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## **Essay 2: Making History Personal**

### **Your Assignment:**

In this assignment you will consider the past in the context of its own time by examining historical popular media. To accomplish this, you will use your imagination to put *yourself* in the past. You will choose a location, month, and year between January 1865 and December 1945 (for example, Chicago, July 1893). You will then conduct secondary and *original primary research* on your chosen time period and location. You should include in the paper a bibliography of all the sources you consulted for the project. The paper itself will be a first-person narrative, so you won't need in-text citations. Your essay will be written from the perspective and experience of a person your own age, gender, socio-economic status, and race/ethnicity living and communicating in that place and time.

**TERRIBLY IMPORTANT NOTE:** In other words, write this as if it could be read by a media historian today as a *primary source* from a past time.

You should explore the following questions:

- How would you, as a young adult living at that time, have used media?
- What media would have been available to you for entertainment? For news and other information? For socializing?
- What opportunities would you have had or not had at that time? Would you have been restricted by race, gender, economic necessity?
- What would be your realistic expectations as to education, employment, and family. In other words, what would you have expected your future to be like?

**In order to answer these questions, you must accomplish the following:**

1. Choose a time and place to investigate.
2. Nothing exists in a vacuum. Put the media at the time in historical context. What was happening in the world then? In your community? How did it affect your life? In order to find this out, conduct *secondary* research to familiarize yourself with your chosen time and place. Take note of any major national, international, or local events occurring during this period that might have influenced your life. Familiarize yourself with any social, legal, and economic limitations a person of your age, gender, and race/ethnicity might have faced. Did you have access to an education? Could you vote? Attend college? You can consult reputable web-based sources for this part of the research.
3. Conduct a survey of the local or national media that would have been available to a person living in your time and location. Which general or specialized media would you have consumed? Perhaps you read a national woman's magazine, a local ethnic newspaper, or a workingman's publication. If you are living in the early twentieth century, which film titles

and/or radio programs might you have seen or heard that month? What music was at the top of the charts?

4. Using a combination of resources at the Knight Library and online databases ([a number are listed on the course website here](#)), consult at least *three primary media sources* you might have read, heard, or watched during your chosen month. These can be national magazines, local weekly or daily papers, plays, newsletters, music, popular films, or radio programs. Many radio programs can be found online as can many old films and a wealth of period music. Immerse yourself in this material. Try to put yourself in the shoes of someone living during that time.
5. Write your paper based on your findings. Since this is a first-person piece, you could write in diary, journal, or letter form. It is up to you. Most of all, be creative and have fun!

### **Important notes:**

- There is more to media than just newspapers and radio. For example, if you were to pick New York City in 1908, what music would you have listened to, and what form would it have taken—sheet music, recordings of some sort, local bands? How would you have corresponded with friends? Would you have owned a typewriter? A telephone? The same types of questions would apply to any period you pick. Only the available media would change.
  - **Special Note about Television:** Television was in its literal infancy during the 1930s and early 40s. TV sets were rare, very expensive, and not particularly reliable. And, although there were a few television stations, they were essentially experimental with spotting programming usually limited by geographical area. During WWII, no television sets were produced. Thus, citing television usage during this time period, while literally possible, would be very unrealistic.
- In order to make this work, you must pretend you actually live in the period you've chosen. Don't use your "today" mind to think about this period. This is called "presentism," which means writing about the past as if you have knowledge of the future. You must write as if this is the world you inhabit.

### **Requirements:**

- Be sure to answer all questions asked by the assignment.
- Grammar and spelling count. So does proper style.
- Your finished essay should be approximately 1250-1400 words not counting your bibliography. Your word count should be close to the recommended length or you will lose points. Since this is a more involved assignment, going over the word count a bit shouldn't be a problem.
- This paper does require research, but not in-text citations. However, you should cite the sources that you use (both secondary and primary) *at the end of your paper* in a bibliography using an acceptable style such as APA or Chicago.
  - All information retrieved online should include the complete URL.
  - In your bibliography, list primary sources first and secondary sources following that, with headers clearly stating "Primary Sources," and "Secondary Sources." For each entry note what part of your paper you used each source for. For example:

## Bibliography

### **Primary Sources:**

*The Chicago Sunday Tribune*. (1919). Retrieved from

<http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1919/09/28/page/82/article/the-school-counselor>

- This source helped me put myself in Chicago with the context I needed. It talked about what styles and things were going on at the time.

“100 Sailors at Great Lakes Die of Influenza,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 Sept. 1918, 1.

- This gave me the information about influenza and how it was a real scare for people, especially seeing how fast it would spread. They would put people on house arrest to stop it from spreading.

John Dill Robertson, *Report and Handbook of the Department of Health of the City of Chicago for the Years 1911 to 1918 Inclusive* (Chicago: 1919), 62. Retrieved from

<https://books.google.com/books?id=1Dk-AQAAIAAJ>

- Gave me a sense of what people did when they thought they had influenza, how common and scary it was, also how unhygienic people were at this time

### **Secondary Sources:**

Sean J. LaBat. (2005). *Encyclopedia of Chicago*. Retrieved from

<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1383.html>

- Again this helped me with context about Chicago, what was some major points in history about it and the political leaders ruling the city.

*The Chicago Race Riot of 1919*.(2016). Retrieved from *History.com*. A&E Television Networks.

