

AP & CP U.S. History
Summer Reading – 2011

History is a quest among the ruins of humanity's past for clues concerning the human condition. More than simply a ready supply of lessons, we go to the past to know who we are, what our possibilities and pathologies. (Thus our particular concern over the course of the coming year will be to inquire into who we are as *Americans*.) If history is indeed a sort of quest, your summer reading assignment is intended to initiate you into the way of life such a quest demands.

Set in rural Alabama in 1952, Flannery O'Connor's novel *The Violent Bear it Away* (1960) tells the story of fourteen year-old Francis Marion Tarwater and the two men who vie for his soul. The first is his great uncle, the "old man." The old man kidnapped Tarwater as an infant and brought the boy to live with him in the woods, there to be trained as a prophet of God. Over time, however, Tarwater begins to resent his prophetic vocation. After his great uncle's death, Tarwater leaves the woods to seek out his uncle Rayber in the city. Rayber, a schoolteacher, tries to entice the boy to leave behind his delusions of Divine calling.

In *The Violent Bear it Away*, Rayber and the old man agree on the facts and chronology of young Tarwater's life, but their interpretations of his situation are irreconcilable. Similarly, while the *facts* of history and their chronologies are generally widely agreed upon, individuals and parties and nations differ vastly—sometimes violently—regarding the *meaning* of those facts. Thus the historian is one who journeys into the past so that he may judge its meaning on its own terms, that is, so that he may tell the *truth* about it.

Here, then, is your first task. In a cogent, well-written essay of no more than 700 words, please answer the following question:

Was the old man justified in kidnapping Tarwater and raising him to be a prophet?

Essays are due the first day of class. Essays should be double-spaced, typed in twelve-point font, and make appropriate use of quotations from and references to the novel. When quoting, simply note the page number of the quote after the second quotation mark, but before the period. Late essays will be penalized a full letter grade for each day of school they are late. Essays are worth one project grade.

* Note: You may purchase or borrow Miss O'Connor's novel as you see fit. I will not be checking your annotations or notes, but do expect you to read "actively."