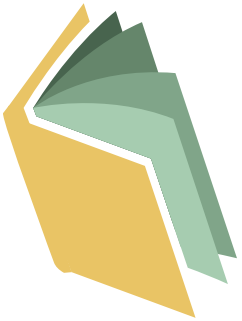

Teaching History

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Introduction To The Fall 2022 Special Issue: Using The Unessay To Teach History

I love words and I love writing words. For me, joining the scholarly conversation about a topic via written analysis has been one of the most rewarding parts of being a professional historian and academic. Similarly, teaching students to clearly convey their ideas in writing and, specifically, how to make a convincing historical argument and support it in the form of a written essay drawing on primary and secondary source research, has always been one of my favorite parts of working in higher education. So it's somewhat ironic that the first issue of *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* under my editorship is devoted to teaching history with the unessay—a pedagogical strategy which offers a myriad of ways that educators can help students build historical thinking skills in almost any format that is *not* the standard written essay.

But it's also entirely appropriate for me to be organizing this special issue because I fervently believe that learning new teaching practices and being pushed outside my pedagogical comfort zone as a college history professor is an essential part of effective teaching. One of the fundamental, foundational realities of being an effective teacher is that we are all, from our first class to our last, always learning how to help our students learn. We try new things, we observe and measure student learning, reflect on what worked well, what's not working well, revise, and then try again. That entirely normal pedagogical learning curve has skyrocketed exponentially during the covid-19 pandemic era, and today teachers and college instructors everywhere grapple with unprecedented challenges and upheavals. Moreover, racialized, gendered, and other biases about academic expertise create major teaching labor inequities for educators from historically marginalized groups, such as faculty with disabilities and women faculty of color. Other aspects of embodied identity, along with employment status and differing student populations, contribute to widely disparate teaching conditions. However, there is one universal among all people who care deeply about teaching: the need to engage in ongoing pedagogical reflection, learning, and discussion, even in the midst of multiple intersecting global and national health, economic, political, and social crises.

This is what convinced me to assume the editorship of *Teaching History*: an opportunity to help facilitate ongoing dialogue, reflection, and scholarship about teaching and learning in social studies and history classrooms at every level, from kindergarten through graduate school. I'm honored to be taking on this role and I'm absolutely delighted to introduce the special Fall 2022 issue on teaching history with the unessay. The articles and interviews collected in this issue offer social studies and history educators insights into designing, implementing, and assessing student learning with the unessay assignment—a teaching strategy that is garnering attention in our field for the ways it challenges standard practices and suggests fascinating new possibilities for inclusive, effective student learning. Furthermore, as shown throughout this issue, teaching history with the unessay can also energize and inspire us as educators, possibly even helping to mitigate some of the burnout that looms large for many of us after years of living and working during a pandemic.

The articles in this special issue demonstrate that the unessay can support student learning in multiple ways, in both its content and form. As Jennifer Guiliano explains in her article "The Unessay as Native-Centered History and Pedagogy," one of the most compelling reasons for using the unessay is how it can reinforce student understanding of the true complexity of knowledge production about the past, decentering normative discourse about what "counts" for history. Guiliano writes that "the unessay serves as a form of disruption in the history classroom by asking students to consider alternative forms and formats of knowledge as equally valid as the five-paragraph essay that dominates academic history" (8). This is a particularly vital point for students studying Native American history, as Guiliano explains: "[Students] struggle in the first few weeks of our course as we discuss non-written forms of evidence and how oral histories, arts, and ritual are themselves important forms of historical evidence.… In my classroom, the unessay offers the opportunity for them to demonstrate that they have understood the importance of non-written and non-white sources" (7). The inherent diversity of the unessay creates an additional layer of learning for students, as Guiliano concludes: "It encourages them to be agents of their own learning by centering student choice; but it also allows me to highlight for them

how complicated Indigenous history can be when it meaningfully engages with non-colonial methods and sources" (12).

Guiliano, and indeed all the authors in this issue, do not ignore the potential pitfalls and limitations of the unessay assignment, even as they explore its positive impact on student learning. Our own specific historical moment shapes both of these aspects of using the unessay in history classes, as Ryan Irwin argues in "The Unessay, and Teaching in the Time of the Monsters." He writes that his article "frames the unessay as an instrument that constructively engages student cynicism about what we do, and it explores how we might enhance the relationship between effort, understanding, and success in the classroom" (14). But Irwin also suggests we need to bring more rigor and careful nuance to how we implement and assess the unessay, even during this enervating time (a "time of monsters") to be a history educator. Asserting that we need more "satisfying explanations about how these projects [achieve] learning objectives that [align] with my understanding of the historian's craft" (17), Irwin unpacks several specific unessay assignments that he has successfully used in his classes to improve students' historical analytical and writing skills.

Doing history in our own unique moment in time, with the current technological advancements in mapping, is an integral part of Jacqueline Reynoso's unessay assignment requiring students to analyze and remap John F. Smith's 1888 map of the United States, as described in her article "Remapping a Historical Geography: An Unessay to Unsettle Perceptions of the Antebellum North." Reynoso points out that "increasing appreciation for the inclusion of geospatial tools in history courses has benefitted from the not-unrelated explosion of new digital mapping software," arguing that "these developments have not only paved the way for more spatially-conscious instruction, but … they also provide an opportunity to design interactive student research assignments outside the mold of more conventional essay formats" (26). Utilizing these new online tools as part of an unessay assignment creates new learning opportunities for students in the field of historical geography, and Reynoso concludes that the success of the assignment demonstrates how "one of the most visually impactful ways to undermine the influence of an engrained geography is to create alternative maps of the same place" (31).

The historical moment we live in—the covid-19 pandemic—had a significant impact on the evolution of unessay assignments in Nora Slonimsky's teaching practices, as she details in "Mediums and Messages: Citations, Sources, and Memory in Revolutionary Unessays." Slonimsky writes that she began using an unessay assignment out of "interest in the relationship between forms and content of expression alongside the complex circumstances of trying to be an effective and supportive educator in a virtual format" (37). However, the unessay appealed to Slonimsky not solely as an innovative adaption to pandemic era teaching and learning but also because it reinforced some of the most important learning outcomes in her classes: "Given the incorporation of public history elements, including discussions of commemoration, museum studies, and history media and communication, an unessay where students could consider so many mediums, from curating an exhibit to gaming, seemed an intuitive option" (38). As the assignment evolved, Slonimsky found that "teaching with unessays to be as much about the wide-ranging, innovative, and creative forms that students crafted as the learning process in which they were made, a process deeply embedded in the work of history and of forming clear understanding the past" (37).

Like Slonimsky, Reba Wissner's adoption of the unessay assignment was a response to both personal and pedagogical circumstances. At the start of her article "The Unessay in the Music History Classroom," Wissner reveals that "I began to think about what [the unessay] would mean for music history classes and how having the choice of topic and medium would not only benefit students, but also benefit my sanity in a semester where I had around 250 final projects to grade" (45). Emphasizing both transparency and universal design for learning, Wissner's approach to the unessay "provides benefits for assessing in a discipline that is both writing and performance based" (45). Wissner includes several important cautions for educators interested in using the unessay, pointing out that "nontraditional structures can reinforce inequity and exclusion without sufficient structure and support [and] … employing this kind of assignment can also be

challenging for those who do not fulfill the stereotype of what a professor looks like, namely women, persons of color, those who look young, and disabled professors, to name a few" (49). With these caveats, Wissner enthusiastically endorses the unessay assignment, concluding: "Creativity can be a catalyst for critical and analytical thinking and skills, especially within historical context. The results of the creative endeavors of the unessay facilitate those skills and engagement with history in a way that most essays cannot" (50).

In the spirit of what Wissner identifies as the unessay's ability to foster creative critical thinking by decentering traditional modes of historical writing, this special issue of *Teaching History* includes two special sections for types of articles that do not often appear in our journal but most definitely add important insights to our scholarly discussion: reflections about learning history with the unessay written from the student perspective and interviews with two leading unessay teaching practitioners.

I believe that student voices should be more concertedly included in all scholarship of teaching and learning and are particularly relevant in conversations about nontraditional assessment mechanisms aimed at increasing inclusive course design and empowering students' academic and intellectual agency. In "The Benefits of Nontraditional Assessment for Historical Thinking," Haley Armogida, a nontraditional student in her thirties returning to college for a BA in Social Studies Teaching and history at Ball State University, details how creating artifact-focused podcasts for a world civilizations course helped her build and improve her historical thinking processes. She concludes: "Writing a podcast script required narrating historical analysis, which drew on my skill at sourcing and corroborating artifacts. I also realized how important it was to place artifacts within the correct historical context and present concrete evidence to support my argument about the artifact's use and user" (54).

Similarly, in "Mapping out the Historical Process in Novel Ways," history BA student Samantha Kidder explains how creating a historical site marker using the online ArcGIS StoryMaps tool in her Ball State University U.S. history survey course significantly increased her own understanding of public history. Kidder writes: "Using local historical sites as a way to think about national movements and events made them seem more compelling and led to using a greater variety of evidence (e.g., visual, video, and textual). These new options opened a door in my early experience as a historian and allowed my work to become more creative and inclusive. Choosing the nontraditional option resulted in stronger research that could be shared with a wider audience" (55).

This special issue concludes with two recorded interviews I conducted with Cate Denial and Jacqueline Antonovich, professors of history recognized by numerous other scholars in and outside our discipline as influential thought leaders on using the unessay for college teaching and learning. A highlight of my interview with Antonovich is her detailed discussion of the need for carefully scaffolding the unessay assignment in order to ensure students are in fact correctly locating, accessing, and effectively applying their knowledge of primary and secondary sources to the project. In this way, argues Antonovich, all the crucial researching skills that historians prize and hope to instill in their students can be meaningfully learned as part of a well-designed unessay assignment. In her interview, Denial too emphasizes the role of quality research in effective unessay assignments. She also discusses how activating a student's individual and unique interests, giving them options for identifying and exploring at length a specific topic via the modality of their choice, not only increases inclusivity in design and assessment but also boosts each student's ability to learn historical thinking skills because those intellectual moves become linked to something that truly matters to that individual student.

While having special import for an issue about unessays, I hope to include student writing and all types of interviews in future issues of *Teaching History*. Student perspectives are an invaluable part of pedagogical learning for all educators. The online open-access journal publication platform for *Teaching History* is maintained by the Ball State University Libraries and as such I would like to be able to include work from their student body in particular. And while interviews cannot replace peer-reviewed research, I believe they can be one way for more people to contribute to and participate in the scholarship of teaching and

learning (SoTL) in meaningful ways. Interviews could increase SoTL access and inclusivity for a wider range of teacher-scholars, keeping in mind all the systemic inequities in higher education that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

In full disclosure, I was on a panel about unessays with Jacqueline Antonovich and Cate Denial at the Teaching History conference in 2021 and they are both important members of my personal pedagogical learning network on Twitter. It is in fact on Twitter where many educators at all levels and in all disciplines are frequently discussing unessay assignments, as mentioned in a number of the articles in this special issue. Of course, a Tweet or Twitter thread cannot reproduce the work and insights of a scholarly journal article. But I do regularly see productive, positive conversations about teaching and learning history on Twitter. With that in mind, part of my assuming editorship of *Teaching History* is our new Twitter account. Follow us @TeachHistAJM, not as a replacement for the peer-reviewed scholarship on teaching and learning here in the pages of our journal but as an addition to the venues and platforms where we find ideas, insights, and new tools for teaching. I am truly grateful to everyone on Twitter who helped shape my understanding of the unessay.

Thank you as well to all the authors in this issue and to everyone who worked to get this issue out into the world, especially Micah Gjeltema, Open Content and Digital Publishing Librarian and Katie Bohnert, Library Scholarly Publishing and User Interface Analyst at Ball State University. Their expert assistance and infinite patience have been invaluable as I learn how to utilize the open-access publication platform for *Teaching History*. I also want to thank Jennifer DeSilva, Professor of History at Ball State University, for soliciting the student perspective essays for this issue. I'm extremely grateful for the outstanding work and support of our outgoing Book Review Editor, Richard Hughes, who will be stepping down after this issue. I'm very pleased to be welcoming Natalie Mendoza as the incoming Book Review Editor. Dr. Mendoza is an Assistant Professor of Mexican-American and Modern U.S. History at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and co-founder of the Teaching History conference. Finally, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to outgoing *THAJM* editor, Sarah Drake Brown, who has been so encouraging, gracious, and incredibly supportive every step of the way. It's a cliché but she truly leaves some very big shoes to fill!

I hope you find this special issue of *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* on teaching history with the unessay thought-provoking and inspiring. I look forward to continuing to learn with you here at *THAJM*.

Jessamyn Neuhaus
Editor, *Teaching History*

The Unessay as Native-Centered History and Pedagogy

Jennifer Guiliano
IUPUI

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In 2017, historian of religion Christopher Jones began tweeting up a storm about a new type of assignment in his classroom: the unessay.[1] The unessay asks students to choose their own topics, develop their own research questions, and present them in a compelling format.[2] Jones was drawing on an innovation first promoted by his colleague in the field of religious studies, Emily Suzanne Clark, who herself credited digital humanists Daniel O'Donnell and Ryan Cordell with the idea.[3] Cordell was frustrated with how ineffective digital humanities assignments were in the undergraduate classroom.[4] This frustration, where students felt little autonomy in the development of final course assignments, is not just a feature of digital humanities classrooms. Indeed, this is a common complaint in many courses that meet general education requirements, and which require students to articulate their proficiency in discipline-specific formats. Enter the unessay, which allow students agency in demonstrating their knowledge.

Unessay products can include creative work like digital documentaries, social media essays, and digital visualizations. History Twitter (it's a thing, trust me) lit up with those delighted by Jones's advocacy for an approach that allowed students to select the format in which they could share what they had learned. Still others lamented a shift away from the final essay?[5] Don't historians need students to understand the five-paragraph convention of essay writing if most of our historical scholarship utilizes an extended form of that as a product? While essay writing matters, in the digital age, historical thinking doesn't just appear in written five-paragraph essay forms.[6] An instructor does not need to teach an explicitly digital history class to consider the unessay as an alternative assignment format. Historical thinking and information dissemination also appears in infographics, maps, digital collections, multimedia essays, and on and on. Each of these should be understood as potential types of assignment that students could complete in a history classroom.

Historian Cate Denial uses the unessay assignment in her introductory undergraduate course as a substitution for the final course paper because it enables students to embrace their own interests in topics that might otherwise seem unfamiliar or even alienating.[7] Her students propose their unessay topic and they establish a set of grading standards by which they will be judged. Grading can include items like use of historical sources, connections to course materials, utilization of citation formats, grammar and style, and the like.[8] For Denial, and those who adopt these methods of assessment grading is fundamentally about student

[1] Portions of this essay are reproduced from Jennifer Guiliano, *A Primer for Teaching Digital History: 10 Design Principles* (Duke University Press, 2022), Chapter 3.
[2] Emily Suzanne Clark, "The Unessay," *Emily Suzanne Clark* (blog), August 2, 2016, https://emilysuzanneclark.wordpress.com/2016/08/01/the-unessay/.
[3] Clark, "The Unessay."
[4] Ryan Cordell, "How Not to Teach Digital Humanities," *Ryan Cordell* (blog), accessed June 13, 2020, https://ryancordell.org/teaching/how-not-to-teach-digital-humanities/.
[5] Lucinda Matthews-Jones, "Assessing Creatively, or Why I've Embraced the #unessay," *Lucinda Matthews-Jones* (blog), September 11, 2019, https://lucindamatthewsjones.com/2019/09/11/assessing-creatively-or-why-ive-embraced-the-unessay/.
[6] Serge Noiret, Mark Tebeau, and Gerben Zaagsma, eds., *Handbook of Digital Public History* (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110430295. Jennifer Guiliano, *A Primer for Teaching Digital History: 10 Design Principles* (Duke University Press, 2022).
[7] Cate Denial, "The Unessay," *Cate Denial* (blog), accessed June 13, 2020, https://catherinedenial.org/blog/uncategorized/the-unessay/.
[8] There are multiple approaches to grading and assessing unessays including individual rubrics developed by students, collective rubrics developed by a class, criteria developed by the instructor and on. A good context for considering alternative approaches to grading unessays is the movement towards ungrading, which is a method of moving away from letter grades and towards more holistic evaluation metrics. See Susan D. Blum, *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*, 1st ed., Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (West Virginia University Press, 2020).

learning outcomes rather than alignment to strict letter-based grades. This is illustrated by Denial's approach where she iterates with the students back and forth until they've finalized both the scope of their unessay and the grading standards. In her words, "students get to set their own bar."[9] That bar also requires them to complete a three-page self-reflection on what they learned, including providing a bibliography that supported their work. Denial's students, like O'Donnell, Cordell, and Jones, have produced a wide variety of types of unessays. Some of my favorites include a Monopoly game where the goal is to gain tribal recognition, a cross-stitch sampler of same-sex-loving women from the nineteenth century, a meal investigating the multiethnic origins of southern foodways, an artistic rendering of W. E. B Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness," and a historical documentary short about the Salish Indians in their homeland in Montana's Bitterroot Valley. Since 2017, the unessay has only expanded in history classrooms. Historian Maureen MacLeod's students in her course on the French Revolution built their own guillotine.[10] Since 2013 Victorianist Lucinda Matthews-Jones has had students in her class about Victorian cities create board games, interactive children's books, and more. These are the results of what she terms "a quiet radical act" in the classroom that dismantles structures that privilege the written word, empowers students in their learning experiences, and allows students to experiment with way to demonstrate expertise to future employers.[11]

In Spring 2018, I adopted the unessay as the culminating assignment in Introduction to Native American History course, a two-hundred level undergraduate course that is open to undergraduates throughout the IUPUI campus. IUPUI is a primarily white institution located in the urban city of Indianapolis drawing students from throughout Indiana. I seek to provide students with a broad understanding of Native American history, prepare students for more advanced course work in Native studies, and enhance students' understanding of colonialism and American history. The course is organized in the form of an introduction module, six learning units, and a final unessay module. At the core of my pedagogy in Native American history is centering the lived experiences and contemporary effects of history on Indigenous peoples in the US. In the selection of course content, this means complimenting colonial records with visual, aural, and contemporary reflections from Native peoples on events like the Sand Creek Massacre, Indian Removal, and colonial expansion and violence more generally. Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* articulates an excellent model of how the fundamental notion of what constitutes research and how research takes place is different within indigenous communities.[12] Within many indigenous contexts, information (or history parlance "evidence") does not exist as something separate from the community. It can only be accessed, shared, amended, and remembered by community members in their specific cultural roles.

