Anthropology 350: Prehistoric Archaeology
University of Michigan-Dearborn, Prof. John M. Chenoweth

“Popular Presentation” Research Paper
(20% of Course Grade)

One of the goals of this class is that you become more critical consumers of statements about the past. This means learning about ancient sites yourself, and learning how archaeologists study them. But another central part of this is to analyze what is said about the past as an academic: that is, to conduct your own library research and be able to verify, complicate, and comment on what others are saying in an informed and constructive way. As archaeologists, we pay particular attention to how the public at large sees our field, and how past peoples or places are (mis)represented.

For this paper, you will choose and critique a “popular presentation” of an archaeological site by conducting your own research in peer-reviewed sources.

See Due Dates on Syllabus

I. Choose a Site and Popular Presentation
Your research paper will focus on a particular archaeological site of your choosing, as presented in a particular “popular” presentation such as a Wikipedia article, an article in a popular magazine such as National Geographic, Archaeology, Time or Newsweek, a substantial newspaper article from a major source (the New York Times, etc.) or a TV documentary.

You may wish to check your site/presentation with Prof. Chenoweth before conducting substantial research.

II. Research
After identifying your site and article (or film, etc.) you will conduct scholarly research to evaluate or add to the information included in this account and formulate a critique:
- what does the popular presentation do well?
- what does it misrepresent (or even get factually wrong)?
- and what does it omit which is really vital to include (and why is it vital)?

Your paper can address any or all of the aspects discussed (or omitted!) by that account, but must also address the questions below (see “Questions to Consider”).

To find out how complete, accurate, and even-handed this popular source is, you will have to conduct your own library research in peer-reviewed contexts (books and journal articles, primarily), and write up the results in the short paper, using complete citations. Your goal will be to assess the correctness, completeness, and even-handedness of the popular account by comparing it to at least three peer-reviewed sources.

Ordinary websites are not acceptable, although many peer-reviewed journals are available through the Mardigian Library’s website (such as those on jstor.org and anthrosource.net) and
these are acceptable sources. If you can cite a printed version of a journal or book, and it has been through the peer-review process, you may use it even if you access it online. In this case, you would cite the printed version, not the website from which you downloaded it. Books go through a slightly different process, but you can use books published by major academic presses, especially University presses, and authored by those who have qualifications in the field. Telling the difference between reliable and unreliable sources is tricky: when in doubt, ask me or a librarian about a particular source. See the Writing Guide below.

III. Proposal
The first step in this project is to write a brief proposal which clears your site and popular presentation with me and shows me some initial research. See due dates above. This proposal must be typed and must include:

1. **The Site:** the name, location, and a very brief (2-3 sentence) description of the site
2. The source for the **popular account** you are evaluating (is it a film? newspaper article? published when? website? what url? etc.)
3. The full bibliographic citation for at least two peer-reviewed sources you have found about the site which you can use to compare with the popular account.
4. A **250 word summary** of one of these two (really limited to 250 words with word count, and yet a complete summary of the authors main points). Summaries should give an overview of the main point(s) and lines of evidence given by the author. It will be hard to get this down to 250 words, but this is an important part of reading complex articles. My suggestion is that you write as you read, going back and forth between the reading and your summary, but know that you’ll go back and make a lot of cuts to your summary after you’ve finished reading. Some items will look like important points, especially early in a reading, but later on you realize they are more marginal. The space pressure is intentional: it helps us focus on what an author is really saying (although a good summary will also help you go and find a detail if you need it). You should cite any direct quotations and make sure that you are mainly using your own words to describe what the author is doing.

The proposal is worth 5% of your grade, and must be completed satisfactorily to get a grade on the project. If unsatisfactory, you will need to resubmit until it is complete, and/or your grade for the proposal will be lower, so read the instructions (for the entire paper) carefully.

IV. Draft
Later in the term (class 17) you will have an opportunity to “workshop” your paper with some of your fellow students. I will also be happy to look at thesis statements or answer questions you may have about your paper, though it will not be possible for me to “pre-grade” the paper based on your draft.

V. Final Draft
To present your research, you will write a paper that is about 1500 words, excluding “Works Cited” any pictures/captions you choose to add (pictures are welcome but not required).
This paper should not simply list off facts about the site or its presentation. Instead, you must evaluate the popular and peer-reviewed evidence, take a position, and make an argument that convinces the reader that your interpretation of the discussion is correct. Your paper must begin with a thesis (what you are arguing) and proceed to lay out a clear argument with evidence to support it.

Questions to consider:
Please do not simply provide numbered answers to these questions, but write an argumentative paper that has a beginning, middle, and conclusion, and is readable and useful to someone who has not read this paper prompt.

1. Provide some context for the site. Where is it, in what time periods was it occupied? Who lived there? Briefly describe the “popular account” you are considering: who made it and when?
2. How does this site relate to the larger themes of our class? What are the major debates and disagreements over the site you are studying? How does this site figure in debates with cut across sites, such as when people arrived in the New World or if “Civilizations” improve the lives of their inhabitants?
3. How complete is the popular account? From your research, do you find important issues omitted by the account but frequently present in academic literature?
4. How correct is the account? Does the account provide sources to back up its information? How reliable do these sources seem? Are there substantive errors, compared to what you find in academic writing? Are there facts presented as concrete and simple that are actually disputed in academic accounts?
5. Is there a difference between the tone of the popular account and that of the academic accounts? Does the popular account try to make things exciting or “mysterious” when they are not? What effect might this have on viewer/readers?
6. Basics: Style, clarity, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and full citations/works cited, and informed use of at least 2 good sources. Tip: Read your paper out-loud or have a friend read it for a final check before you turn it in.

NOTE: It will be very important that you use specific information (detailed examples) from your research in answering the above questions. That is, don’t simply write that the popular presentation “does not consider comparative sites.” Instead, you need to prove that this observation is both true and important using specifics from your peer-reviewed sources, for example: “In its depiction of the megalithic tomb at Newgrange, this film neglects to mention the nearby sites of Knowth and Dowth, which are nearly as large, as well as many smaller sites discussed by Mitchell and Ryan (2001: 175). This omission implies that Newgrange is unique, rather than being a particularly large example of a well-understood sequence of tomb development in Neolithic Ireland.”

VI. Rewrite Option
If you are unhappy with your grade, you may choose to re-write your paper using the comments provided on your submission. The re-write will be due at the last class, and will receive a new grade. The original grade and that for the re-write will be averaged to produce your grade of record for the assignment, so put a strong effort into the first paper even though you might be able to improve it!