- This short film gave me a visual of what the city looked like and how the air was very dense with dirt. Also how cruel things were at this time with violence.

## **J387: MEDIA HISTORY**

### **A FEW STYLE GUIDELINES:**

NOTE: *This guide is provided in order to limit the number of obvious errors that tend to recur in student papers. Because you have been provided with this in advance, errors noted here that occur in your paper will result in an automatic 5-point deduction from your grade, regardless of how well-reasoned or interesting your paper is. If your paper is full of errors, your final grade will reflect that as well as the 5-point deduction.*

Class assignments are *not* written in AP style; therefore, the names of newspapers, books, magazines, and radio/television shows should be in *italics*. (i.e., *USA Today*, *The New York Times*)

#### ***Pronoun-antecedent agreement:***

Instead of fretting over which pronoun to use to reference an antecedent noun, we will subscribe to the guidelines set down by *The Washington Post*:

It is usually possible, and preferable, to recast sentences as plural to avoid both the sexist and antiquated universal default to male pronouns and the awkward use of he or she, him or her and the like: “Journalists should never disclose their sources,” not “A journalist should never disclose his or her sources.”

When such a rewrite is impossible or hopelessly awkward, however, what is known as “the singular they” is permissible: “Everyone has their own opinion about the traditional grammar rule.” The singular they is also useful in references to people who identify as neither male nor female.

Other options if you don’t want to use “they” as singular pronoun:

Pick a pronoun and stick with it, or vary it, using the masculine alternating with the feminine (unless you’re referring to the same person each time).

- A *journalist* should never disclose *her* sources.
- A *journalist* should never lie to *his* readers.

The least desirable option is to use his/her, he/she, s/he, or some other derivation of that approach. It is usually, but not always, awkward, and, if repeated too many times, just sounds silly.

#### ***Typical errors in history papers:***

- There is no apostrophe in constructions such as 1970s, 1980s, the 70s, the 80s.
- “Media” is the plural form of “medium.” If you’re talking about newspapers, TV, radio, etc., then it’s always “media.” If, however, you’re talking about a single form of media—“the medium of television”—then it’s singular. The word “mediums” would be a gathering of people who talk to ghosts. Remember to use the correct verb form with the plural: “the media *are*,” or “the media *have*.”
- The past tense of *broadcast* is *broadcast*, not *broadcasted*.
- Using the correct verb form when writing about the past is tricky business. You may use

either past or present tense, or something called “conditional perfect.” Just pick one and stick to it. For example:

- “We *listened* to the radio every day.”
  - This means you are talking about something that happened in the past as someone who is writing about that time from any time in the future, as in— “When I lived at home in 1940, before going to college, we *listened* to the radio every day. Now I don’t have has much time, so I rarely *listen* to it.”
- “We *listen* to the radio every day.”
  - This is most effectively used to give the reader a sense that you are actually living in that past time and is a much-used stylistic device. For example— “I *rush* home every day from work *to listen* to my favorite radio show.”
- “We *would have listened* to the radio every day.”
  - This keeps you in the present while imagining living in the past. For example— “If I had lived in 1940, I *would have listened* to the radio every day.”

- We all suffer from colloquialisms such as:

- “This paper is based *off of* my interest in the Jazz Age.”

The correct grammatical construction would be

- “This paper is based *on* my interest in the Jazz Age.”

Other common colloquialisms include *being as* or *seeing as* instead of *because*.

- “*Being as* it was the 1930s, nearly everyone had a radio.”

The correct form would be:

- “*Because* it was the 1930s, nearly everyone had a radio.”

Another option:

- “*Since* it was the 1930s, nearly everyone had a radio.”

Another common colloquialism is using *anyways* instead of *anyway*.

- “The radio was a better form of entertainment *anyways*.”
- *Anyways* is not a word. *Anyway* is the correct usage.

- *Theater* is the accepted American spelling. *Theatre* is the British form. Use American English forms.
- While we’re on the subject of theaters, until nearly the 1970s, theatrical films were generally referred to as “movies” or “shows” in the U.S., and especially before the 1960s (i.e., “we went to the movies” or “we went to the show”). “Cinema” in recent years has come to refer both to the process of filmmaking and the building in which films are shown. This is a more modern construction and shouldn’t be used if you are speaking from the past.
- In general try to use the language from the time you are writing about. For example, news stories weren’t “posted,” they were printed, published, or broadcast. Or, records were “put on,” as in “I put on Bing Crosby and relaxed to the mellow sounds.” They weren’t “put in” or “inserted” as with CDs. Of course, if you’re living in 1970, you would “put in” a

cassette tape.

**Use of quotation marks:** (pretty much everyone has trouble with this.)

- Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks.
- If a question is in quotation marks, the question mark should be placed inside the quotation marks.

**Examples:**

She asked, “Will you still be my friend?” (In this case, the quoted question is at the end of the sentence, so no further punctuation is needed.)

Do you agree with the saying, “All’s fair in love and war”? (Here the question mark is outside the quote because the sentence itself is the question, not the quote.)

- Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes. Note that the period goes inside all quote marks.

**Example:** He said, “Julie said, ‘Do not treat me that way.’”

- Single quotes are *never* used to replace double quotes unless used as in the previous example.