For my students, they are often troubled by the notion that knowledge is tied to specific communal, familial, and tribal relationships. They struggle in the first few weeks of our course as we discuss non-written forms of evidence and how oral histories, arts, and ritual are themselves important forms of historical evidence. For many, the notion that their own identity limits their access to "the truth" is troubling; in part, this is because their experience with history has been dominated by factual memorization brought to them by standardized testing and narrative histories that emphasize singular points of view. In my classroom, the unessay offers the opportunity for them to demonstrate that they have understood the importance of non-written and non-white sources. It also encourages a holistic application of their learning where how they engage is as important as the results of that engagement—something that scholars like Smith and others continually reinforce for non-Indigenous researchers.

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[9] Cate Denial, "The Unessay."

[10] Maureen MacLeod (@DrMMacLeod). 2019. "Dr. Maureen MacLeod on Twitter post." Twitter, December 9, 2019, 8:43 am. https://twitter.com/drmmacleod/status/1204230087337480193?lang=bg

[11] Matthews-Jones, "Assessing Creatively, or Why I've Embraced the #unessay."

[12] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Zed Books Ltd., 2013). Portions of this paragraph related to Smith are duplicated from Jennifer Guiliano and Carolyn Heitman, "Difficult Cultural Heritage and the Complexities of Indigenous Data," *Journal of Cultural Analytics* 4, no. 1 (2019): https://doi.org/10.22148/16.044.

Students throughout the course grapple with how Indigenous experiences and memories are framed differently than white colonizers. They are forced to confront how terms like "settler," "settlement", "founding," "discovery", and "civilizing" are all part and parcel of a large project of white supremacy that would dramatically impact Native communities. Students appreciate the inclusion of content on Boarding Schools, for example, because they not only engage with the records from the schools and the memoirs that have been written but also spend time looking at the contemporary Boarding School remembrance and recovery efforts.[13] Rather than attempting to cover every period, geography, or tribal community, the course covers six historical themes and events to explore why the history of Indigenous peoples matter and how our understandings of Native history shape contemporary discussions of issues important within tribal communities and families.

Disrupting Forms of Knowledge

The unessay serves as a form of disruption in the history classroom by asking students to consider alternative forms and formats of knowledge as equally valid as the five-paragraph essay that dominates academic history. The unessay offers students the opportunity to make connections beyond the course content. Through further research, they study tribal communities we have not explored; study how specific historical events have shaped contemporary images, music, movies, and popular culture; and develop educational units for younger students to counter the positive narrative of colonization and founding of Indiana seen in textbooks throughout the state.

To facilitate the independent research inquiry beyond course content that the unessay promotes, I offer students the following guidance:

> For this course, I've selected ten major events that highlight the history of Native Americans and the challenges Indigenous peoples are currently experiencing. There were hundreds of potential events. I selected those that would offer us a variety of questions that Indigenous history explores and brought together digital media, music, and culture to communicate the questions. For your unessay, you are allowed to select your own topic in consultation with the instructor. You may elect to build off one of our topics we studied this course, or you might select an entirely different topic that intersects with a question we explored. You need to associate your topic with the subject matter of the course. You can take any approach; you can use as few or as many resources as you wish; you can cite all kinds of source content (e.g., games, music, Wikipedia, books, articles, films, art, etc.). The only requirements are that your treatment of the topic be *compelling* and *effective*: that is to say presented in a way that leaves the reader thinking that you are being accurate, interesting, and as complete and/or convincing as your subject allows.[14]

Students are then provided more than two dozen example unessays drawn from previous classes both at IUPUI as well as other history classes at other institutions. The Twitter hashtag #unessay provides ever-expanding examples that I can sort through and link to each semester.

Following best practices in connecting learning outcomes to course assignment logic,[15] I also explicitly

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[13] On boarding schools generally, please see: David Wallace. Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1995); John Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do: Sports at Native American Boarding Schools* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000); B. J Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Wade Davies, "How Boarding School Basketball Became Indian Basketball," *American Indians and Popular Culture: Media, Sports, and Politics* 1 (2012): 263–78; Rachael Renee Johnson, Washington State University., and Department of History., *The Navajo Special Program in the Pacific Northwest Educating Navajo Students at Chemawa Indian Boarding School, 1946-1957* (Pullman, Wash.: Washington State University, 2010), http://www.dissertations.wsu.edu/Thesis/Summer2010/r_johnson_081310.pdf; Andrea Smith, "Boarding School Abuses, Human Rights, and Reparations," *Social Justice*, 2004, 89–102.

[14] Jennifer Guiliano, "Getting Started Thinking about the Unessay," Introduction to Native American History, Spring 2018.

[15] Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, and Amanda Cook, *Improving Quality in American Higher Education: Learning Outcomes and Assessments for the 21st Century* (John Wiley & Sons, 2016); Orly Calderon and Charu Sood, "Evaluating Learning Outcomes

state the motivation for students in doing this culminating assignment:

> The unessay may be quite different from what you are used to doing in a standard class. If so, a reasonable question might be whether I am wasting your time by assigning it. If you can write whatever you want and present it any way you wish, is this not going to be a lot easier to do than an *actual* essay? And is it not leaving you unprepared for subsequent instructors who want you to right the real kind of essays? The answer to both these questions is no. Unessays are not going to be easier than "real" essays. There have fewer rules to remember and worry about violating (there are none other than those that meet the student code of conduct e.g., plagiarism). But unessays are more challenging in that you need to make your own decisions about what you are going to discuss and how you are going to discuss it. And you are not going to be left unprepared for instructors who assign "real" essays. Questions like how to format your page or prepare a works-cited list are quite trivial and easily learned. You can look them up when you need to know them and, increasingly, can get your software to handle these things for you anyway. But even more importantly, the things you will be doing in an unessay will help improve your "real" ones: excellent "real" essays also match form to topic and are about things you are interested in; if you learn how to write compelling and effective unessays, you'll find it a lot easier to do well in your "real" essays as well.[16]

Collectively, students then developed a short one-page proposal, submitted drafts, the final unessay, and a short reflection which asked them to clearly identify how the unessay met the goals of the course, what they learned in completing the assignment, and provided suggestions for what they thought I should pay attention to when I graded the assignment.

This is coupled with guidance I give the students when I introduce the unessay to them. They are reminded that the unessay requires both a compelling and effective format that draws explicitly on the approaches that we've covered in class (oral tradition, arts, alternative histories, etc.) as well as additional research they've completed that center Native voices and experiences. Their proposal, where they are asked to provide a short overview of what they intend to do and to identify the research and resources they wish to incorporate allow me an early intervention point to help guide them to appropriate materials to assist in their final product.

The unessay assignments have resulted in short documentaries, creative writing, teacher's guides for teaching Native history for fourth grade elementary students, poetry, music lyrics, posters, websites and blogs, and artwork. Additionally, several students elected to complete a standard research essay on a topic of their choice.[17] Offering students the choice to complete an essay helps alleviate student resistance to assignment formats that are unfamiliar. It also mitigates potential impacts of student evaluation bias where students view instructors who use alternative formats as less rigorous in either their academic expertise or their pedagogical approach.[18] By allowing them to opt out, students (especially history majors) who feel proficient in academic essay writing can leverage their own strengths. I questioned students about their decision to complete a

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of an Asynchronous Online Discussion Assignment: A Post-Priori Content Analysis," *Interactive Learning Environments* 28, no. 1 (2020): 3–17; Tara MacPherson, *Innovative Uses and Unexpected Outcomes - Digital Learning*, accessed June 3, 2011, http://digitallearning.macfound.org/site/c.enJLKQNlFiG/b.2146243/k.EE75/Innovative_Uses_and_Unexpected_Outcomes.htm.

[16] Guiliano, "Getting Started Thinking about the Unsay."

[17] Cheryl Hanewicz, Angela Platt, and Anne Arendt, "Creating a Learner-Centered Teaching Environment Using Student Choice in Assignments," Distance Education 38, no. 3 (September 2, 2017): 273–87, https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2017.1369349; Robert Kowalski, "Some Implications of Student Choice of Course Content for the Processes of Learning, Assessment and Qualification," in Assessment & Evaluation (Routledge, 2019), 73–80; Lynette Pretorius, Greg P. van Mourik, and Catherine Barratt, "Student Choice and Higher-Order Thinking: Using a Novel Flexible Assessment Regime Combined with Critical Thinking Activities to Encourage the Development of Higher Order Thinking," International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 29, no. 2 (2017): 389–401.

[18] Frederic Fovet, "Universal Design for Learning as a Tool for Inclusion in the Higher Education Classroom: Tips for the Next Decade of Implementation," *Education Journal* 9, no. 6 (2020): 163–72; Richard M. Gargiulo and Debbie Metcalf, *Teaching in Today's Inclusive Classrooms: A Universal Design for Learning Approach* (Cengage Learning, 2016); Tracey E. Hall, Anne Meyer, and David H. Rose, *Universal Design for Learning in the Classroom: Practical Applications* (Guilford press, 2012).

standard research essay about when they submitted their final materials. Students noted that they felt "more comfortable" with the research essay because it did not require innovation and creative thinking. Some noted that they were too stressed to spend time trying to come up with an original approach; still others noted that they had limited time to complete the assignment (even with multiple weeks of time set aside in the class) and felt they could be most successful with a format they already understood.

In the four years since this first experiment, this pattern of student choice has largely continued. Roughly seventy-five percent of students elect to use the unessay format to align their products to their own interests. Notable submissions from students included an art major who sculpted a paper-mache woman inspired by the conflicts between stereotypes of Indigenous women displayed in Disney films and mass media and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's movement; a student in computing interested in video games who built a design document for a game based on colonial violence associated with Native removal in the 1840s; a botany major who developed a guide for Native plants and their traditional uses in Indiana; a geography major who built dynamic maps of Native movement and migration; an education major who developed a supplement for use in social studies education classrooms on Indigenous social justice movements; and a health sciences student who developed a digital site for those interested in Indigenous healthcare.

Lessons Learned

For all these successes, though, there are several challenges that have arisen that point to my own deficiencies in incorporating the unessay in my classroom. As noted above, some students find the flexibility of the unessay exciting; others find the relative lack of guidance stymying.[19] For these students, I often suggest that they ground their unessay in one of the units we have completed so that they have both a contextual familiarity but also a starting point for identifying what they might wish to expand upon.[20] This results each semester in a fair number of projects that take as their starting point content provided in the course content modules. In some cases, this can result in a student augmenting the provided content with new research, remixing the content in interesting ways (e.g., turning historical materials into music and lyrics), or undertaking a comparison and contrast approach that brings the content I've selected into conversation with materials from their other courses. These students generally do well on the assignment because they demonstrate how their unessay have moved beyond what we've discussed in class to interrogate the meaning and experiences specific Native peoples had in relation to the event they are studying.

In other cases, though, students demonstrate a marked unwillingness to either completely new research or to in-weave content from other courses into something that truly takes advantage of the unessay format. To a student, these individuals generally chose one of two paths: they directly reproduce the content provided to them in the course in the form of a summarized five-paragraph essay or they turn to internet-based research where many of their sources are drawn from popular press and personal internet sites and where the essay quality itself suffers. When students lean towards reproducing course content, I guide them to new sources and gently push that they move beyond the content I've provided, if they have submitted their proposal as required. This encourages them to demonstrate critical thinking skills and to reveal how they've thought about the topic beyond merely reproducing my logic as the instructor. Sometimes this strategy is successful; other times, the essays I receive are close copies of the course content. In grading these close copies of course content, I am often frustrated because I can see glimpses from the students of where they had opportunity to expand their

[19] Gargiulo and Metcalf, *Teaching in Today's Inclusive Classrooms*; Kelly A. Hogan and Viji Sathy, "Structuring the Classroom for Inclusive Teaching | The Center for Faculty Excellence," *Center for Faculty Excellence* (blog), accessed May 30, 2022, https://cfe.unc.edu/initiatives/structuring-the-classroom-for-inclusive-teaching/; Sarah L. Eddy and Kelly A. Hogan, "Getting under the Hood: How and for Whom Does Increasing Course Structure Work?," *CBE—Life Sciences Education* 13, no. 3 (2014): 453–68; Terrell L. Strayhorn, *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students* (Routledge, 2018).

[20] Karl Maton, "Cumulative and Segmented Learning: Exploring the Role of Curriculum Structures in Knowledge-building," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 30, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 43–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690802514342.

work and instead chose to avoid taking on additional research. In my comments to these students, I will often highlight that their synthesis of existing content is well done but that the assignment asks them to challenge themselves to incorporate new research and evidence. Rarely do I hear more from these students who instead take the B (if the essay is well-written) or C (if it is less well-written) and move along to another class.

The latter students, who rely on popular press and personal websites, though, are more problematic as they require further education in digital literacy around Native topics.[21] With few exceptions, when I query their research process, students tell me that they've plugged keyword terms into Google and then cherry-picked the resources they like best. Rarely do they dig more deeply into who the journalists are, what venue/publication they are writing in, and/or how someone's personal site relates to tribal identity and authority. As with many underrepresented communities, the internet age has made it possible for anyone who wishes to populate their evidence, theories, and perspectives to others.[22] Within Indigenous studies, though, this proliferation has spawned opportunities for fictionalized accounts of historical events, "authorized" takes on tribal communities and events written by those outside the community, and many examples of hobbyists who proliferate harmful anecdotes, stereotypes, and images.[23] Often, these students will return proposal drafts that unknowingly replicate erroneous historical information or reproduce stereotypical depictions. Often, their unessay proposals are framed using language of "Native peoples" or "Natives" rather than specific tribal contexts.

Despite my reminding students frequently that students are not allowed to produce an unessay about "Native peoples" or Indigeneity, but instead must be grounded in a specific tribal community and context, I see a fair number of unessay drafts that ignore this prohibition. I then remind them that they should be looking for sources and evidence that is from that tribal community and its members; it also allows me an easy way to intervene in draft unessay projects that rely on problematic sources and generalities. One example highlights these opportunities for intervention built into the proposal-draft-feedback mechanisms. Students often wish to produce art projects that rely on popular "Native" arts such as dreamcatchers. I ask these students to research dreamcatchers as an artistic tradition which pushes them into understanding how the Ojibwe developed these as spiritual objects and how from the 1960s on, dreamcatchers became popular craft activities for white hobbyists.[24] They also discover that dreamcatchers have been adopted by other communities and have alternative spiritual and communal meanings. My goal for the student choosing this unessay topic, then, is not actually to study the dreamcatcher but rather to reflect on cultural appropriation and how their effort to make a dreamcatcher is itself an act of cultural appropriation. Given my students are primarily white, suburban, or rural, and from Indiana, many of the creative arts that students might elect to develop for their unessay unwittingly lead to them realize their own indoctrination into cultural appropriation.[25] Beading, weaving,

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[21] Catherine D'Ignazio and Rahul Bhargava, "Creative Data Literacy: A Constructionist Approach to Teaching Information Visualization," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 012, no. 4 (n.d.); Tona Hangen, "Historical Digital Literacy, One Classroom at a Time," *Journal of American History* 101, no. 4 (March 1, 2015): 1192–1203, https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jav062; Jeff, "Digital History and Undergraduate Digital Literacy," *Techist* (blog), December 6, 2008, http://mcclurken.blogspot.com/2008/12/digital-history-and-undergraduate.html; Daniel M. Ringrose, "Beyond Amusement: Reflections on Multimedia, Pedagogy, and Digital Literacy in the History Seminar," *The History Teacher* 34, no. 2 (February 1, 2001): 209–28, https://doi.org/10.2307/3054280.

