The Pardon of Alan Turing
Paper Assignment #4

Important Dates:
Thu Oct 27: Assignment
Tue Nov 8: First version of paper due (bring a one-side printed, stapled copy to class)
Thu Nov 10 – Fri Nov 11: Individual conference days (sign-up sheet to be provided)
Fri Nov 18: Revised paper due (bring a printed, stapled copy and your original draft to my office by 10 am)

Goals: This paper will give you practice in writing a well-organized argument that clearly explains multiple perspectives on an issue. You will work on creating credibility by showing that you understand the historical facts behind a significant event, and the various factors that make it controversial.

Assignment: In the 1950s, Alan Turing was convicted of “gross indecency,” chemically castrated, and ultimately committed suicide. In 2009 the British Prime Minister officially apologized to Turing for the persecution that he endured, and in 2013 he was posthumously pardoned for the crime of gross indecency. Was the apology appropriate? The pardon? The apology was a political decision. The pardon was a legal one (with political overtones). Do current political and legal views support the apology and pardon? What about current religious and social views? How has society’s view of homosexuality changed from the 1950s to today, as reflected by Turing’s story? And was Turing’s prosecution a factor in that change?

It is from questions such as these that you are to develop your thesis for paper #4. You may choose between two topics:

1. Write an essay that argues for or against the apology and/or pardon. Your objective is to make a strong case for your position while making clear that you understand (and maybe even partially agree) with the other side’s position. Your argument can be based on current prevailing social, legal, political, scientific, and/or religious views — but choose one or two of those perspectives, not all of them.

2. What societal factors led to Turing’s complete exoneration from a “crime” that led to his death 70 years earlier? Write an essay that surveys 2-3 key historical events between Turing’s conviction and pardon, arguing for one that evidence suggests had the most significant effect on social change. Did, for example, Turing’s own death and subsequent martyrdom play a role? If not, what was the single most important factor leading to a change in societal attitudes towards homosexuality according to your research?

The first topic focuses on the present day and an analysis of the arguments surrounding Turing’s recent prominence. The second topic is essentially a historical research project, informed and framed by Turing’s story, with analysis of the causes of social change.
Plan your argument, as you have done in the past. A clear, written outline is a necessity. Recall that the OWL site provides numerous suggestions for the planning process here: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/1/. Do not skip the planning phase. You are welcome (and encouraged) to discuss your ideas with me during this process.

As before, your introduction will draw in the reader’s attention with a compelling beginning and will present a clear thesis statement by the end of the paragraph. In the course of the paper, you will demonstrate that you understand the complexity of the issues involved and also the reasons why others might disagree with you. You will ultimately make a strong, supported argument for your position on either (1) the apology to and pardon of Alan Turing, or (2) the most important factors behind social change in attitudes towards homosexuality, based on the evidence that you uncover. Your paper should end with a conclusion that not only restates your thesis, but also gives your audience—which consists of me (your professor) and your Furman first year classmates—a reason to remember your argument and to care about this issue.

Please note that you are required to document sources correctly using MLA format in order to receive a passing grade on this paper. You are encouraged to look at the OWL discussion of MLA documentation (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/) once again. Be sure to properly cite all ideas that are not originally your own.

Unlike the last two research papers, this one allows for the validity of non-scholarly sources, including newspaper and magazine articles, editorials, published opinions, etc. However, to strive for the highest level of authenticity possible, you are required to consult at least one scholarly, peer-reviewed source, either a journal paper or published book.

As always, consult the class web site if you need a reminder about specific formatting requirements.