Week 1 Assignment Handout and Prewriting Questions

When we think about history, we can include quite a wide array of human activity: government (formation and law making), religion, art, money/jobs/economics, culture (the way people behaved, spoke, dressed, and so on), and much more. However, when you’re asked to write a 2-3 page paper on an historical artifact or event, all of this is just too much to consider. Historians find it much easier and more rewarding to focus deeply on one of these elements at a time.

This week, you’ll be focusing on political history, the oldest and most recognized branch of history. As is stated in the Assignment Connection section of this week’s lesson as well as in the Assignment module, you will be examining the constitutions of various colonies through the lens of political history, which means you’ll be examining the structure of government outlined in these documents as well as how these governmental structures affected people’s lives in the British colonies of North America.

Remember, the theme of this paper is to answer this question: How do these documents change or add to your understanding of the different forms of state government present in the Thirteen Colonies?

Please take the time to answer each of these questions before you begin writing your essay to help you collect your thoughts:

1. When you imagine the government of the original thirteen British colonies, what do you imagine? How did you think they were governed or organized prior to this class?
2. Who wrote the document you’re reading?
3. What is the purpose of the document you’re reading?
4. What is established in each constitution? (Think organization of government—what will be the parts of government, how will laws be made, who will enforce those laws, etc…)
5. Now that you’ve read each constitution, define how they are similar and also what is different about each.
6. Imagine you are a colonist living under any of these constitutions. Which one would you prefer to live under? Why?
7. Now think outside yourself under any of these constitutions and towards a community of people living under them. Which constitution better serves a growing colony? Why?
8. How has what you wrote in answer to the first question now changed because of this exercise?

Now that you’ve collected these thoughts on political history, look back to the original essay question: How do these documents change or add to your understanding of the different forms of state government present in the Thirteen Colonies?

Make sure that you develop a thesis statement that explains your point of view and that you discuss points from EACH constitution to help explain what you learned.