[22] Judy M. Iseke-Barnes and Deborah Danard, "Indigenous Knowledges and Worldview: Representations and the Internet," chapter, Information Technology and Indigenous People (IGI Global, 2007), https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-59904-298-5.ch003.

[23] Devon A Mihesuah, *American Indians: Stereotypes & Realities* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity, 1996); Arianne E. Eason, Laura M. Brady, and Stephanie A. Fryberg, "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias against Native Americans," *Daedalus* 147, no. 2 (2018): 70–81.

[24] Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Jami C. Powell, "Creating an Osage Future: Art, Resistance, and Self-Representation" (Ph.D., United States -- North Carolina, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), accessed June 2, 2022, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2059260997/abstract/DF42EFE868E49BDPQ/1.2022, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2059260997/abstract/DF42EFE868E49BDPQ/1."},"plainCitation":"Philip Joseph Deloria, Playing Indian (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999

[25] On conservativism, whiteness, and the American Indian Studies classroom, see Caskey Russell and Angela M. Jaime, ""Tolerance and Diversity Cut Many Ways": Conservatism and the American Indian Studies Classroom", in Interrogating Critical Pedagogy:

bonnet making, music and lyrics and more have all offered a powerful moment of intervention in which I can guide students towards considering their complicity in appropriating Native arts, sounds, and appearances. This, after all, is something I grapple with myself as a white woman teaching Native history.

A second way I counter the reliance on problematic sources is to ask students to align their unessay to a specific Native author, researcher, or group. This is a lightweight way to align my student's research processes to Indigenous research methodologies that center respectful relationships, researcher responsibility, and reciprocity.[26] By asking them to evaluate their sources for declarations of relationships, responsibilities, and reciprocity, students quickly realize that many sources available through the internet fail to meet most or even all these criteria. Having students identify, for example, the tribal and communal ties of an author allow them to consider the complicated identity politics of many authors. It also urges them to remember that as researchers we must defer to tribal and communal expertise even when it contradicts the colonial record.

Ultimately, the unessay then allows students to understand knowledge production outside the traditional five paragraph essay. It encourages them to be agents of their own learning by centering student choice; but it also allows me to highlight for them how complicated Indigenous history can be when it meaningfully engages with non-colonial methods and sources. For those who take the opportunity of the unessay to push their learning, the longer-term benefits are undeniable as they are not only engaged but often deeply dive into areas of information and tribal history that they would not otherwise. For those who struggle, they are still able to produce a form of scholarship they are familiar with. But at the end of the day, I still try to push these students to broaden their source base and to integrate Native voices and experiences in meaningful ways.

The Voices of Educators of Color in the Movement, eds. Pierre Wilbert Orelus and Rochelle Brock (Routledge, 2015), 253-266.

[26] Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Fernwood Publishing, 2008).

The Un-Essay, and Teaching in a Time of Monsters

Ryan Irwin
University at Albany-SUNY

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> "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters."
> -Antonio Gramsci, 1919[1]

> "Students are not taking history classes because of the work and effort that goes along with having the history major. A lot of us just aren't as motivated after the pandemic. Therefore, the history major's decline is due to students not wanting to go that extra mile. Becoming a teacher, curator, lawyer etc takes a lot of effort . . . Just to graduate you would need to research and write a thesis. When students hear that they want to run the other way. Also, it is hard to find a job in history. Students tend to get into healthcare because jobs are available. But most importantly, since the pandemic, doing work online is an easy way out and research/writing takes a lot more effort than using chegg for multiple choice answers. History takes a lot of effort to learn and digest so the lack of motivation is most likely the reason for the fall of history. We have options. No offense.
> -Anonymous student, University at Albany-SUNY, 2022[2]

Ernest Hemingway once wrote that people go broke in two ways: "Gradually, then suddenly."[3] His words capture something essential about the nature of change, and teaching history—as a career in higher education—has changed fundamentally during the past decade. After the 2008 recession, students began drifting away from the major, prompting the American Historical Association (AHA) to coordinate a project that articulated the core features of historical study.[4] The discipline then came under fire after 2016, as activists and pundits attacked the profession's commitment to multiculturalism from wildly different standpoints.[5] Then things fell apart in 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic sent classrooms online, faculty adopted new instructional modalities, and most of us are still picking up the pieces two years later, navigating our students' mental health crises while clamoring for the normalcy we took for granted.

Is the history classroom broken? Are *we* teaching in a time of monsters? The un-essay—the subject of this special issue—resonates in this context. Learning requires motivation, and there is little consensus on how to motivate young people in the current environment. Some authors suggest we should return to the past, replacing online instruction with small in-person classrooms, so every student enjoys a rich emotional relationship with each faculty.[6] Others clamor for flexibility, insisting that faculty should possess the authority to toggle between modalities because the COVID-19 pandemic is not over.[7]

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[1] Quoted by Slavoj Žižek, "A Permanent Economic Emergency," *New Left Review* 64 (2010), available: https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii64/articles/slavoj-zizek-a-permanent-economic-emergency.

[2] Anonymous student survey response, Humanities Connections: Exploring the Past, Reimagining the Future, National Endowment for the Humanities, May 2020, possession of author.

[3] Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner's, 1926).

[4] "Tuning the History Discipline in the United States," *American Historical Association*, available: https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline.

[5] Conor Friedersord, "1776 Honors America's Diversity in a Way 1619 Does Not," *The Atlantic*, 6 January 2020, available: https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/inclusive-case-1776-not-1619/604435/; Matt Karp, "History as End," *Harper's Magazine*, 14 June 2021, available: https://harpers.org/archive/2021/07/history-as-end-politics-of-the-past-matthew-karp/.

[6] Johnathan Malesic, "My College Students Are Not Okay," *New York Times*, 13 May 2022, available: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/13/opinion/college-university-remote-pandemic.html.

[7] Sahalie Donaldson and Chelsea Long, "As Covid Cases Break Records, Instructors Are Asking for More Flexibility," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 13 January 2022, available: https://www.chronicle.com/article/as-covid-cases-break-records-instructors-are-

These arguments make common ground elusive because they pit student wellbeing and public safety against each other, and the un-essay invites a different kind of conversation. By focusing on what happens in the classroom when we implement unorthodox assignments that advance our department's learning objectives, we can put attention squarely on student motivation. We can build common ground. And common ground is necessary because today's undergraduates have an overabundance of options and no shortage of opinions. This essay frames the un-essay as an instrument that constructively engages student cynicism about what we do, and it explores how we might enhance the relationship between effort, understanding, and success in the classroom.

*

Good courses help students succeed at hard things, and writing about history is exceptionally difficult.[8] On the one hand, students receive different kinds of feedback as they move through our curriculums. Some of us focus on grammar and style; others emphasize organization and logic; others still respond to tone and inference. Reconciling this feedback is not easy. Even the AHA revises the history discipline's core regularly.[9] On the other hand, nonfiction writing is relational. Identifying an answerable question is tricky, as is tracking down relevant sources, but nothing compares to narrative-making, uncovering the beginning, middle, and end of an opaque tale, and then balancing background with action to persuade a reader that your interpretation is correct and distinct. To accomplish this task successfully, students need to converse with archivists, librarians, other authors, and reviewers. And somehow this melee works. If you teach your department's capstone, you surely know the satisfaction of mentoring a young person though the process of writing that dreaded senior thesis.

However, convincing undergraduates to go on this journey is getting harder. Social media has changed how publics interact, and we live in an information environment that downplays many of the principles we teach in the classroom. With a Twitter account, I suspect I could pull together the main points of what you are reading now into posts that receive more readers in a fraction of the time without the back-and-forth of peer review. If the implications are unclear, google the word "un-essay" right now. You will find a blog by historian Cate Denial that attributes the concept's origins to tweets from historian Christopher Jones.[10] This special issue is responding to a conversation on the internet. We are all imbricated in a new normal.

Seeing ourselves in context is important. For many historians, the traditional essay—the bedrock assignment of the history classroom—is a counterweight to unwelcome change. The essay asks the student to substantiate an opinion with well-digested evidence from another time and place, and writing a traditional history paper requires slow-thinking and the close study of documents that evince competing truths—skills in short supply.[11] So, how might the un-essay help historians teach these skills more effectively? How could we leverage the technologies that saturate our everyday lives to build inclusive, interactive learning communities

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asking-for-more-flexibility-in-the-classroom.

[8] For context on good courses, Daniel Chambliss and Christopher Takacs, *How College Works* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

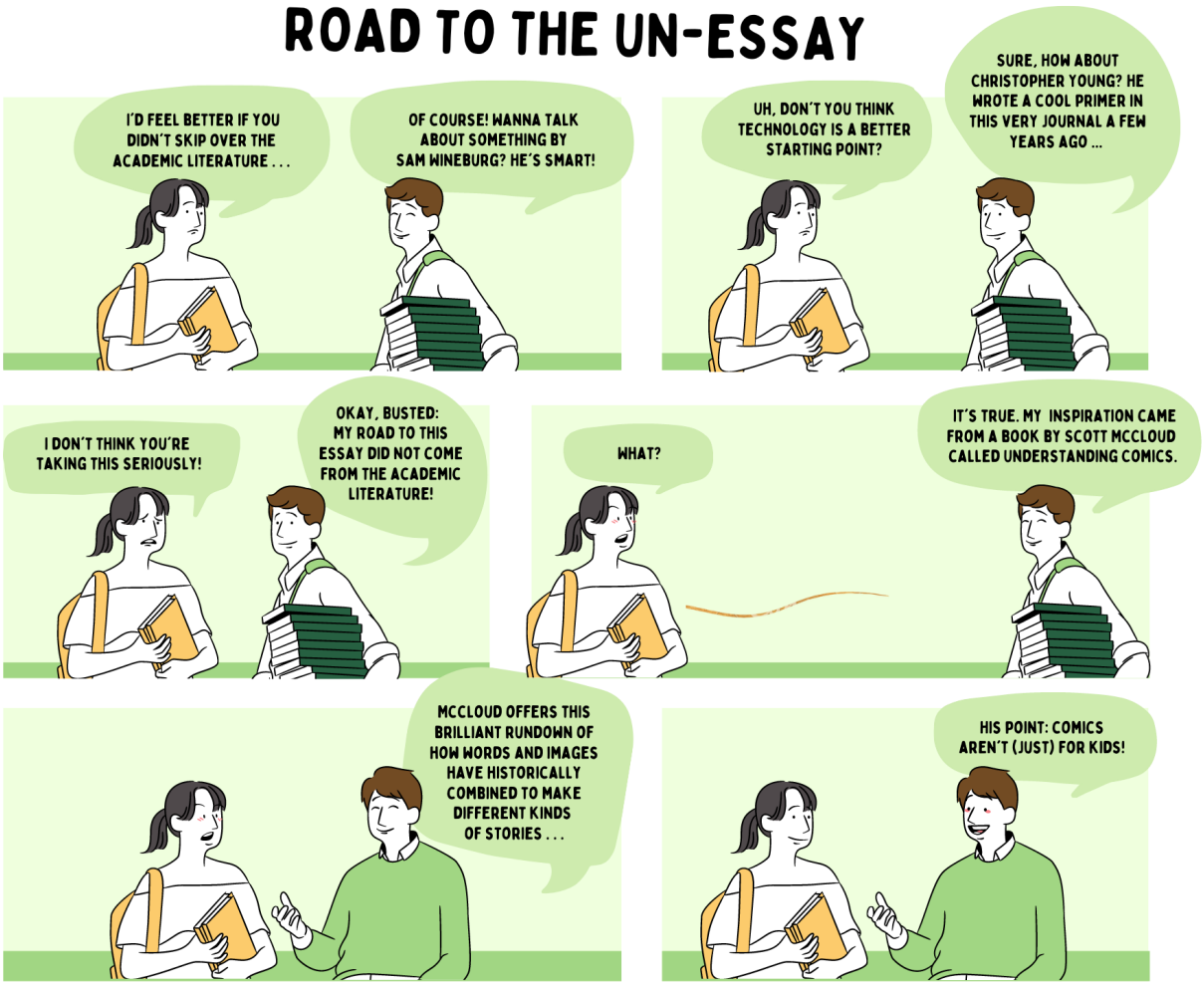
[9] AHA History Tuning Project: 2016 History Discipline Core, *American Historical Association*, available: https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2016-history-discipline-core.

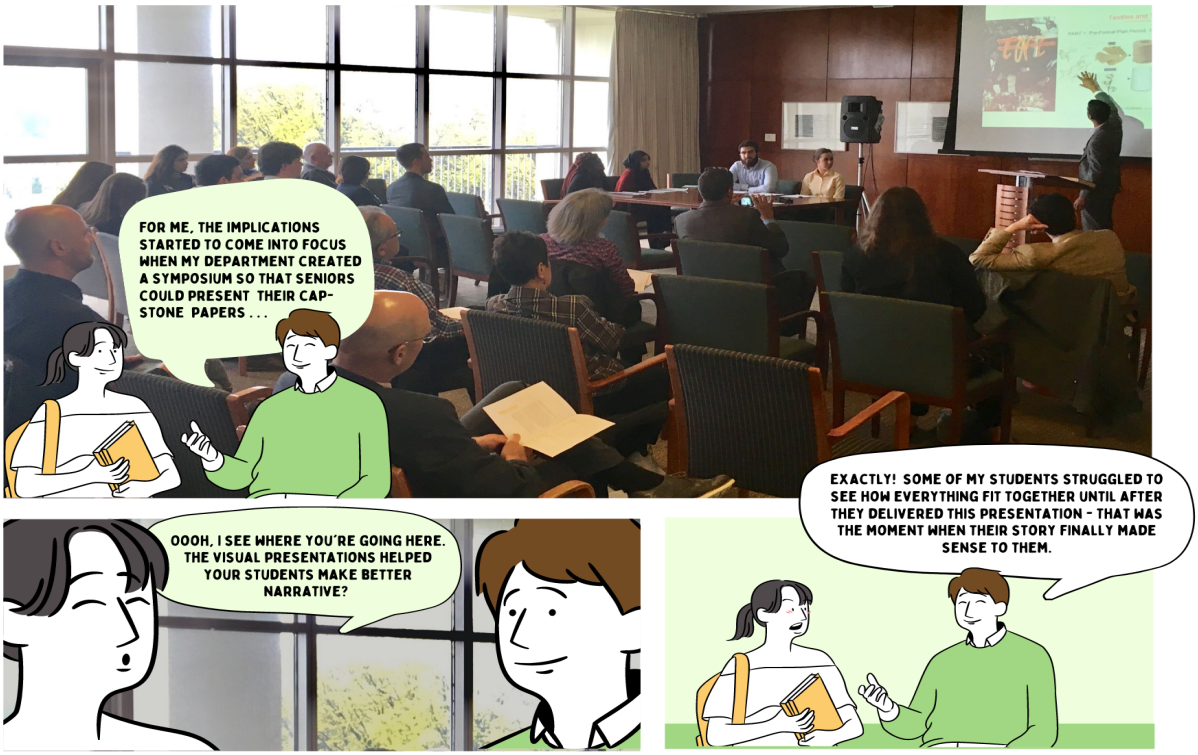
[10] Cate Denial, "The Unessay," *Cate Denial Blog*, 26 April 2019, available: https://catherinedenial.org/blog/uncategorized/the-unessay/; Christopher Jones, Twitter post, 18 April 2019, available: https://twitter.com/ccjones13/status/854449018272751618?lang=en. Other examples include Jodie Mader, "The Unessay Experiment: Moving Beyond the Traditional Paper," *Faculty Focus* (22 July 2020), available: https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/course-design-ideas/the-unessay-experiment-moving-beyond-the-traditional-paper/; Cara Ocobock, "The Un-Essay," available: http://sites.nd.edu/cara-ocobock/un-essay/; Hayley Brazier and Heidi Kaufman, "Defining the 'Unessay,'" *DH@UO*, available: https://dh.uoregon.edu/2018/04/02/defining-the-unessay/; Marc Kissel, "The UnEssay," *Marc Kissel's Website*, available: https://marckissel.netlify.app/post/on-the-unessay/.

