

HIST 2C: FAMILY HISTORY PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Purpose: Why is history important? The best guide to understanding the present and future is to know how and why things happened in the past. We do that by learning about, recording, and learning from the experiences of others. In this case we want to find out how individual lives and big, "world-historical" events intersect, as well as what ordinary people consider most important in their lives.

I. Prospectus (due Nov. 10, 8am in lecture). Length: 1 page. It should include:

1. Who will you interview for this paper? When, where and how do you plan to interview them? (It's ok if you end up changing this scheduled time and place, but you must have a plan.)
 - Ideally, this person will be someone in your family, but can also be an older friend or community member. Older interview partners may be better, because they have experienced a longer range of history. You can ask a parent about what they know about *their* parents' experiences, too. Someone younger, like an Iraq/Afghanistan war vet, would also be ok. If a single event turns out to be the focus of the assignment/interview it is ok to interview multiple people about it.
 - You need to talk to them to be sure they are willing, and to set up the interview time. Thanksgiving break may be a good opportunity. Face-to-face is much better than on the phone.
 - Let them know that the interview will be at least a half hour, perhaps up to two hours.
 - Ask them a few questions about their background, so that you can include in the prospectus:
2. A brief biographical sketch of the person--when they were born into what kind of family, where they've lived, what they do for a living, maybe even what they consider important (core values).
3. Given the person's life, think of some world-historical events they lived through. *Research* and summarize some information about those events. Note how you think the person might have experienced them. (When you write your paper, you can compare their answers to this list.)
4. Formulate some (4-8) open-ended questions that you might ask in the interview. These are only to be used as back-up prompts, in case the person has trouble telling you about themselves. "Open-ended" means they can't be answered yes or no, but require an "essay" explanation. The National Day of Listening website has some good questions: nationaldayoflistening.org/great-questions.

II. The Interview

- A. Especially if you don't know the person well, introduce yourself and explain this assignment again.
- B. Take notes, even if you record and transcribe the interview. These do NOT need to be typed. Include the time, place and situation at the top of your write-up. As an **appendix** to the hard copy of your essay, you will attach 1-2 pages (original or photocopy) of your notes.
- C. Confirm or get more detail about the basic background information in I.2, above.
- D. Ask them to tell about their life, from the beginning, only asking your pre-formulated questions if necessary. Let them know that the purpose of this assignment is to find out how big 'world-historical' events affected individuals' lives, so when they are done, you will have some specific questions about that. It is best to let the person talk, without making suggestions. Some people may need prompting, others may need to be gently steered back to telling their life story.
- E. Once they have told you about their life, ask them to talk about the following questions. In each case, be sure to ask them why. If events ii and iii are different, try find out why.
 - i. What was the most significant change of residence in the person's life? Why? (If none, why not?)
 - ii. What personal event(s) affected your life the most? Did it affect your values? How and why?
 - iii. Did "big history" (a world-historical event) affect your life? Why or why not?

III. The Paper (due Dec. 1, 2011, 8am in lecture--also upload to Gauchospace [not the notes] by 6pm)

Your paper should be 1200-1400 words (5 pages) in length, not including the appendix (II.B. above). You will be graded partly on the quality of your interview and write-up, but especially on how you explain, interpret and assess the story you were told, relating it to the course content and concepts, and drawing meaning and insights about the "benefits of history for life," as Nietzsche put it.