Law, Politics & Social Change in 20th Century America
Fall 2003

Final Paper Assignment

Legendary Boston Congressman Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neil famously said, “All politics is local.” Without accepting the “all,” it is clear that he had an important point to make. Few books make this more evident than Common Ground. Anthony Lukas interweaves the local history of three Boston communities to create a story that is epic in its scope. However, as Lukas’ story-telling attests to truly understand such events you must look at the local and the national; the personal and the general; the past and the present; in short: the micro (small-scale) and the macro (large-scale). Both play a role in influencing the course of history.

For your final paper assignment, I want you to imagine that you have been hired as a consultant to the new Mayor of Boston.1 The Mayor ran on a set of promises whereby she vowed to deal with Boston’s persistent problems of racial inequality. You were hired specifically because the Mayor was aware of your background as a 20th-Century U.S. historian. You were also hired because you have knowledge of the Boston busing crisis and an intimate familiarity with one of Boston’s most important communities. She has asked you to formulate suggestions for actions she can take in order to combat inequality in the city, why you believe your suggested actions would be successful, and what pitfalls she might face in attempting to carry out your recommendations. In formulating your report to the Mayor, you must draw not only from information you have gained in reading and discussing Common Ground, but also bring information from other historical time periods and events you have studied over the entire semester.

Obviously in a report of such length, you cannot tackle every aspect of inequality, thus you will need to pick one or two topics that will allow you to make your best case. Unlike in your first paper, where I expected you to look at more than one example, here the emphasis is on depth and complexity. As I’ve said in class, history is complicated. No event, past or present, has a simple explanation. As you would expect then, no solution to societal problems has a simple solution. Thus, you must consider many factors, many variables, and many constituencies in formulating your response.

1 Circa 1980. I do not expect you to know anything about the events from the end of Common Ground to the present day.
Expectations

As suggested in the opening paragraph, a good report will account for both the macro and the micro of Boston’s situation. Because the Mayor hired thanks to your expertise and scholarly bent, she does not simply want to hear your personal opinions. Rather, she expects you to back your recommendations up with support from specific historical examples. Also, the Mayor is aware that you have primary familiarity with only one of the four Boston “communities” discussed in Common Ground. Thus, your papers should account for what the people you “know” would expect from the Mayor, how they would react, etc.

However, part of your paper should account for how other communities might react to your recommendations. Thus, on December 9th, we will work in groups of four (one representative of each sub-group) to discuss what recommendations you are considering. Thus, you must come to class on that day with a rough outline of your planned recommendations. Your fellow group members will be responsible for telling you, from their assigned perspective, what opposition or support might arise to such recommendations.

Guidelines

• Your report should be no less than 1500 words and no more than 2000 words. This does not include your works cited page or citation footnotes.
• Papers must be typed, one-inch margins, 12-point font.
• All materials used to support your arguments must be cited. Citations must conform to those set out in one of the major citation formats (i.e. Chicago, Turabian, APA, MLA). I don’t care which one so long as you are consistent.
• Only materials assigned as part of the course may be used in writing your papers. You are not allowed, expected, or rewarded for using outside information or materials. Your world, for this paper, is the world of our course.
• I highly encourage you to come see me to discuss your papers. I will only meet with students on Wednesday, December 17th to discuss questions of citation format (as that is where I expect you to be in the process by then).
• If you received a “C” on the first paper, you are required to meet with me to discuss your paper at least once. I also encourage people who received below a “B” to take advantage of advisors at the Writing Center.
• The final paper is due in the Legal Studies office by 10am on Thursday, December 18th. Extensions will granted only in cases of documented hospitalization or death in the family.