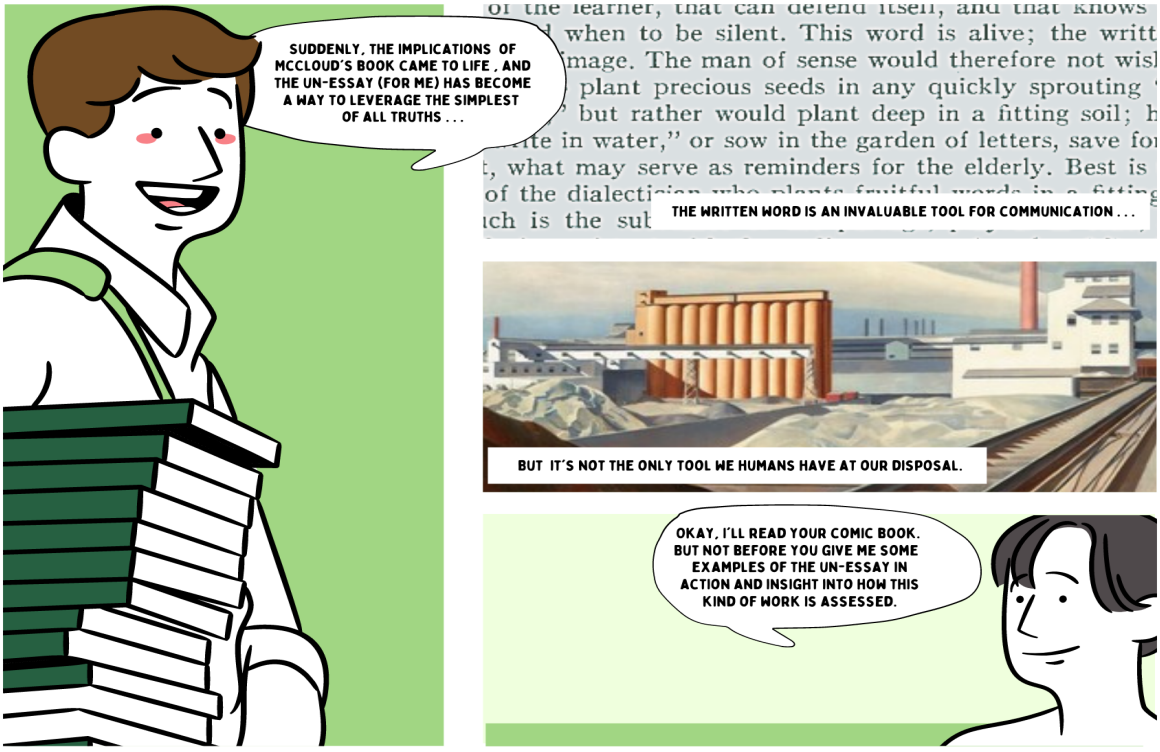
[11] Mary Lindemann, "Slow History," *The American Historical Review* 126:1 (March 2021), 1-18; Sam Wineburg, Mark Smith, and Joel Breakstone, "What Is Learned in College History Classes?" *Journal of American History* 104 (March 2018), 983-993; John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

that motivate our students? In our fast-changing present, how might historians use non-writing assignments to achieve learning objectives better?

What follows are some reflections about my failures in this regard, woven together around the counterintuitive argument that un-essays can help students write better historical papers. Let's jump into the weeds by considering the topic from the inside-out:




FOR ME, THE IMPLICATIONS STARTED TO COME INTO FOCUS WHEN MY DEPARTMENT CREATED A SYMPOSIUM SO THAT SENIORS COULD PRESENT THEIR CAP-STONE PAPERS . . .
OOOH, I SEE WHERE YOU'RE GOING HERE. THE VISUAL PRESENTATIONS HELPED YOUR STUDENTS MAKE BETTER NARRATIVE?
EXACTLY! SOME OF MY STUDENTS STRUGGLED TO SEE HOW EVERYTHING FIT TOGETHER UNTIL AFTER THEY DELIVERED THIS PRESENTATION - THAT WAS THE MOMENT WHEN THEIR STORY FINALLY MADE SENSE TO THEM.


SUDDENLY, THE IMPLICATIONS OF MCCLOUD'S BOOK CAME TO LIFE , AND THE UN-ESSAY (FOR ME) HAS BECOME A WAY TO LEVERAGE THE SIMPLEST OF ALL TRUTHS . . .
THE WRITTEN WORD IS AN INVALUABLE TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION . . .
BUT IT'S NOT THE ONLY TOOL WE HUMANS HAVE AT OUR DISPOSAL.
OKAY, I'LL READ YOUR COMIC BOOK. BUT NOT BEFORE YOU GIVE ME SOME EXAMPLES OF THE UN-ESSAY IN ACTION AND INSIGHT INTO HOW THIS KIND OF WORK IS ASSESSED.

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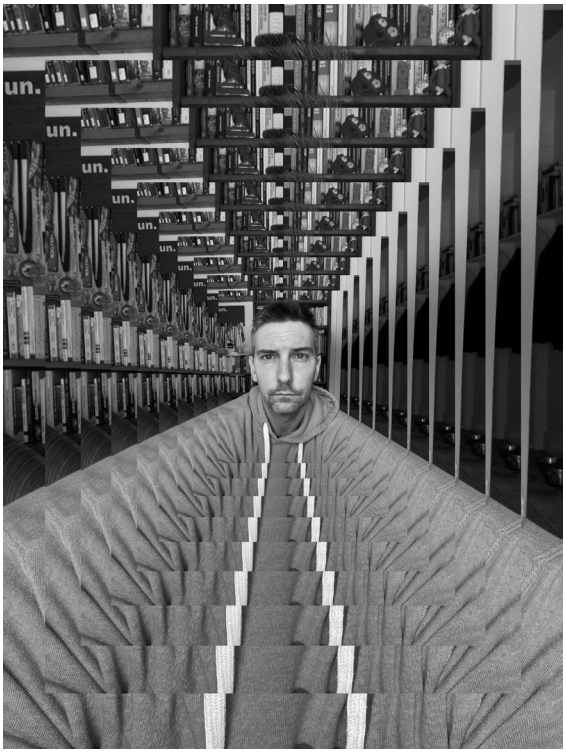
First, let's define the un-essay. Should anything be out of bounds?

This is not an un-essay *The* not an un-essay not an *Un-Essay* un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not *is* an un-essay not an un-essay *not* an un-essay not an *a* un-essay not an *vaguely* un-essay not an un-essay not an *artsy* un-essay not an un-essay *project* not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay *with* not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay *no* not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not an *tangible* un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-*relationship* essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not an *to* un-essay *a* not an un-essay not an un-essay not *stated* an un-essay not an un-essay not an *learning* un-essay not an un-essay not an *objective* un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-essay not an un-

Art for the sake of art - expression that celebrates creativity as an end in itself - is not an un-essay. Not in my opinion.



Both assertions above will generate debate, since they contrast vividly with the sentiments in Peter Sullivan's 2015 seminal article on this topic. For Sullivan, the point of an un-essay is that "creativity should be as important as literacy and treated with the same status," a premise that saturates many of the un-essay examples you will uncover with an afternoon of rigorous internet research.[12] My afternoon uncovered quilts, drawings, poems, meals, collages, murals, more meals, and some extraordinary paintings. Everything was interesting to look at and most projects celebrated the author's identity beautifully. Yet I rarely encountered satisfying explanations about how these projects taught learning objectives that aligned with my understanding of the historian's craft. "If a student turns in an unessay," Denial explains, "they have to turn in a three-page reflection on what they

[12] Peter Sullivan, "The UnEssay: Making Room for Creativity in the Composition Classroom," *College Composition and Communication* 67: 1 (September 2015), 6-34.

learned," plus "a bibliography of sources consulted," so that "they cannot simply cook a meal or paint a picture without really thinking through why that better expresses their learning than a paper could."[13] In other words, if the choice can be justified the assignment will be graded.

What if we situated the un-essay in the interstice between the AHA's disciplinary core and a department's learning objectives? Each of us work in different institutional milieus, so the results would vary, but the conversation would change in subtle, important ways. For example, my department's foundational learning objective is argumentation. My colleagues and I want every student to engage critically with secondary sources, pinpointing how authors use evidence to advance arguments that interact with historiographies. Our second objective is information literacy. We want students to find and decipher relevant primary sources using appropriate search tools, so they can answer their own questions with the best information available. Most importantly, we want students to write well-crafted, self-aware narratives, since narrative is essential to the way historians communicate. Learning about another time and place is hard but formulating an original question and answering that question with an argumentative, well-evidenced story is *a lot* harder, and narrative represents the holiest of grails for our majors.[14]

The un-essay can foster artistic creativity, but it can also help students master these objectives faster and better. Since un-essays help students write better, there is no reason to follow Sullivan's lead by characterizing them as creative alternatives to literacy. To the contrary, the un-essay's value arguably arises from the way it teaches craftsmanship and self-awareness, two of the hardest parts of the narrative-making process. When wedded to established learning objectives, un-essays get students to that aforementioned "symposium moment" sooner, folding the eureka into the preparation so that everything comes together before the student crosses the curriculum's finish line.

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Let's talk examples.

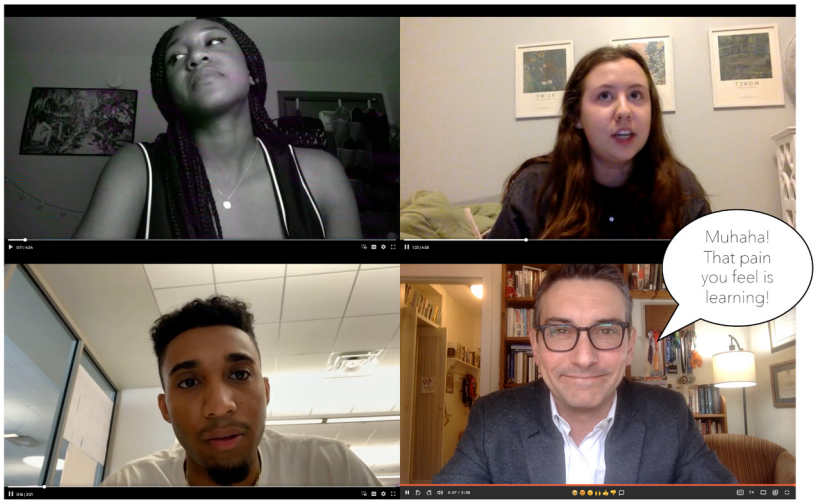
Before the pandemic, I taught argumentation with written assessments and low-stakes journaling. These journals never received a letter grade—students either did them or didn't—and my prompts typically worked on three levels. First, the students would read the book's introduction and conclusion. I invited them to riff on the topic under discussion, sharing what they knew already and whether they thought they would like this book, before identifying the author's thesis and explaining a sentence that I lifted from the text. Second, we would dive into the chapters. Each week, I asked the students for a revealing or surprising sentence from the chapter under discussion. I would also give them a line or two to explain. But most importantly, I would invite them to analyze each chapter's title, so they were ready to talk together about how the book's narrative was advancing the thesis from the introduction. Finally, I would nudge the students toward higher-level thinking with freeform questions like, "How'd you describe *this* character to a friend over a beer?" Or "Does the book prove that *this* idea was always doomed?" Or "What will you *remember* about this story in a month?" When taken together, these prompts walked the students through the process of gutting a book.

This assignment had a lot of problems. Since the students were writing for an audience of one, their prose was often atrocious. For reasons I cannot explain, they sometimes wrote things they would never articulate in front of classmates—weird things. Less mysterious was the fact that everyone expected reciprocal recognition because these journal entries took time to complete, and I was too busy to respond to forty-eight journal entries every week. So, I swapped journals for Flipgrid during the pandemic. Although the prompts stayed the same,

[13] Denial, "The Unessay."

[14] As context, the University at Albany-SUNY is an R1 public university that enrolls just under 18,000 students, accepting approximately 57% of undergraduate applicants and graduating approximately 65% of each class. Because of reforms to the SUNY system, half of our undergraduate population transfers from one of the SUNY system's community colleges, so many of our students arrive as juniors with credit from other institutions. For additional information: https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=SUNY+Albany&s=all&id=196060.

the assignment changed because words no longer existed on the page. Since everyone could see everything everybody else had to say, the exercise became more dialogic. Some students who participated reluctantly in the actual classroom flowered on Flipgrid, and my high-performing students became co-teachers by modeling top-notch answers to their classmates, a dynamic I could quantify by tracking student views, since eyeballs gravitated toward the most thoughtful posts.[15]



A handful of students tried to game the system, emulating their peers without reading the book, yet they still went through the motions on my terms, learning how the book's chapters advanced the author's argument. The performance motivated them in ways the journals had not. Best of all, for extra credit, the students engaged each other's posts, so the exercise evolved as the semester went on. The students not only expressed themselves naturally; they started listening to each other. And since our university had a mask mandate until April 2022, Flipgrid became the one place we could see each other's faces.

What happened next? The grades went up because the students wrote smarter papers. These preparatory videos—my first example of the un-essay in action—culminated in a reflective essay about the book's argument, which everyone understood because of this monthlong asynchronous conversation about the author's choices. Our conversation accentuated the relational nature of nonfiction writing, and the graded assignment asked the students to explain whether they accepted the book's argument. They had to engage the rival position respectfully and thoroughly before justifying their argument with well-considered evidence from the book and our supplementary reading material about the topic.[16] In this respect, the un-essay was not an alternative to writing so much as a tool to teach argumentation without the written word, fostering comprehension by making the learning process public. Honestly, these videos were like TikTok—and the students got farther faster by thinking together.

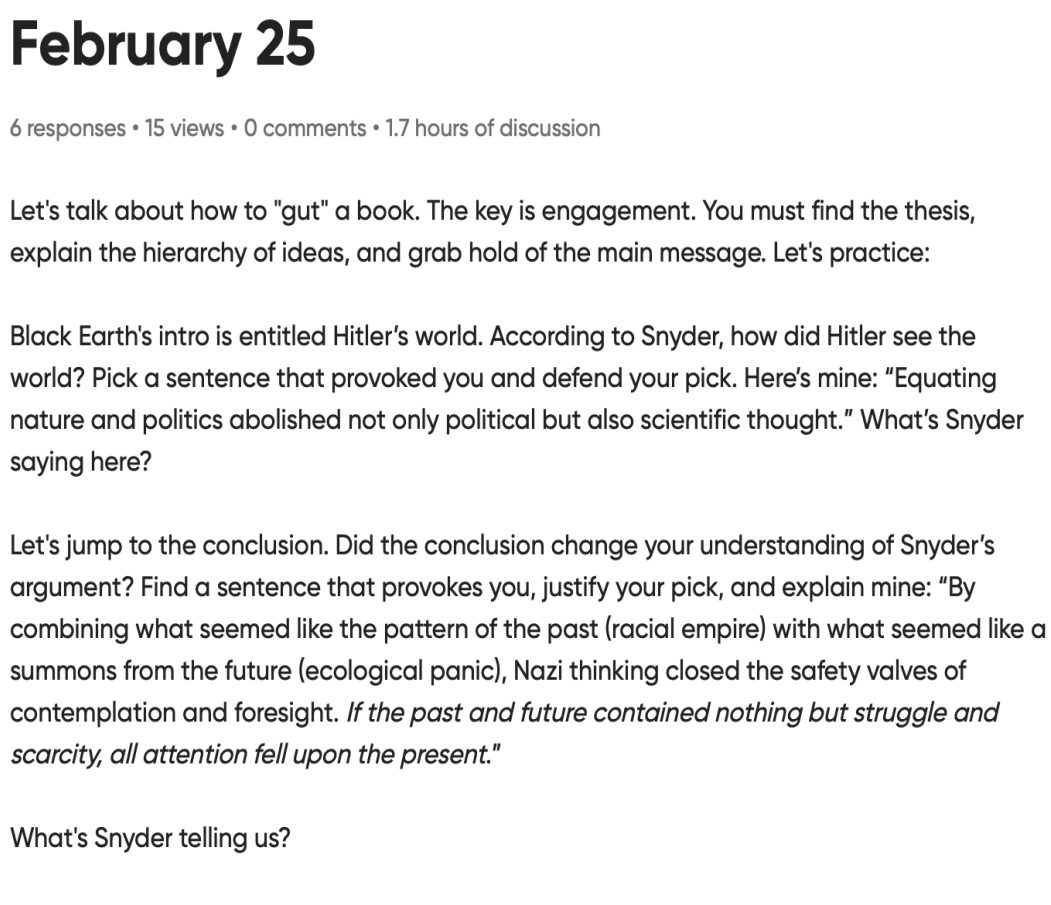
The point cuts deep. When my students arrive in my classroom, they often assume that history is a jumble of names and events to be memorized and regurgitated. Argumentation introduces the past as narrative, pushing them to recognize that historians organize stories around interpretations. Once an author's hand is visible, the student can trace narrative-making on the page to determine how the author is choreographing information to prove a thesis. These videos chop that process into small, doable steps, and for everyone involved, Flipgrid

[15] Tim Green, Erin Besser, Loretta Donovan, "More than Amplifying Voice and Providing Choice: Educator Perceptions of Flipgrid Use in the Classroom," *TechTrends* 65:5 (July 2021), 785-795.

[16] For context, Samuel Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Rita Luís and Chrysi Rapanta, "Towards (Re-)Defining Historical Reasoning Competence: A Review of Theoretical and Empirical Research," *Educational Research Review* 11 (November 2020), 1003-36.

became an interactive, visually dynamic supplement to our class work.

