

Personal Identity & American History Project

In this project you will explore how personal identity intersects with American history. To do this, you will need to acknowledge how a person or persons' identity (race, immigration status, religion, gender, and/or socioeconomic status) made a significant impact on their family's historical experience in the United States. The goal here is not to tell a "family history" but rather to critically analyze the legal, social, and/or cultural benefits or disadvantages that the family encountered across the course of their interactions with American institutions, society, policies.

You will trace the history of individuals in your own family background. Please note that family background can be interpreted broadly. You may choose to trace the history of people you are related to (family tree), or a group of individuals that constitute a meaningful force in your life—who may or may not be related to you (family orchard).

Project Components

Part I - The Family Tree/Orchard

To begin, you are to create a family tree/orchard. The family tree/orchard will act as an outline for you to determine which individuals you wish to profile and therefore which moments in their history and American history you need to research further. Family history research should be limited to what you can learn from interviews and conversations with family members, there is no expectation of using an ancestry research site.

Your goal is not to tell a *comprehensive* family history, your goal is to spotlight certain family members for whom their experiences and identity (race, immigration status, religion, gender, and/or socioeconomic status of individuals), made a significant impact on the family's interaction with America. This may mean:

- You spotlight a range of individuals across generations.
- You only spotlight a few pivotal family members and thereby dig further into their individual histories.
- You only write about one family branch or one family group.
- You need to decide how to balance their American experience before arriving in America and after

For your family tree/orchard, you can use an online family history generator (Family Echo is a free site), or you are welcome to draw the family tree/orchard.

Part II - Research

Once you have completed your family tree, you will identify key individuals whose American story you would like to further investigate. The focus of this research is to examine the way in which American history impacted their lives and the experience of the family as a whole. Here you will research significant legislation, court cases, events and the social/cultural climate that had a significant impact in the lives of the individual(s) you are writing about and the way in which these historical moments led to benefits or disadvantages in the family's interaction with America.

Approved research databases: ABC-Clio (any of the American History databases), Gale U.S History in Context, Gale World History in Context, or Britannica School. You also may use any and all resources from class.

Part III - Writing

You are to write an autobiographical narrative in which you acknowledge for select individuals in the family history, the ways in which key components of that person's experiences and identity, either benefited or hindered their lives in the United States. You then need to connect these events to draw conclusions about how these experiences led to accumulated advantages and/or disadvantages in the family history as a whole.

Requirements for the Narrative

A narrative uses all the elements of a story – a beginning and ending, a plot, characters, setting and climax – all coming together to complete the story, however with this narrative your focal point is the family tree/orchard.

Your narrative will include an introduction, various body paragraphs with evidence/facts, and a conclusion. Your narrative must be 3-5 pages and include Chicago Style footnotes and a bibliography. You are not required to cite interviews that you did to gain knowledge about the family history.

Introduction

The introduction should present a concise overview of the family history. It should also provide an overview/summary of how the family history was ultimately shaped by the personal history of its members. You should end your introduction with a bottom line summary of how the experiences found in the family tree led to accumulated advantages and/or disadvantages in the family history as a whole.

Body Paragraphs

There are various ways you can organize your body paragraphs because of the unique elements to the family histories you researched. Some possible suggestions include: by person, by family, by time period, by event, etc. Within your body paragraphs you need to include the personal story and how the personal story links up to history (consider legislation, wars, global events, social/cultural trends or expectations, social and political movements, etc.).

Conclusion

In the conclusion you will analyze how the experiences found in the family tree/orchard led to accumulated advantages and/or disadvantages in the family history as a whole. You should also offer some thoughts on the implications of these advantages and disadvantages in your own life. Finally, offer some conclusions about the implications of the family story on the American story--what does it lead you to conclude about America if a story like the one you just profiled can happen in this country? For instance, is America truly a land of opportunity? Can anyone make it in America?

Part IV - Video

You are to create a video that is approximately 5 minutes that provides a condensed version of your narrative. The video must be visually appealing and engaging, and feature either audio or video of you sharing the family story. You are to integrate either personal photographs, stock photos, documents, or artifacts to highlight the historical features of the family story.

Your teacher and peers will view these videos to get a condensed overview of your narrative. Be sure to give precise information so that your peers have adequate information for our class discussion.

Suggested video making tools include:

- Adobe Spark
- Imovie
- Other (check with me so we can verify that the program fits with the project).

*Be sure to watch the tutorials that accompany these video making tools so that you are introduced to all the features of the programs.

Part V - Discussion

You will watch 4-5 videos produced by your classmates for homework in preparation for a discussion. As you watch the videos, you are to take notes on points of similarity/difference between your classmates stories and your own. Also, try to account for why these similarities/differences exist.

You will be participating in two in-class discussions. First, you will have a conversation with the students whose videos you watched in which you discuss the similarities and differences in the stories profiled. Second, we will conclude with a whole class discussion in which we discuss the following questions: What can you conclude about America if stories like the ones you learned about can happen in this country? Is America truly a land of opportunity? Can anyone make it in America?

Disclaimer

It is possible that you will encounter challenging moments in the family history that you research. This is common, as most family histories have some relationship to oppression--both experiencing it or carrying it out against others. Try to be reflective on these experiences and work through the difficult moments. That being said, if you encounter anything that causes you emotional stress, know that you can omit a full discussion of these issues or see your teacher for help to shift the nature of the assignment to best suit your needs.

Score Sheet

Project Component	Grade & Comments
Research Family Tree/Orchard Date Due: Yellow: Wed 5/29 Tan: Tues 5/28 Purple: Tues 5/28	/5
Research Historical Research Date Due: Yellow: Fri 5/31 Tan: Fri 5/31 Purple: Fri 5/31	/15
Writing Narrative Date Due: Fri 6/7 by 2:30 pm	/75
Video Date Due: Tues 6/11 by 2:30 pm	/50
Discussion Small Group and Whole Class Discussion Date Due: Yellow: Wed 6/12 Tan: Thurs 6/13 Purple: Thurs 6/13	/20
Overall (30% of Q4) /165	