Un(dis)covering America

As your study of the cultures of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China has revealed, what we know about these ancient civilizations comes from artifacts left behind by these ancient cultures and discovered by archeologists, including monumental sculptures (e.g., the Egyptian pyramids, Mesopotamian ziggurats, Chinese pagodas). For this assignment, you will spend time thinking critically about American monuments and what future civilizations who discover these artifacts might conclude about America’s cultural/social values, social/class structure, the everyday lives of Americans, or other aspects of American civilization that an archeologist would find of interest. It is important to keep in mind the entire time you are working on this assignment that you are putting yourself in the role of an archaeologist. Other important rhetorical concerns are listed in the table below. These elements of the assignment will dictate content, the voice you develop in your essay, the format, as well as the research you do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>For this formal assignment, you will play the role of an archeologist alive in 3013. You have just discovered several ancient monuments in ruins in the American capital, Washington, DC.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Analyze what an archeologist discovering monumental art in Washington, DC after the American republic has collapsed in the year 3013 might conclude about America.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Formal academic essay or article in National Geographic (must be thesis-driven and provide adequate supporting reasons and evidence to support the thesis).</td>
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| Audience   | Determined by chosen genre:  
|            | • Formal academic essay – other archeologists who have not visited the DC site.  
|            | • National Geographic article -- National Geographic readers who are not archeologists, have never seen the monuments of DC, and who are interested in archaeology. |
| Length     | 1200 – 1800 words (4 – 6 pages) |
| Due Date   | September XX, 2013 |
| Sources    | Your project must utilize at least 5 scholarly sources. |
| Grading    | This assignment is worth _______ % of your final course grade. |
| Other Resources | “Citation Sheets” (CP), |

Assignment Details: As we have discussed, archaeology is one of the many disciplines that study ancient human cultures. It is the job of the archeologist to uncover, analyze, and interpret the material remains of past societies. Archeologists deal with primary sources (works original to the age in which they were produced). You will choose one primary source from each column in the table below and conduct an archeological analysis of those sources (meaning you will ask questions about the artifact that an archeologist would typically ask. We will compile a list of possible questions in class).

- Jefferson Memorial
- Lincoln Memorial
- Vietnam Veterans Memorial
- Iwo Jima Memorial
- The White House
- Arlington Cemetery
- Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
- Washington Monument
- Supreme Court building
- Pentagon
- Washington Monument
- Christopher Columbus statue
- Portrait monument to Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony
- Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial

Obviously you’ll want to familiarize yourself with the monuments you’ve chosen. (Archeologists use the term “feature” to describe non-portable remains (buildings, pits in the ground, etc.) and the term “artifact” to refer to portable remains (clothing, tools, etc.) and the term “monument” to refer to large structures that represent a person, idea, event). In order to understand what the monument you’ve chosen can tell an archeologist who is unfamiliar
with America about our culture, you’ll need to do research on the monument’s history, geography, location, etc. Take careful notes and make sure that you record where you got the information from (the Citation Sheets posted on the Content page are a handy way to record this information).

Your analysis should include:
- A vivid description of the artifacts (make your reader feel like they are standing next to you looking at the artifact with you). In order to do this, view as many photos of the statue as you can find, especially those that show the artifact from different angles and perspectives.
- Note the geography of Washington, DC by using maps to explain any significance the location of each artifact might suggest about the artifact’s meaning or importance.

Pay attention to the following aspects of the monuments you have chosen:

The Text: Using the term “text” in its broadest sense, the text of a primary source refers to
- its medium (that is, what it is made of),
- its form (its outward shape), and
- its content (the subject it describes).

The Context: The context describes the historical and cultural environment of a primary source. Understanding the relationship between text and context is one of the principal concerns of any inquiry into the humanistic tradition. Much of what archaeological investigation and reconstruction is about is context - where an artifact was found in relation to other artifacts, buildings, features, etc. To determine the context, we ask:
- In what time and place did our primary source originate?
- How did it function within the society in which it was created? How do you know?
- Was it primarily decorative, didactic, magical, or propagandistic? How do you know?
- Did it serve the religious or political needs of the community? How do you know?

Sometimes our answers to these questions are mere guesses. For instance, the paintings on the walls of Paleolithic caves were probably not “artworks” in the modern sense of the term, but, rather, magical signs associated with religious rituals performed in the interest of communal survival.

The Subtext: The subtext of a primary source refers to its secondary or implied meanings. The subtext discloses conceptual messages embedded in or implied by the text. The epic poems of the ancient Greeks, for instance, which glorify prowess and physical courage, suggest an exclusively male perception of virtue. The state portraits of the seventeenth-century French king Louis XIV bear the subtext of unassailable and absolute power. In our own time, Andy Warhol's serial adaptations of Coca-Cola bottles offer wry commentary on the commercial mentality of American society. Examining the implicit message of the text helps us determine the values of the age in which it was produced and offers insights into our own.

Remember that this assignment must be thesis-driven—meaning that after you have 1) researched your artifacts, 2) considered them from an archeologist’s point of view, and 3) asked and answered the questions an archeologist would, you must draw a conclusion (or more than one) about what the monuments would tell a civilization a thousand years from now about American culture. Feel free to jot down working thesis statements while you are doing your research and realize that your thesis may only become clear to you only after you have drafted significant portions of your paper. Remember that at any point in this process – from Day 1 to the final draft, the College Writing Center can help you to develop your ideas and draft your paper.

Other requirements: Multimedia requirements: include pictures of the artifacts you’ve chosen. You might also include pictures of parts of the artifact that you are discussing. Please refer to the “Computer How-To’s” document on the Content page for instructions on how to insert an image into your text. Do not simply put these images at the end of your essay).