Here's a screenshot of a typical prompt:



February 25

6 responses • 15 views • 0 comments • 1.7 hours of discussion

Let's talk about how to "gut" a book. The key is engagement. You must find the thesis, explain the hierarchy of ideas, and grab hold of the main message. Let's practice:

Black Earth's intro is entitled Hitler's world. According to Snyder, how did Hitler see the world? Pick a sentence that provoked you and defend your pick. Here's mine: "Equating nature and politics abolished not only political but also scientific thought." What's Snyder saying here?

Let's jump to the conclusion. Did the conclusion change your understanding of Snyder's argument? Find a sentence that provokes you, justify your pick, and explain mine: "By combining what seemed like the pattern of the past (racial empire) with what seemed like a summons from the future (ecological panic), Nazi thinking closed the safety valves of contemplation and foresight. *If the past and future contained nothing but struggle and scarcity, all attention fell upon the present.*"

What's Snyder telling us?

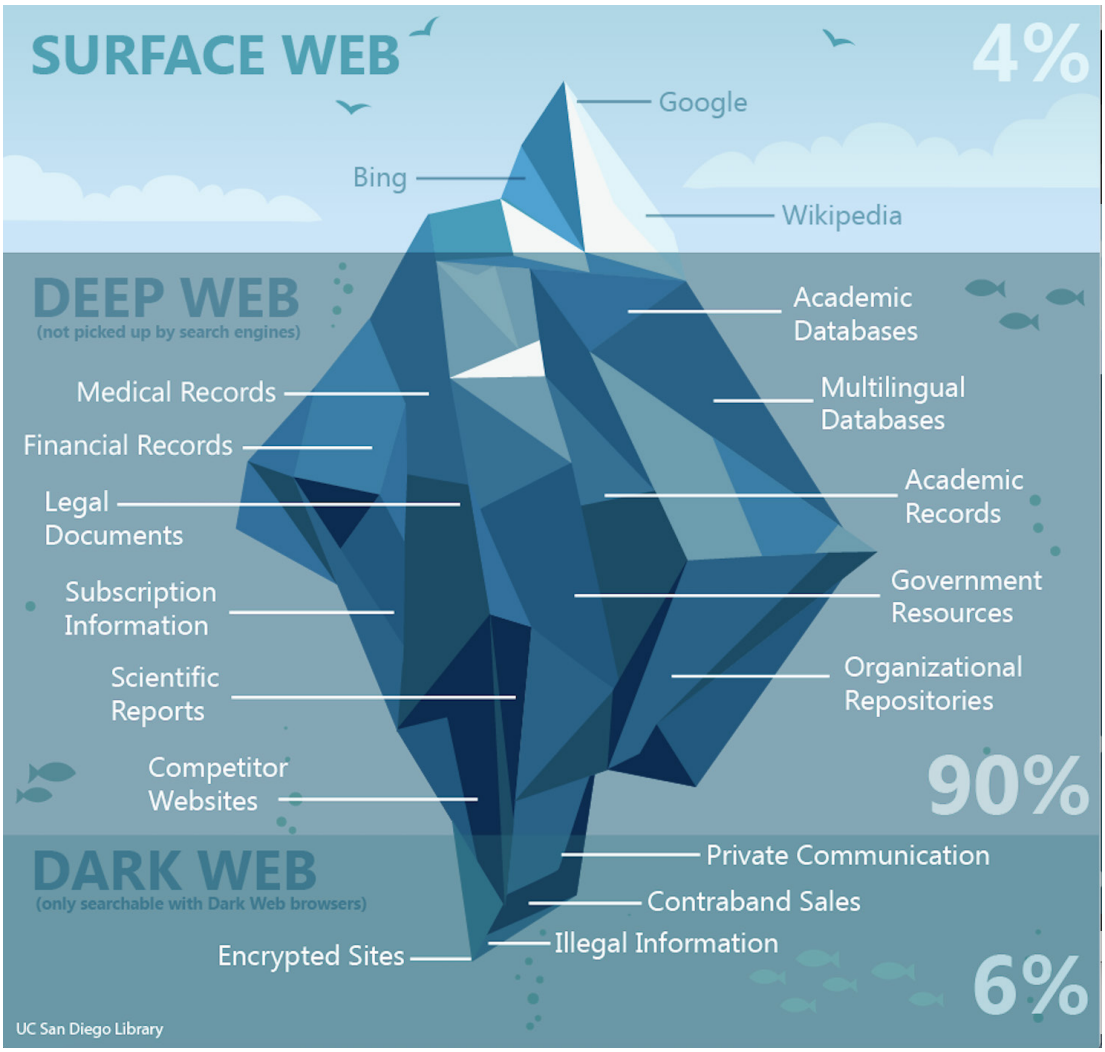
*

If video journals are a fun way to teach argumentation, podcasts can do something similar for information literacy. In my classes about historical methodology, I have always asked students to write papers about a research project they would write if our class asked them to write a research paper, which it does not. When everything was open and accessible, we would spend weeks together in the library, working with our university's research librarian to master the search tools that historians use to locate appropriate articles, books, and primary sources. Then the students would formulate a question, situate that question into a historiography, and organize a preliminary archive into an annotated bibliography using a software program called Zotero.[17] But the paper would always remain unwritten because the assignment was not about writing—it taught information literacy.

The main point was not hard to grasp. Because Google is ubiquitous, some students assume that research is as straightforward as entering a keyword into a web browser, and this assignment scuttled that mindset by reintroducing the internet as a mélange of overlapping archived information. After highlighting the importance of offline repositories, we would explore the efficacy of different search methods and apply the lessons in this non-paper paper that doubled as a testimonial about each person's journey.[18]

[17] Jason Pucket, *Zotero: A Guide for Librarians, Researchers, and Educators* (Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017).

[18] Samuel Wineberg, *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2018); Eric Schmidt, *Google: How Google Works* (New York, Grand Central Publishing, 2014).



Every paragraph of this assignment had a distinct job. In one section, the students described their questions and claims, explaining what the proposed topic revealed about them and their interests. In another section, they would talk about the ups-and-downs of their adventure, answering specific questions about how their keywords and search tools uncovered different kinds of information—and how these sources adjusted the project's ambitions. The third section would probe the relevance of this material to the original question and walk everyone through a revision process that culled the bibliography and updated the project's assumptions. Finally, the students explained how they would write the paper if they had to write the paper: How might they wrangle these sources into a narrative? What would come first, second, and third in a 20- or 30-page paper—and why? Had they uncovered any "smoking gun" evidence or were they reading along the "archival grain"? What had they learned from the process—and what might the biggest challenge be if they turned this project into their capstone?

Until I discovered podcasting, I thought this assignment was decent. Things only ever fell apart at the end when the students presented their findings to each other. Year after year—irrespective of my instructions—they would use these presentations to talk about what they now knew instead of sharing their reflections about the research process, which was predictable since they experienced their burgeoning expertise as the acquisition of once unknown information. Their technical skills felt banal once acquired and talking publicly about the process instead of the outcome invited a vulnerability that felt insincere because the project ended triumphantly. Understandably, most students wanted to finish the project with a performance. Who am I to blow against the wind?

Enter the podcast. Removing the stage became the solution, and podcasting was a tool that accentuated the exercise's true intentions, offering an intimate space where student "pods" cogitated together about their discoveries and growth. Basically, I made the preparatory work more interactive and ditched the final presentation. Instead of journaling about each of the non-paper's four sections, the students recorded podcast episodes that tackled these tasks collaboratively, which made their research experience more conversational. The first episode was called, "Who are You, Why Should I Care, and What Do You Have to Say?" The second episode became "The Quest: Tools vs. Keywords," and the third and fourth episodes were "The Road Behind" and "The Road Ahead." The students received discussion questions before each episode, but they had to choreograph the conversation beforehand, and a different pod-member played host each week. From there, they simply had to record their conversations on their smartphones in a quiet place at their leisure. Like those Flipgrid videos, these podcasts were graded by submission and shared with the class.

Like clockwork, the grades got better because the quality improved. The conversations were not groupwork in the traditional sense; they were a forum to think collectively about individual labor. Every student still had to submit that un-paper (about that unwritten research paper) at the end of the semester. Yet they started to put more work into the preparatory steps, presumably because they did not want to sound foolish in these recorded conversations with each other, offering a delightfully subtle lesson about the power of peer pressure. As the project unfolded, each episode dramatized the connection between effort and learning—some of them started narrating my talking points from a position of belief—and the experience enhanced their self-esteem by establishing a community around a once solitary journey. The students still struggled to meet my standards, but the podcast invited them to toil together playfully. Best of all, the low-stakes nature of these routinized conversations equipped them with a richer vocabulary to talk about the historian's craft, and the discussions convinced many students that they indeed possessed very special skills.

Podcasting is a second example of an un-essay in action. Again, this assignment was not a creative alternative to writing, nor did it displace any of my department's established learning objectives. This assignment merely used a technology that saturates today's information environment to teach something familiar better, motivating students by putting peer relationships at the center of the research process. And recording a podcast is child's play in the sense that my ten-year-old daughter literally taught me how to do it. My students required zero instruction—everything was completed with the smartphones in their pockets.

*

So, I hope I have sold you on the premise that the un-essay can teach argumentation and information literacy. But what about narrative? Narrative is like the holy grail in my instructional universe—mysterious, elusive, important—and I am rather bad at teaching it. I know how to explain the fundamentals to a young person. Every story needs an arc, I'll say, and each part of a story must fit into a causal chain that carries the reader from Point A to Point B without too much fuss. Good stories need plots too, a point I try to bring to life with snippets from Hayden White's *Metahistory*, plus lively sentences that break as few grammatical rules as possible.[19] From the front of the classroom, narrative sounds straightforward to me, yet the breakdown follows when I stop talking and they start writing. As their sentences merge one into another, the missing links in their causal chains become more apparent, exposing problems that can only be resolved with research and reflection.

Earlier, I mentioned that my relationship to the un-essay began at my department's annual undergraduate research symposium, when I realized that my students resolved *some* of these problems when they turned their papers into lectures. This process made each link in their story's chain into a visual slide, and the act of moving the written word to a multimedia presentation helped some students think anew about the way each part of their story fit together. Unspectacular on the surface, this insight led me to think more critically about comic books, since they exist at the interface between word and images. As artist Scott McCloud explains,

[19] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973).

two things happen simultaneously on the page of any given comic. First, the author moves the reader through ordered space time. Each panel exists in planned succession, and the author devotes considerable attention to the sequence of ideas and the reader's eye movement over the page. Second, the author harmonizes two icons—the word and the picture—by varying the imagery within each panel to control the flow of the story. Just as body language affects a reader's understanding of a sentence, a close-up embellishes an important point and a panorama changes its implications.[20] If the distinctions are unclear, flip back a few pages, and you can see how my own comic harmonizes words and pictures differently using these techniques.

My comic is not very good, but thankfully the point is not very complex: Comics create clarity through abstraction. Abstractions help authors think anew about the way readers experience their stories. Therefore, moving students from one medium to another—asking them to toggle from words to pictures and back—encourages them to be self-reflective about the craft of narrative-making.[21] If I were teaching this point to students, I might start with three versions of this essay's comic, varying small details to foster discussion. For example, why is the male character wearing a sweater on the bottom of page one—and where did he put his books? If that character had a different facial expression in the final panel on that page, would the transition to the next page be more dynamic? Why is the second page more interesting than the first? Once the conversation begins, folding the lessons into a discussion about written narrative is essential. Everybody drops a metaphorical sweater into their writing and stumbles through an imperfect transition, so my students and I will identify our missteps by revisiting something we've written. The comic's second page pops because the dialogue unfolds against a backdrop of images that enrich the points under discussion, and all narratives create dialogue between action and context. My students and I will find spots where that balance is off and add action/context as necessary. From my lectern, I bellow about all this and more—barking dirges about revision—but visualizing these principles helps many students understand what these ideas mean. Abstraction unlocks the seemingly mundane secrets of narrative-creation.

That said, teaching off comics is better than teaching through them. CanvaPro is a fine tool, but it is expensive and drawing is an unnatural act for most of us. Multimedia lectures make it easier to apply these insights, since they are more familiar and less costly.[22] For example, in my pre-McCloud days, if I were explaining a topic like John Tyler's foreign policy, I would probably use Tyler's face as background as I talked about his worldview, letting the students sort out the relationship between my words and Tyler's visage. Post-McCloud, this same presentation would weave together the visual and auditory experiences, using more slides to keep every student in the same instructional present.

[20] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Mark Martin, 1993).

[21] Trevor Getz, "Getting Serious about Comic History," *American Historical Review* 123:5 (2018), 1595-97; Alicia Decker and Mauricio Castro, "Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel," *The History Teacher* 45:2 (2012), 169-187; Nicholas J. Aieta, "Teaching History through Comic Books," *Magazine of History* 24:3 (2010), 1-5; Ian Gordon, "Let Us Not Call Them Graphic Novels: Comic Books as Biography and History," *Radical History Review* 106 (Winter 2010), 185-192.

[22] An alternative approach is to assign something from Oxford University Press's Graphic History series, which is almost up to ten books. They're all superb and my personal favorite is Trevor Getz and Liz Clarke, *Abina and the Important Men: A Graphic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Basically, thinking like a comic artist means you use movement and harmony to control the pace of comprehension. If you glance at the six slides above, the fragmented background imagery gives visual form to an argument about American political sectionalism in the 1840s. The word bubbles are akin to topic sentences in paragraphs of exposition and each slide roots the viewer in sequential space time. The presentation still is not perfect, but more students leave the lesson with a better understanding of Tyler's foreign policy.

Did Tyler just become this essay's metaphorical sweater? The point is that creating a comic book is hard—because the payoff is not apparent—but making a multimedia lecture is as simple as recording your voice over PowerPoint—and it is this essay's third example of the un-essay in action. In each of my foreign policy classes, students receive four weeks to prep the final lecture of the course. They select a topic and ask a question, and then annotate a bibliography and settle on a thesis. Together, we study comic composition, introducing the lessons I just explained, and since my lectures are recorded now, the students critique their favorite, pinpointing the question, argument, evidence, and causal chain.[23] Then they apply the takeaways in their own fifteen-minute recorded multimedia lecture. These presentations go live as the semester ends, and the final exam is a Flipgrid video, where each student analyzes three peer presentations and reflects on the lessons they learned that semester.

What does this assignment do? Well, my goal is to relocate that eureka moment from our symposium to a random class about foreign policy midway through the student's journey across the curriculum, and my hope is that this seed grows into a top-notch capstone project someday. Admittedly, everything gets harder when primary sources replace secondary sources on the bibliography, but that is likely another professor's problem. For now, the students learn something about narrative.

*

In these past few pages, I have reconsidered the common premise that un-essays are creative alternatives to prose communication. Un-essays teach writing better by enriching the goals that anchor the historian's craft, and they can motivate students by disaggregating the learning process into small, doable steps that do not require extensive preexisting skills, thereby establishing a 1:1:1 bond between effort, learning, and success. Routinized low stakes assignments—the un-essay in action—squeezes instructional potential from commonplace technologies like TikTok, podcasts, and YouTube.[24] Historians often lament social media for

[23] On composition and SoTL, J.M. Anderson, "Speak That I May See Thee, or the Elements of Effective Lecturing," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 36:2 (Fall 2011), 59-69; Richard Hughes, "New Guidelines for SoTL in History: A Discipline Considers the SoTL Turn?" *ibid.* 44:2 (Fall 2019), 34-43; Peter Burkholder, "Teaching Historical Literacy within a SOTL Framework," *ibid.*, 44-50.
[24] On low stakes assignments, see Mary Snyder Broussard, *Reading, Research, and Writing: Teaching Information Literacy with*

promoting distraction and disinformation. However, when used purposefully—when leveraged to teach argument, research, and narrative—these tools can also build inclusive, interactive learning communities that give young people more access points into our courses and help them build stronger relationships with their peers. Students have more options than ever before and they possess opinions about the appropriateness of coursework, and the best way to combat their occasional cynicism is to assure that they succeed—and find meaning in their triumph.[25]

On this point, the un-essay can enhance our effectiveness as teachers. Each of my examples generate an overabundance of measurable data to track student learning, and if you're inclined, you can use preparatory assignments to adjust your explicit instruction as the semester unfolds, closing comprehension gaps to build student capacity. If a class misses an essential point about a book or article, low stakes work can spot the problem, which you can address in the classroom, and if your students fall behind, you can pull them back into a course with personalized interventions. Moreover, giving students the space to work through their ideas informally—inviting them to learn together before committing their thoughts to paper—almost always leads to superior outcomes. And none of these low-stakes assignments require long hours of additional grading; they merely diversify the way students interact with a course.[26]

Pedagogically, the un-essay swaps compliance for engagement by using technology to create student-centered environments. If you believe that people learn when you criticize them, most of these exercises will feel pointless. But in my experience, affirmation and interaction generate student motivation. When the labor is public and collaborative, and everyone is asked to aspire toward common standards together, the resulting classroom can crackle with enthusiasm and humanity. Hopefully, I have stirred the pot enough to pique your interest in the un-essay's upside. We may live in a time of monsters—to borrow Gramsci's words—but there is no point howling at the wind. To repurpose another Hemingway quote, teaching history is hard, but "[we are] not made for defeat."[27]

Process-Based Research Assignments (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017); Jacqueline Herman and April Kerby-Helm, "Question of the Week: Can a Low-Stakes Assignment Improve Students' Attitudes?" *Journal of Statistics and Data Science Education* 30:1 (January 2022), 39-44.

