

## Term Paper, HST/WMS 286, Spring 2009, Professor Lavender

You will notice that there are two main textbooks assigned for this course: Darlene Clark Hine's *A Shining Thread of Hope: A History of Black Women in America* (Broadway, 1999), and Sara Evans's, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (Free Press, 1997). These are both histories of women in the United States, written around the same time, but the former focuses on the history of African American women while the latter attempts to provide a broader, multicultural focus on all women, in which the history of African American women takes a central place. The term paper will compare and contrast these two historians' treatment of a single historical figure: Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

The first step is to search in each book for the discussions of Wells-Barnett (look her up in the index, and then review the indicated material). Note how both Hines and Evans write about Wells-Barnett. What movement does she represent to each historian and what is her significance in each historian's narrative?

In order to examine Evans's and Hines's treatment of Wells-Barnett, you may wish to consider the following questions:

1. Hine is an African American historian who has written extensively on the need to forefront the role that race and gender has played in shaping both the African American community in particular and the lives of American women in general. Evans is a white historian who has written extensively on the impact of gender on American society, and on the history of feminism and women's liberation. What impact do these different backgrounds have on the kind of story that they tell about Wells-Barnett?
2. What changes when the historian's focus moves from gender (as in Evans) to the intersection of race and gender (as in Hine)? What is lost, and what is gained? What becomes clearer, and what is obscured?
3. It is important to understand that, ultimately, the question of the impact of these different approaches on the story that is told is more important than the question of which approach is "better" or "truer," so don't get bogged down in arguing over which is more accurate (for the record, they are both "accurate"). What you need to examine more deeply is how history is shaped by the focus that the historian chooses, and how stories are determined by the different elements (availability of sources, historians' training and perspectives, etc.) that shape them.

In order to compare and contrast these approaches in an essay form, you will perform several steps.

1. Identify a question which both historians deal with, find what they say, and look at the sources that they cite.
2. Draw some comparisons and contrasts between the two treatments of the question you have chosen. What is lost and gained in each approach?
3. Create an outline for an essay based on your findings in step 2 above. Be sure that you can use quotes from each book to support what you are saying.
4. Once your outline is clear and you have sufficient support drawn from the two texts, write your essay.
5. Proofread your essay carefully for clarity and convincingness. Ask others to proofread it for you. Then submit your essay.

Outline due date: Tuesday, April 21, 2009

Final paper due date: Tuesday, May 19, 2009 (at Final Exam)