HIST 101 WESTERN CIVILIZATION I

Spring ‘18

NOTE ASSIGNMENTS

 For your Note Assignments, you will be asked to provide some basic information about the documents that you have read. There are some basic facts to ascertain about each of the documents:

1. Who wrote this document, and when and where? Most of these documents you can easily find out who wrote it, and where and when; it’s usually in the introduction to the document itself, if there is one.

2. What kind of document is it? Is the document written, or part of a speech? Is it a letter, a note, a decree, declaration, etc.? How can this (document type) aid your understanding of it historically?

3. Who is the intended audience for this document? Is the document written to be widely read, or only by a few people? Is the audience supposed to be similar people (all the Franks), or different (all Christians)? Is it intended for the rich only or the poor only, or everyone in between, or some other group altogether?

4. What are the main points of the document? Summarize!

These are the main ideas that you should first discover about the document: the who, what, where and why questions that will get you started in using this document as a historical source. Once you have this information (and some of it may very well be listed for you in the introduction to the particular document), then you can go on to the more important historical questions:

5. Why was the document written?

Is it supposed to do something specific (free the serfs, declare war, brag, threaten, make law, etc.), or is it more general (here’s my description of the Crusades)? Is it to share something (like a discovery), or to teach, or correct an earlier mistake, or merely record (like a journal)? All these things, plus those above, should help you to figure out why a document was written. A oneline answer is not sufficient; Gregory VII wrote to all the German princes in response to questions from just one of them—there are differences between replying to just one person and writing an open letter.

6. What can you tell about the society that this document comes from?

This is another area where you’ll have to try to synthesize all of the above information. The audience for the document is one of the most important things here; if it is written to only a small segment of the population, that might tell you something about the society (like only a few people really count). If it is a speech (or contains a speech), you might think that it reflects the thinking of some of the leaders of a society, (but make sure that they are not too unusual-- Not all leaders reflect their population’s views; or perhaps it just reflects the views of the author who included that speech!). Also: be careful! Some of these documents may be influential without being very popular; they express ideas that just never caught on, or are pretty far afield for most of society. If all else fails, take a guess at this society; it’s worth a try. Above all, try to be thoughtful; there are reasons that these documents were chosen for you. They all tell something about their societies, and you should try to get as much information as possible from them. As above, a oneline answer is not sufficient!