[25] On the learning process, see Joshua Eyler, *How Humans Learn: The Science and Stories Behind Effective College Teaching* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2018).

[26] On assessment, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, "Assessment and Classroom Learning," *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice,* 5:1 (1998), 7–74; Maureen Murphy Nutting, "Correcting the Course: The Assessment Loop," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 33 (September 2008); Anne Hyde, "Five Reasons History Professors Suck at Assessment," *Journal of American History* 103 (March 2016), 1104–7; Gary Kroll, Jessamyn Neuhaus, and Wendy Gordon, "Slouching toward Student-Centered Assessment," *ibid*., 1108-22; Jeffrey McClurken and Krystyn Moon, "Making Assessment Work for You," *ibid*., 1123–31; James Grossman and Julia Brookins, "Assessment Is What We Make of It," *ibid*., 1132–57.

[27] Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (New York: Scribner's, 1952).

Remapping a Historical Geography: An Un-Essay to Unsettle Perceptions of the Antebellum North

Jacqueline Reynoso
CSU Channel Islands

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To teach about places is to teach about placings. Whether intentionally or not, the way we locate certain regions of the world shapes how we see the individuals, resources, activities, and environments that exist within them. Boundaries, place-names, and other geographic descriptors direct our gaze. They influence not only how we define the places that come into focus but also how we distinguish those places from surrounding regions. In the process, they also inform the stories we tell about ourselves and others. And, as sources deliberately designed to organize space, maps are particularly impactful in shaping our sense of place.

The connection between maps and the ways we perceive place has long been recognized by scholars of spatial theory, geography, and the history of cartography. In the early 1990s, in a now canonical study of maps and the power they wield, Denis Wood described maps as spatial arguments that "construct—not reproduce—the world."[1] Like those of others publishing at the outset of what scholars have now termed "the spatial turn," Wood's study underscored the importance of examining the mapmakers behind the cartographic texts, together with the assumptions and agendas that informed their work.[2]

In the past two decades, historians and scholars in other allied disciplines have increasingly approached maps as objects of study. To be sure, much of their work has taken the form of scholarly publications, with pedagogical application coming at a slower rate. As Christopher Saladin and Shana Crosson have recently argued: "While many historians are using GIS to explore spatial questions in their own research, a smaller number have brought it to their classrooms."[3] Nevertheless, there is a growing appreciation of the instructional value of incorporating geospatial tools in history classrooms. In a recent study, Sarah Fayen Scarlett and peers contend that "HGIS-based projects integrate space and time in ways that make history immediately relevant and accessible, and, in so doing, promote the cultural value of history in the daily lives of students and their communities."[4]

In part, the increasing appreciation for the inclusion of geospatial tools in history courses has benefitted from the not-unrelated explosion of new digital mapping software. Platforms like Neatline, Carto, and Knight Lab's StoryMap JS provide instructors and students alike with multiple alternative options to less accessible and less user-friendly GIS mapping software (such as ArcGIS). These developments have not only paved the way for more spatially-conscious instruction, but—as I argue in this article—they also provide an opportunity to design interactive student research assignments outside the mold of more conventional essay formats.

Rethinking John F. Smith's "Historical Geography"

In the fall of 2019, I designed a student project premised on the understanding that maps influence the histories we narrate. It was part of a culminating class project for a course titled: "All Over the Map: Cartography and Historical Narrative," an upper-division seminar that introduced undergraduate students to spatial theory and history of cartography. The assignment asked students to build off the knowledge that maps could shape historical narrative—a connection we had already established in earlier class discussions of assigned readings. The purpose of the project was to enable students to push past that awareness. It prompted them to not only

[1] Denis Wood with John Fels, The Power of Maps (New York: The Guilford Press, 1992), 17.
[2] For other seminal studies that helped spark the spatial turn, see especially J. B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," Cartographica 26, no.2 (Summer 1989): 1-20; Mark Monmonier, How to Lie with Maps (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Paul Carter, The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History (NewYork: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).
[3] Christopher Saladin and Shana Crosson, "Spatial Approaches to the Past: Story Maps in the History Classroom," *The History Teacher* 55, no. 1 (November 2021), 36.
[4] Sarah Fayen, et al., "Out of the Classroom and Into History: Mobile Historical GIS and Community-Engaged Teaching," *The History Teacher* 53, no. 1 (November 2019), 12.

analyze the connection between a particular map and the histories it helped make visible, but also required that they unsettle the source's narrative power by producing an alternative map of the same place. Our ultimate goal was to identify some of the different historical experiences that an alternative mapping of a familiar place could help bring to light. The familiar region at the center of the project was the United States' antebellum North.

To begin the project, I facilitated an in-class analysis of a map from the late 1800s: John F. Smith's "Historical Geography" (see Map 1 in the Appendix). The map, as is immediately clear, is focused on the United States, though only outlining the forty-eight contiguous states that made up the nation at the time it was created. Incomplete representations of Canada and Mexico also appear on the map, but only as a means to orient the map viewer. By defining the U.S.'s northern and southern borders, these two nations help the viewer find geographic purchase within the continent of North America. Simply by framing the map in the manner he did, Smith was making a subtle argument about place (communicating the primacy of the United States even while including its surrounding nations). Within that frame, though, the viewer can trace a much a more intentional, not to mention conspicuous, argument about the history of United States and its geographic tenor.

Although all maps, by their very nature, are arguments about space, Smith's main argument is particularly overt. It, therefore, served as an especially rich source for class analysis. Superimposed onto an otherwise familiar cartographic representation of the continental U.S. are two trees in abstract form; one is shaded in a grey-blue tone while the other is a darker brown-black tone. The bases of the trees stem from two different points along the Atlantic seaboard: the British colonies of Plymouth and Jamestown. Those colonies are the two conventionally-recognized "starting points" of the nation despite the fact that neither could claim to be the first settlement in the already-inhabited territory that became the United States.[5]

Smith associated the two trees with contrasting moral standings. Metaphorically, New England was the seed of an upright, symmetrical tree he labeled "God's Blessing Liberty," while the Chesapeake was rendered the seedbed of the much more disfigured tree he branded "God's Curse Slavery." As students were quick to point out, his contention was clear. From Puritan Plymouth's colonial model springs forth such blessings as "Knowledge," "Virtue" and "Equal Rights." From the model set by Jamestown, emerge the contrasting vices of "Ignorance" and "Lust," as well as various legislative bills and compromises associated with slavery (i.e., the Kansas Nebraska Bill, the Compromise of 1850, etc.). Smith's antebellum America, in short, was comprised of two foils, and those two foils could be mapped.

Notably, Smith's overarching argument in "Historical Geography" rests on various other, more subtle arguments about the United States' history, which students and I explored. Although created in 1888, part of Smith's message is as much about the early 1600s as it is about the late 1800s. As mentioned above, Smith designated two British colonies as the geographic beginnings of the United States. In doing so, he both reflected and reinforced a still common tendency to reduce British colonial history to a pre-history of the United States.[6] His preference for one colonial experiment over the other is, of course, evident from the very labels he applied to each tree. Yet, there are other, more subtle clues that betray his partiality. Next to Plymouth and Jamestown, for example, Smith included a year—a detail prompting viewers to situate themselves not just geographically but also temporally. Surprisingly though, both locations bear the same year: 1620. Although the date make sense when it comes to Plymouth (which was founded in 1620), it does not in connection to Jamestown (which was founded in 1607). As a class, we considered this inaccuracy and questioned what assumptions this revealed about the mapmaker himself.

Together, we discussed the kinds of creation stories that factor into American's collective national memory. We shared personal anecdotes about the various ways we had observed or participated in commemorations of certain national founding stories. We also discussed the sorts of narratives we had encountered in readings.

[5] In fact, neither Jamestown nor Plymouth were even the first *colonial* settlements in the region, as Spain's St. Augustine predated both by more than forty years.

[6] For a notable critique of that tendency, see Claudio Saunt, *West of the Revolution: An Uncommon History of 1776* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014).

After sharing our personal experiences with different United States creation stories, I highlighted short excerpts from various scholarly works that touched on the topic. One of those was historian Karen Kupperman's monograph, *The Jamestown Project*. In her study, Kupperman examined the colony's early history, questioning the creation myths associated with it and acknowledging the complicated and violent legacy of the of the colony. "Jamestown," she explained, "makes us uncomfortable."[7] It tells a tale of greed, exploitation, slavery, and hostile relations with Native Algonquians. Instead, Kupperman acknowledged, "Americans prefer to think of Plymouth colony in New England as our true foundation."[8]

Yet, as scholars like Kupperman point out, the tendency to contrast Plymouth from Jamestown can lead many Americans to award British New England a benevolent image it does not deserve. That tendency, which continues to exist today, was evidently operating in the late 1800s as well, as Smith's map makes visible. Students and I considered the likely possibility that it could help explain the hold 1620 had on Smith's conceptions of the nation's beginning. Given his key attention to detail, it is unlikely that he was unaware of Jamestown's founding date. In any case, regardless of intention, his inclusion of 1620 next to each colonial enterprise enabled New England's curated image, together with its chronology, to eclipse that of the Chesapeake's in more than one sense.

Connected to Smith's assumptions about the United States' founding are his ideas about its historical and geographic progression. Because he locates its beginning along the eastern Atlantic seaboard, it is not entirely surprising that he portrays its history as one that moves westward, following the symbolic growth of the trees.[9] In a sense, he is correct; the United States' boundaries shifted to reflect the nation's increasingly westernmost territorial acquisitions. Yet, in the process, Smith's cartographic depiction silences the different colonial and Native histories that also shaped the regions eventually located within the United States' boundaries. As one student pointed out, the map was a cartographic reflection of what historian Juliana Barr has described as American history's "east-coast bias"—an argument we had engaged with earlier in the semester.[10] Barr's claim is that most histories of early America begin on the east coast and then move west, as the nation's boundaries did. In doing so, though, most histories of the continent west of British America (and, later, the United States) fall out of view until they intersect with those of Britain or the U.S.[11] Given Smith's depiction of the nation's geographic progression, it is clear he not only viewed American history as something that had moved west, but also considered the westward progression an extension of one of the two colonial models he viewed as foundational.

After analyzing some of the more subtle details in Smith's "Historical Geography," we considered the broader, more overt argument he set out to make. Despite its chronological foundation in the 1600s, his map's overarching argument was about the antebellum United States geography. In Smith's view, the antebellum North, a region he conflated with the image of New England, was a region of freedom and benevolence, while the South nurtured slavery and avarice. In viewing the nation's geography this way, Smith was in good company.

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[7] Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

[8] Ibid., 2.

[9] For more on John H. Smith's map and the ways it reflected a conscious effort to use maps in order to shape Americans' understanding of their national history in the nineteenth century, see Susan Schulten, *Mapping the Nation: History and Cartography in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 56-70.

[10] Much of Juliana Barr's scholarship challenges the east-coast bias of early American history, but the specific material I assigned in this class was a recorded talk she delivered for Humanities Texas. See Juliana Barr, "The Spanish Colonial Period," lecture delivered at the *Lyndon Baines Johnson Library* (Austin, 2010) https://www.humanitiestexas.org/archives/digital-repository/barr-spanish-colonial-period-2010

[11] One consequence of early American history's east-coast bias is the common—but mistaken—perception that the histories of Native polities and different colonial powers constitute a pre-history of the United States. That, in turn, can lead to the equally flawed notion that the nation's eastern region is somehow older than its western territory. It is worth noting, however, that scholars of early North America have increasingly worked against this narrative bias. Indeed, the geographic boundaries of the field have increasingly expanded to reflect growing engagement with scholarship of different regions of the Americas—a historical trend that has led scholars in the field to adopt the regional description of "Vast Early America" to locate their work.

Although most students had never encountered Smith's map before, all them expressed a familiarity with the suggested binary.

Although created in the 1800s, the map reflected geographic assumptions that still operate today. It is not uncommon to encounter descriptors like the "Free North" and the "Slave South" in educational material like textbooks. And, for many reasons, those descriptors are justified. Students and I acknowledged some of the ways in which they are appropriate. The reality was that states in the United States' South maintained the enslavement of African Americans as a legal practice throughout the Antebellum period. Enslavement informed the social structures, economies, political and cultural practices of the region. Designating that same region the "Slave South" reflects the legal realities that systematically aimed at dehumanizing enslaved individuals.

In contrast, in the north (and in some western territories), state constitutions legally prohibited the practice of slavery. Referring to northern states as free states while labeling those in the south slave states, therefore, reflects that important legal reality. However, we also recognized that binaries such as these could obscure nuance. In particular we wondered about the north's classification. We questioned if the outlawing of slavery naturally led to the promotion of freedom in its broadest sense. To that question, we added the related query: Was the region as antithetical to slavery as its common designation suggests?

The Free North?

As students embarked on the project, the class, as a whole, considered the difficulties of the research ahead. We acknowledged that the histories we were searching for were not going to be straightforward. We were looking for sources, events, individuals, and practices in the antebellum North that were connected to slavery but in ways that were less directly linked to it than those which conventional histories have tended to privilege. We likewise recognized that those connections would be varied in nature. If we were looking to question the veracity of the "Free North" as a regional descriptor, we could do that through several different avenues. Students could accomplish that by identifying examples of individuals or organizations in the north benefitting from the existence of slavery in the south or even examining instances in which the meaning of freedom for free people of color was constrained in the north.

With that in mind, students formed groups based on the topics or themes they were most interested in exploring. One group, for example, opted to explore different ways in which northern industries and companies financially benefitted from slavery. Another group explored the existence of legislation that constrained the political freedoms of free Black Americans in northern states. Taking a more thematic approach, a third group set out to identify rhetoric and activity that attacked abolitionism and its proponents, whether symbolically and physically. The remaining groups took on topics that overlapped with some of the themes and topics other students were researching. For instance, one group examined connections between the nation's first northern universities and wealth generated through the transatlantic slavery.

Student research uncovered histories that were both surprising on their own and in relation to each other. The group focused on the economic profits of northern industries and companies, for example, identified histories that were specific to a single insurance company as well as general trends among the wider cotton industry in the north. One of the sources they discovered was an advertisement from a northern insurance company that marketed insurance policies on the human "property" of southern enslavers. At the same time, they were able to speak to broader connections between various cotton manufacturing companies in the New England region (see Image 5 in the Appendix). The scope of student research topics, therefore, often depended on the specific primary and secondary sources they could find.

The broadly defined topics or themes that each group took on also prompted them to place different kinds of historical events in conversation with each other. For instance, the group that examined various ways in which freedom and abolitionism came under attack in the north uncovered sources that described very different forms of violence in very different regions of the north. Images 2 and 3 in the Appendix below display two of their findings. The first episode describes racially-inspired vigilante violence directed at a building

designed to house abolitionists: Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Hall, which was funded by the state's Anti-Slavery Society in 1838. The other describes a short-lived abduction of a well-known northern abolitionist. As that group demonstrated, even when sources concerned dissimilar forms of violence, they could nevertheless spark important questions and reveal new histories when considered alongside each other.

After dedicating several weeks to researching their topics, students and I shifted our focus to the un-essay assignment's ultimate goal: the creation of an alternative map of the antebellum North. The platform I chose to use for the project was Knightlab's StoryMap JS. It offered many advantages including the fact that it was free, easy to use, and could contain all of the class's findings in a single map. However, the aspect that most appealed to me when designing the assignment was its storytelling features. As its name implies, StoryMap JS enables its users to map both places and stories about those places at the same time (see Images 1-8 in the Appendix for sample entries). Given that the project directed students to produce an alternative map of an engrained geography and the histories it privileged, the platform proved to be an ideal tool.

Within their groups, student decided which of their research findings to highlight (each group produced three StoryMap entries). They then crafted short, digestible overviews of the histories they wanted to communicate, weaving together description and analysis (with each member writing one or two entries that featured histories they had taken the lead in researching). As they crafted their narratives, we discussed the importance of audience. Like more traditional essay assignments, students made thoughtful choices about organization and evidence use. However, because the finished un-essay would exist as a digital and publicly-accessible interactive map, audience factored into class conversations much more frequently than has been the case when I have assigned essays. I also noted that students were afforded the ability to take on the role of the assignment's audience in new ways. Because each narrative overview was relatively short, we were able to do a general class peer-review session in which we read and provided feedback on every entry. One consequence of this was that each group had the opportunity to share their findings while simultaneously considering—and seeing—the ways their work connected to that of their peers.

