Source Analysis

Textual (or discourse) analysis is a process of taking text or other kind of source apart and looking at what the author says and does relatively deeply and critically, considering three basic categories: language (key terms, tone, word choice), thesis or overall argument and its structure, and the author's perspective. You will find many other aspects to pay attention to as you work with a source—evidence, relationships between ideas, or audience construal, for instance—but the main idea of discourse analysis is to find ways to think about texts that produce deeper understanding about what's good and bad about the text, about what works and what doesn't. Using a secondary or primary source that you can also use for your final project, write a formal (though not necessarily "I-less" and impersonal) essay on the order of two pages that analyzes it critically. Though this is not intended as an outline or a list of requirements, here are some elements to think about (not an outline for content!):

- **Authors**: What agenda or purpose might they have? What are they affiliated with? What view of themselves do you think they try to convey? (Objective, involved, scholarly, etc.) Why should readers believe them? Trust them?

- **Key terms**: Analyze important nouns or terms do you see in the piece. How are they used? Do you/can you define them differently? Does the way the writer uses them suggest a special or different sense of using the terms?

- **Connotative meaning**: What kind of emotion does the author seem to want to arouse? Are words or topics contextualized in way to make readers think negatively or positively about them? Do any of the key terms seem "loaded"?

- **Consider your response to the topic as well as how others (in other groups of people—parents, for instance, or policy makers) might respond to it. What sense do you get of the author's construal of the audience?**

- **Compare the author's view, or what you can know of it from the information in the piece, to other views of the topic as a way to analyze his/her perspective.**

The easiest way to do this might be to go through the piece in serial fashion, beginning with a description. When you use quotations, make sure that you look at the language, definitions, tone, unspoken assumptions, and so on, as ways to write about what we should see in it or from it. When you write about the author's evidence, also consider what is not there: factors that might have been ignored or evidence that you know of that would work against the piece's point or view.

We will write two of these analyses, one a close treatment of a single substantive source, such as a chapter from a book or an extensive article from a professional journal, and the other a treatment of a combination of several sources. (If it fits with your project one of these can be a treatment of primary sources, such as one or more interviews, a survey, or analysis of raw data such as Bureau of Labor Statistics or market data from a reliable source).

Due dates to be announced by email and in class.