb.

Week 6 - 18 February “Alexander and the New World Order”
Readings to be assigned on 11 Feb.

Week 7 - 25 February “Hannibal and the Decline of Carthage”
Readings to be assigned on 18 February. Discussion of the major research paper, nature of the oral report, and the paper prospectus due next week.
Week 8 - 4 March “Pompey’s Role in the End of the Roman Republic”

Readings to be assigned on 25 February. Paper prospectus due today.

After it has been returned with suggestions and corrections, you must keep it and resubmit it with your final paper. I will not grade your final if the prospectus is not attached.

Week 9 – 11 March “Augustus-Architect of Roma Aeterna”

Readings to be assigned on 4 March.

Week 10 -18 March “Constantine – Christianizing the Roman Empire”

Readings to be assigned on 11 March.

Week 11 – 25 March No class-Spring Break.

Week 12 -1 April Discussion of your essay on “Leaders of Antiquity.” Be prepared to read your paper or parts of it in class. Bring two copies of your essay to class.

Week 13 -8 April “Justinian- the Last Roman or the First Byzantine Emperor?”

Readings to be assigned on 1 April.
Week 14 -15 April Student Reports – Order of student reports to be determined by a lottery held on 8 April.

Week 15 – 22 April Student Reports. We may also have an evening meeting this week if we do not finish all student reports during the regular class session.

Week 16- 27 April - Research papers due at 5:00 PM in Hellems 204. This deadline is absolute. I am leaving the country the next day (and will take your papers with me). If you do not submit your research paper on time, I will have to submit a final grade of IF and, assuming you do complete the requirements for the course sometime next semester, your final grade cannot be higher than C.

C. PLAN AHEAD SO YOU SUBMIT YOUR ESSAY ON TIME. I also remind you of the obvious. You can turn in your paper well before this final deadline. You might be well served if you decide to do so, since such a plan will enable you to deal with the unexpected whatever that might turn out to be.

29 April - No Class – Instructor leaves for Egypt (on assignment with National Geographic)

No final examination for this course.
ADMINISTRATIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS (Required by central administration):

1. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (before our second class) so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, Willard 322.

2. Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. If this applies to you, please contact me before our second class so we can find some mutually satisfactory arrangements.

3. Students and faculty have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and at
4. The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment, the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at http://www.colorado.edu/odh

5. All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All
incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html and at http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/

6. My only administrative announcement: I expect all students to demonstrate common sense, courtesy, and civility during this semester. I shall try to do the same. If we succeed, our time together will go well.