The final product was a multi-layered map we titled "The Free North?" It was a deviation from the title I had originally planned: "Remapping the Antebellum North." During our class peer review session, students and I recognized that the stories the project highlighted were doing more than merely producing a different cartographic depiction of the United States in the decades prior to the Civil War. Both individually and collectively, the mapped stories would equip their audience to not only consume alternative histories, but to formulate questions about the region of their own. "The Free North?" was an open-ended interactive text designed to invite its audience to remap a familiar geography alongside it. As a result, the interactive map that was the result of an un-essay student assignment designed to engage with geospatial and digital humanities pedagogy became a pedagogical tool of its own. In fact, since the spring of 2020, I have regularly assigned it to students in my U.S. History survey classes.

Concluding Thoughts

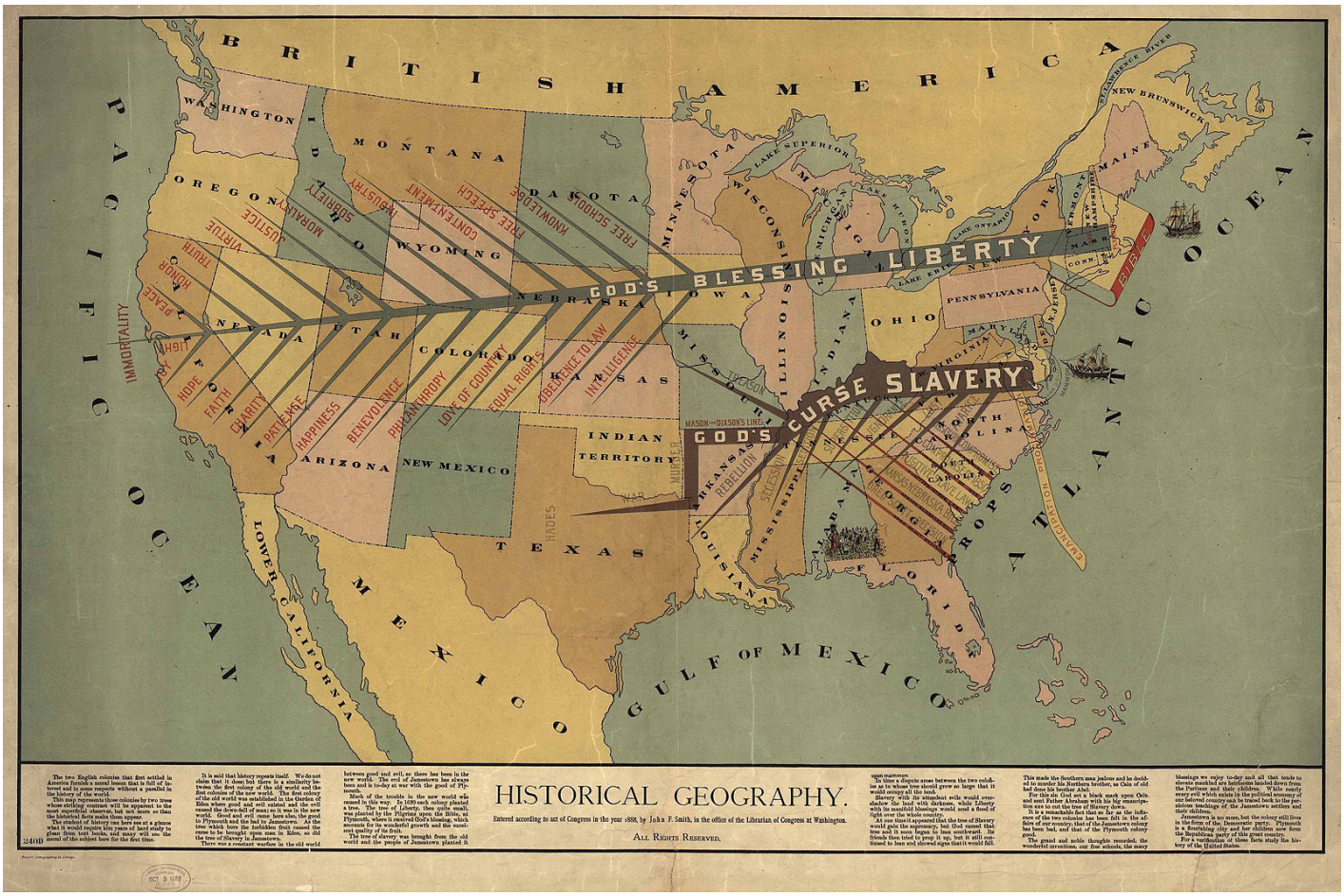
Rethinking maps and the ways they inform historical narratives can take various forms. The specific un-essay assignment I designed revolved around the remapping of a relatively old source (a map produced in the late 1800s). Yet, past maps are not the only cartographic texts that shape the ways we perceive places and the stories we associate with them. Recently-produced maps can have similar effects. And notably, they continue to be utilized as standard visual aids in history educational material and textbooks. Indeed, one of the first pages you will encounter when opening the most recent edition of Eric Foner's *Give Me Liberty!* (one of the most commonly adopted history textbooks in high school and university U.S. History classes) is a map of the political boundaries of the nation.[12] Unless we take the time to critically consider the narrative power of these kinds of reference maps, we risk adopting both their biases and their blind spots. As "The Free North?" helps

[12] Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History* 6th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2019).

illustrate, one of the most visually impactful ways to undermine the influence of an engrained geography is to create alternative maps of the same place.

Appendix

Map:



Map 1: John F. Smith, “Historical Geography” (1888)

Images

A Note on the selected images below: The images below represent a sample of the StoryMap entries students submitted as part of their projects. Each entry featured a short narrative of a history different groups chose to spotlight as a way to reframe the engrained geography of the Antebellum United States. At the bottom of their entries, groups listed their works cited information as well as suggested sources for further reading.

An interactive, digital map of student entries is available on my personal website: www.jacquelinereynoso.com

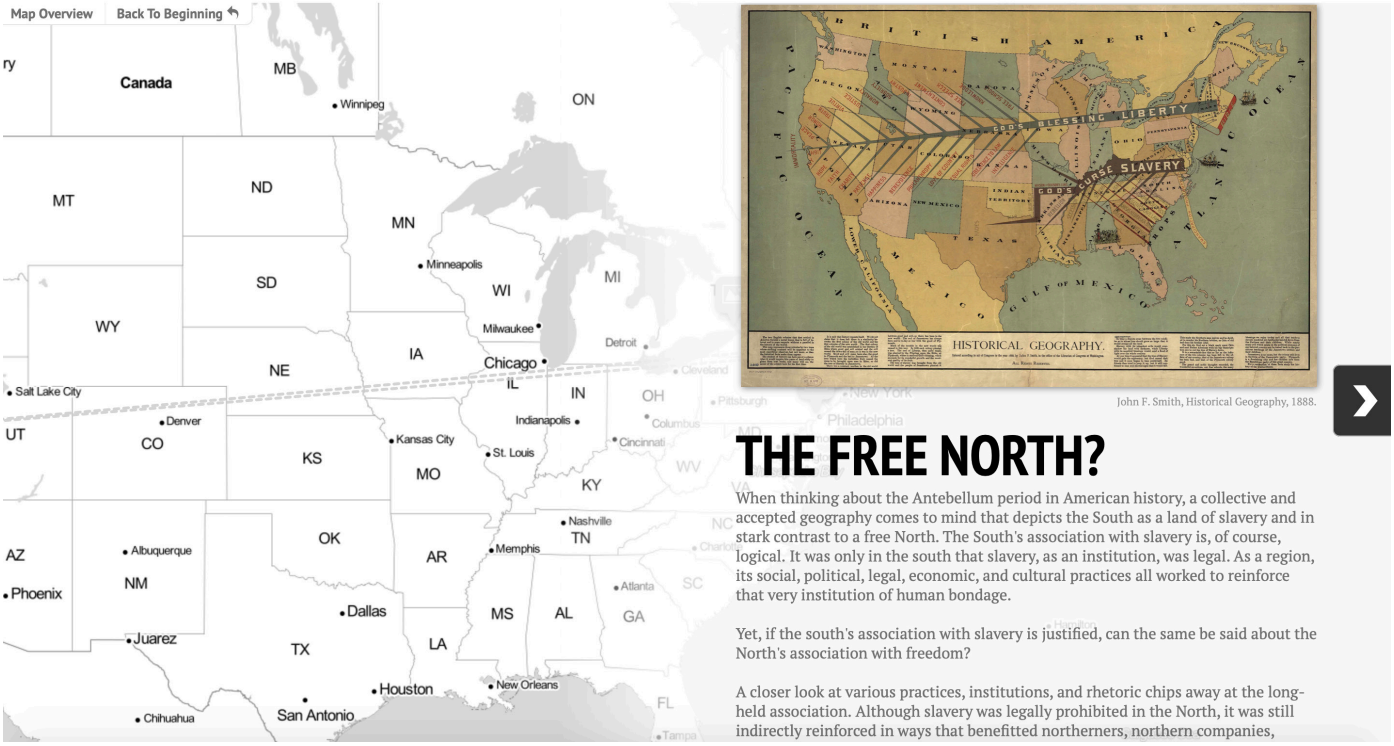


Image 1: "The Free North?" (Map Overview)

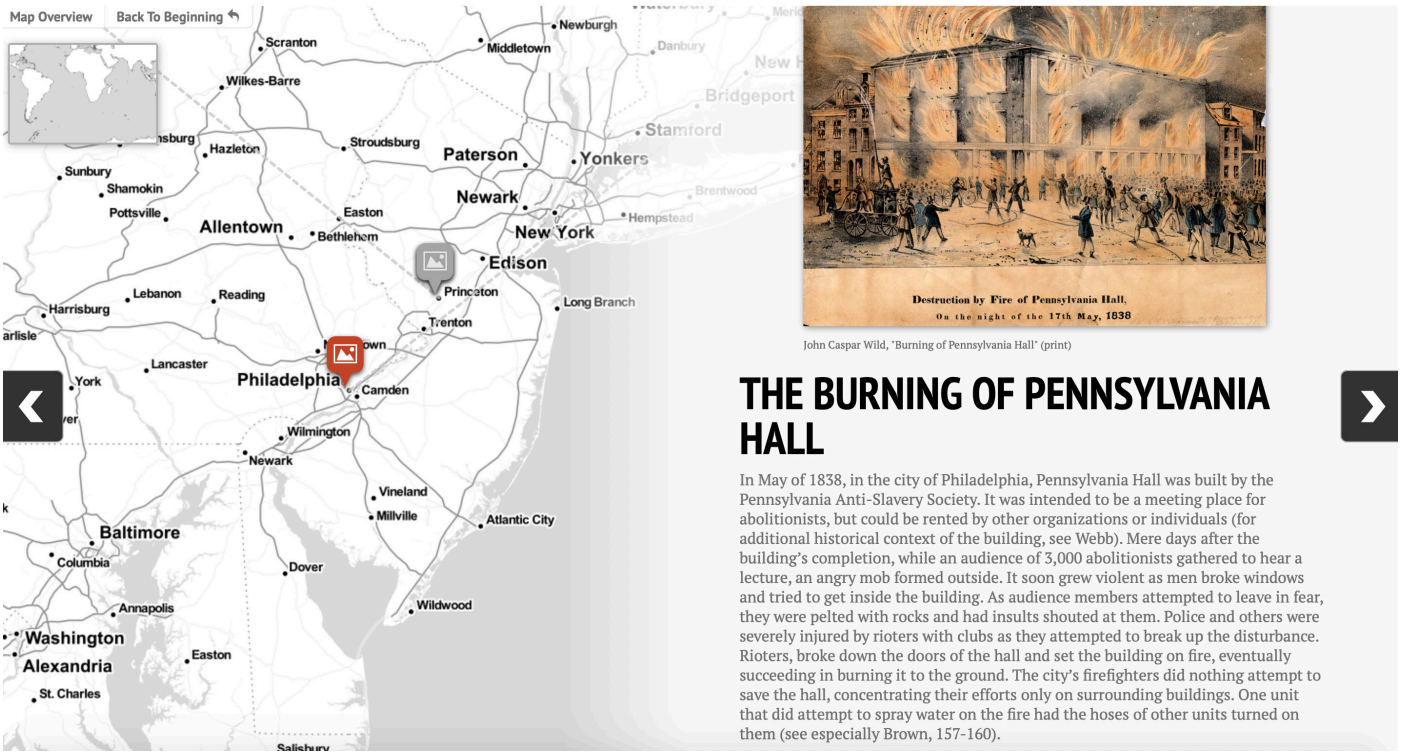


Image 2: "The Burning of Pennsylvania Hall"

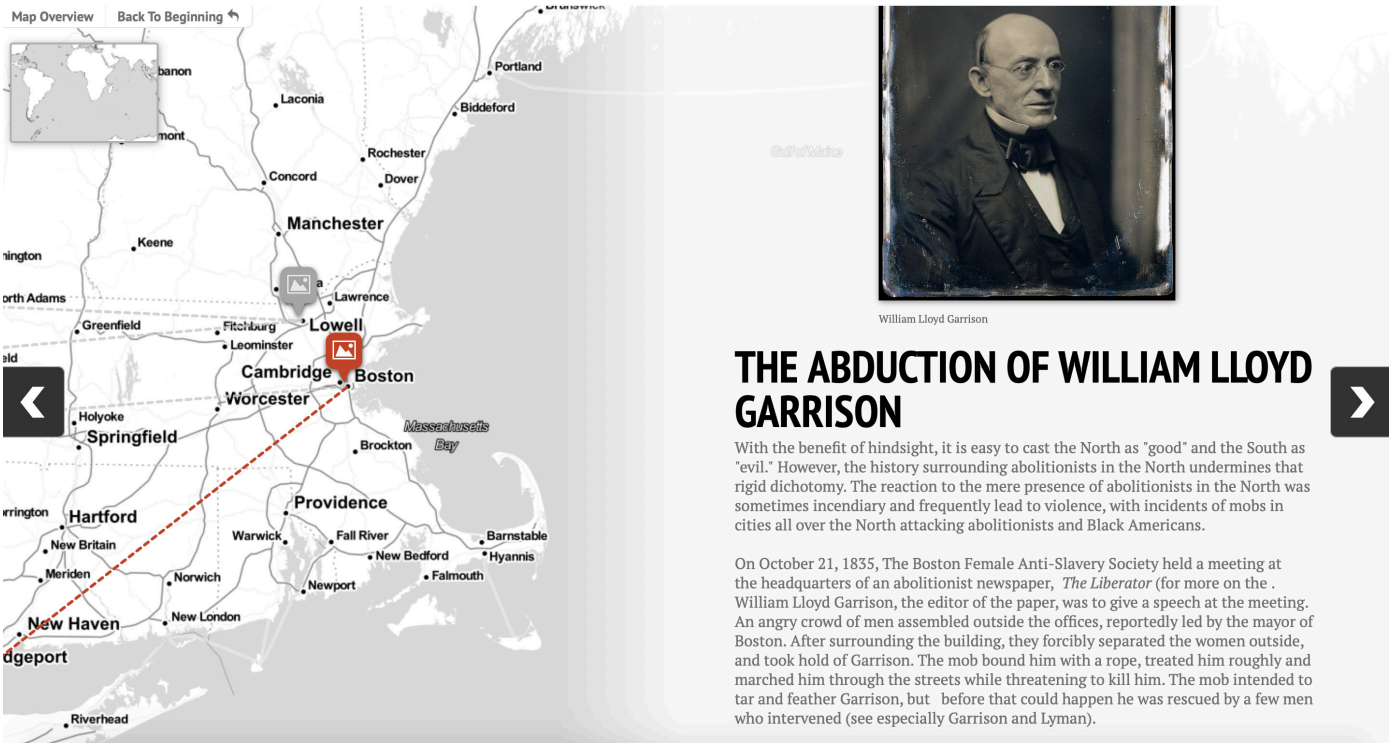


Image 3: "The Abduction of William Lloyd Garrison"

Image 4: "Slavery in California"

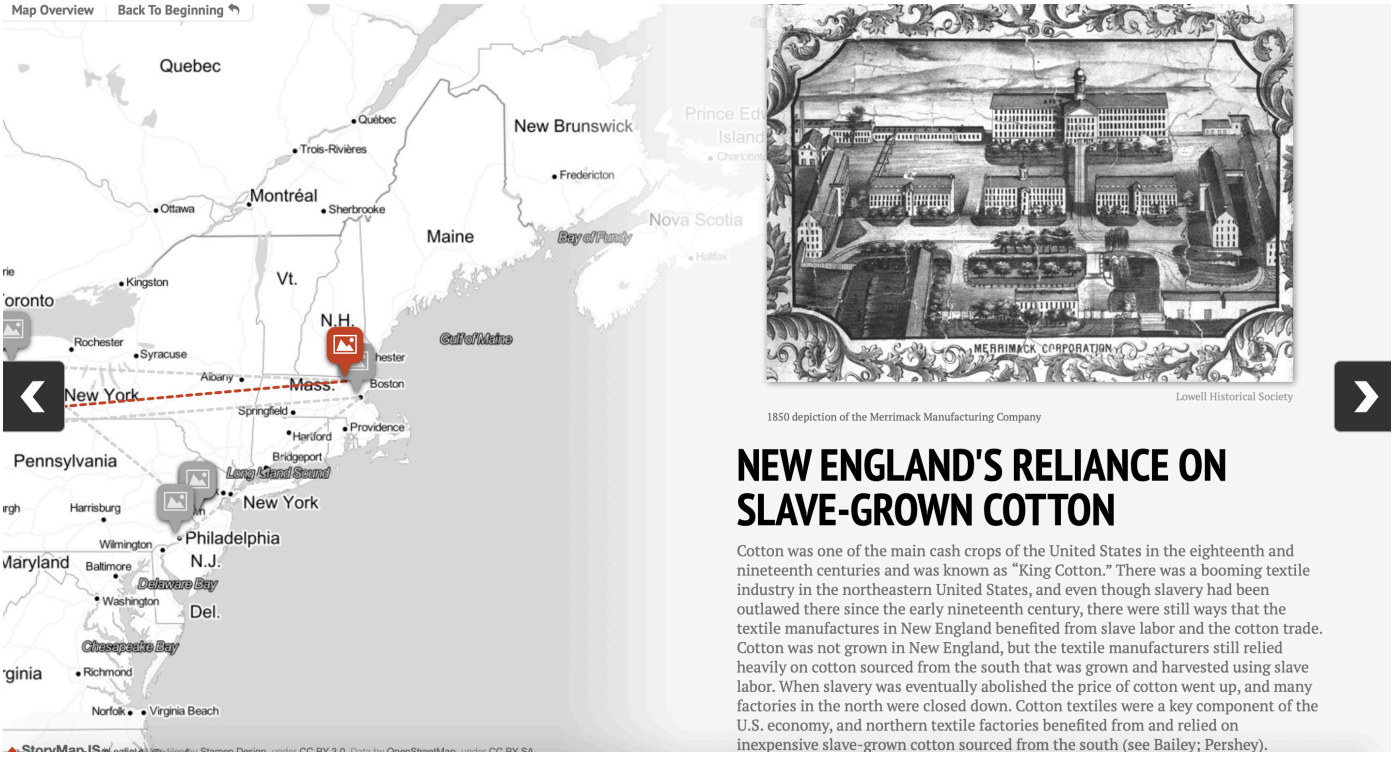


Image 5: "New England's Reliance on Slave-Grown Cotton"

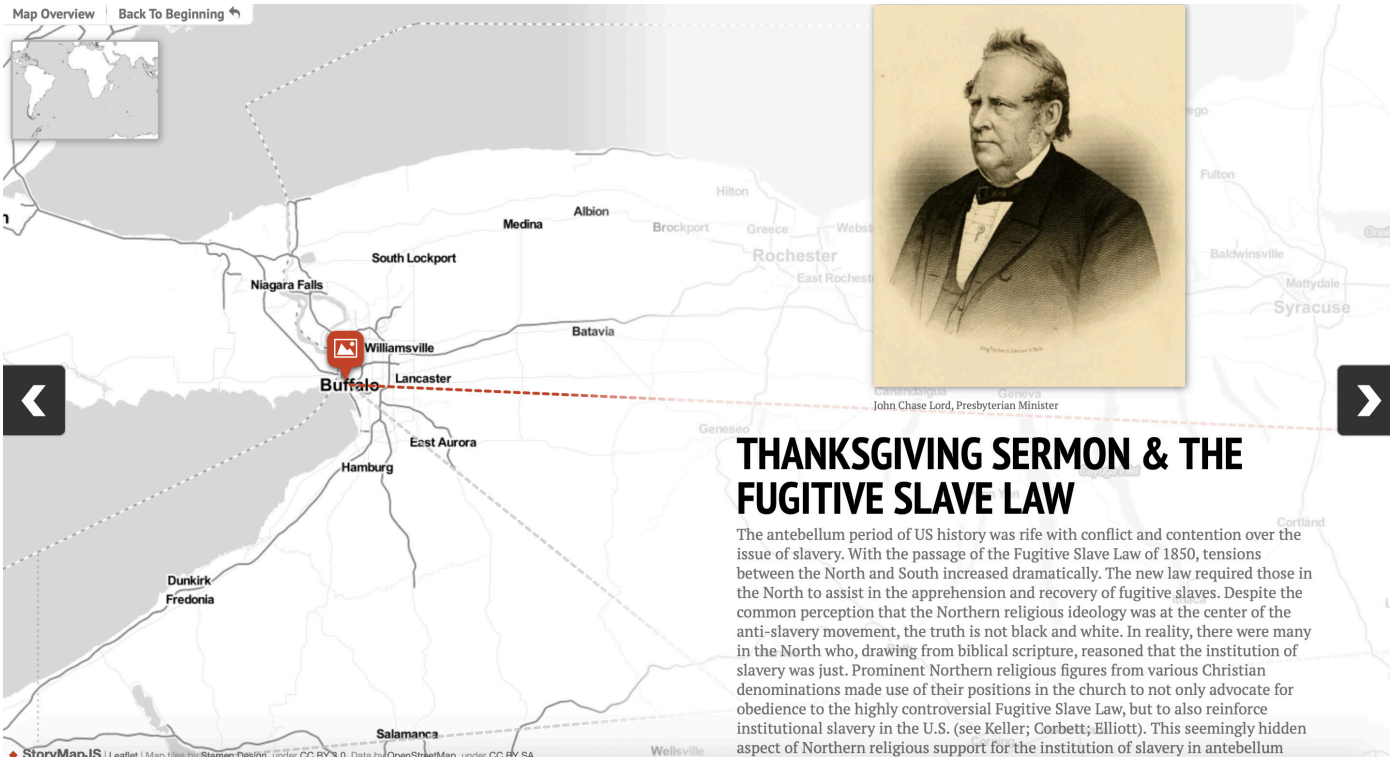


Image 6: "Thanksgiving Sermon & the Fugitive Slave Law"

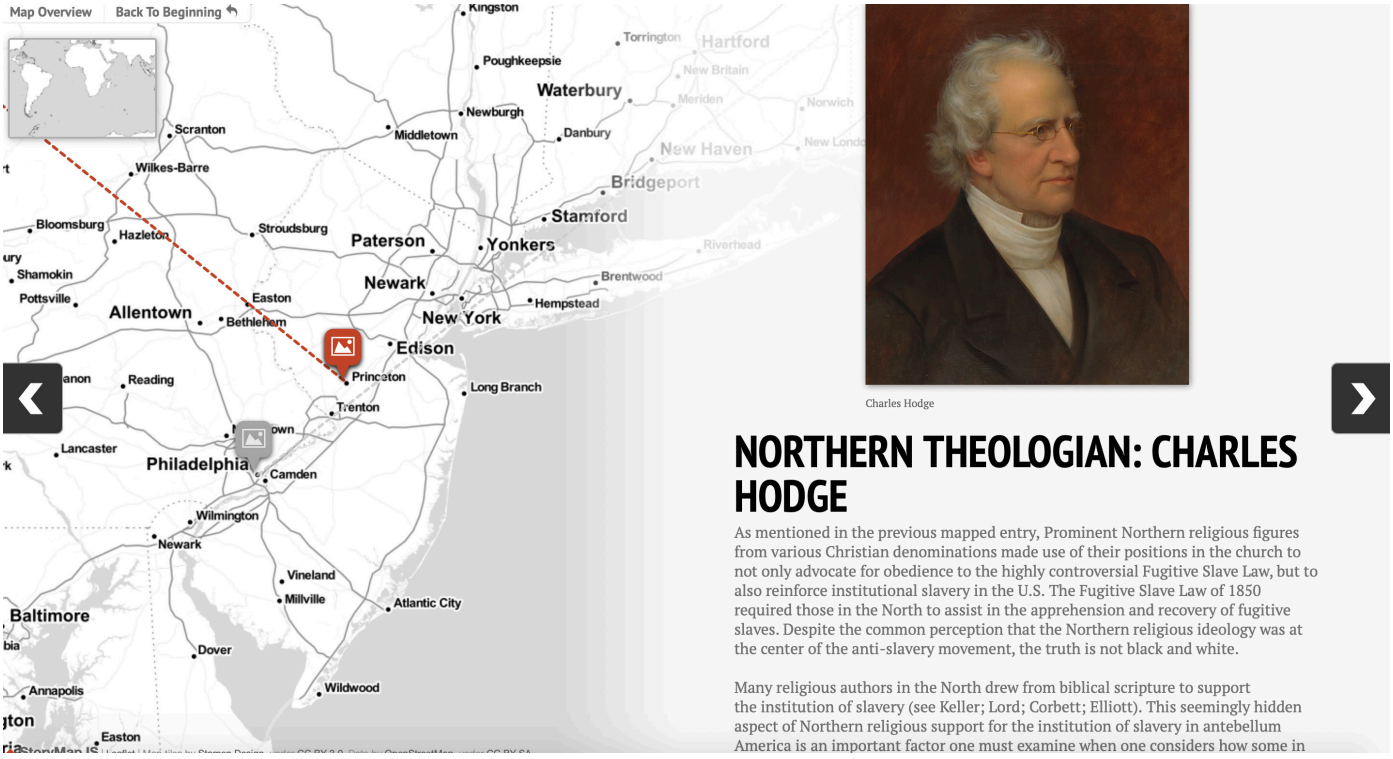


Image 7: "Northern Theologian: Charles Hodge"

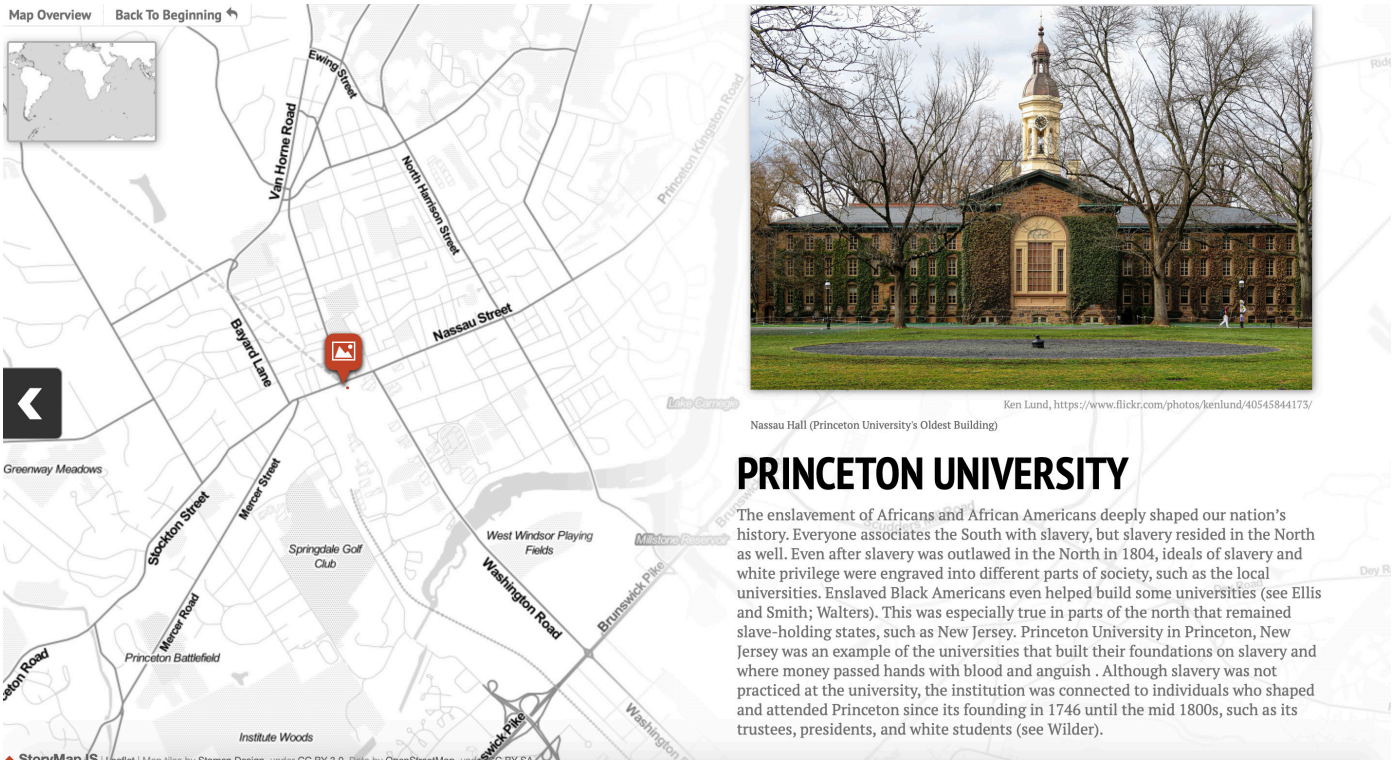


Image 8: "Princeton University"

The Methodology is the Message: Citations, Sources, and Memory in Revolutionary Unessays

Nora Slonimsky
Iona University and ITPS

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When Marshall McLuhan wrote that the "medium is the message," he was not, per se, talking about unessays.[1] Essentially arguing that forms of communication and technology rather than their content were the source of audience engagement, *Understanding Media* was published more than fifty years ago, generating debate ever since.[2] Like countless scholars across disciplinary boundaries, as an early Americanist who specializes in histories of copyright, I am deeply interested in the broad relationship between media and messages in my research and pedagogy. But like so many others, I did not anticipate how relevant they would become to my every-day circumstances since March of 2020. Over the last year in particular, I began to think about this relationship directly in my teaching by incorporating unessays. Layered in the format of a course with dual in-person and virtual components, unessays simultaneously embodied multiple aspects of the themes we studied, particularly in subjects of memory, digital history, and revolution, while also providing students with tangible, wide-ranging ways in which to express historical knowledge and interpretation.

Amidst the abrupt expansion of virtual and hybrid teaching brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, educators continue to confront benefits and challenges of learning across different mediums. I was no exception and spent the 2021 – 2022 academic year remotely teaching a class focused on historical memory in the age of revolutions and digital humanities where my students gathered physically in a classroom. For this special issue on "Teaching History with the Unessay," I considered multiple ways in which I could discuss my experiences, not least of all by incorporating some aspects of what I learned through unessays myself! What follows is a reflection on how my use of unessays was dually grounded in this interest in the relationship between forms and content of expression alongside the complex circumstances of trying to be an effective and supportive educator in a virtual format. Ultimately, I found teaching with unessays to be as much about the wide-ranging, innovative, and creative forms that students crafted as the learning process in which they were made, a process deeply embedded in the work of history and of forming clear understanding the past.

Over the last several years, I learned about unessays largely through social media. Historians like Cate Denial and Christopher Jones wrote movingly about their experiences with the format, and in turn referenced other scholars from multiple disciplines who inspired the practice.[3] While I was intrigued by what sounded like a creative and versatile option for students, I was not sure if such a project would fit within the structures of the classes I was teaching at the time: a 300 level seminar; "From Hamilton to Mickey Mouse," a class on the history of copyright and politics; and a survey-style introductory course, "Timeless Issues in History." But by the fall of 2021, two sets of circumstances came together where I felt reasonably confident to try unessays out.

The first circumstance was an exciting one. After several years of planning at my institution, a liberal arts institution in the north east, myself and several colleagues began moving forward with digital humanities

[1] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).
[2] For examples of studies that engage with McLuhan in wide-ranging ways, see: Rianka Singh and Sarah Sharma, Re-Understanding Media: Feminist Extensions of Marshall McLuhan (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2022); Alan Galey, "Imagining Marshall McLuhan as a Digital Reader: an Experiment in Applied Joyce," in "Reading McLuhan Reading," ed. Paula McDowell, special issue, *Textual Practice*. 35. 9 (2021): 1525–49; Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as An Agent of Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). For discussion of Eisenstein and McLuhan's scholarly dynamic, see: Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin, eds., *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).
[3] For Cate Denial's reflections on using un-essays, see: Catherine Denial, "The Unessay," CatherineDenial.org, April 16th, 2019, https://catherinedenial.org/blog/uncategorized/the-unessay/. Christopher Jones shared his experiences as well: Christopher Jones, "Assigning the Unessay in the US Survey," on *The Junto: A Group Blog on Early American History*, June 26th, 2018, https://earlyamericanists.com/2018/06/26/assigning-the-unessay-in-the-u-s-survey/. Jones cites Emily Suzanne Clark, Ryan Cordell, and Daniel Paul O'Donnell and the links to their work are available through his essay.

and public history curriculum this past academic year.[4] As a centerpiece to those efforts, in the fall of 2021 I began teaching a course called "The Age of Revolutions and Historical Memory," which had both digital and public history components. "The Age of Revolutions and Historical Memory" is organized around three units, with unit focused on the American revolution, unit two on the Haitian and French revolutions, and unit three considering how each movement is connected and remembered through the present day. Rather than a midterm or final exam, the central project of the course has four parts: a topic proposal; a bibliography; a digital component; and a final essay.

Given the incorporation of public history elements, including discussions of commemoration, museum studies, and history media and communication, an unessay where students could consider so many mediums, from curating an exhibit to gaming, seemed an intuitive option. Many students in my classes are not history majors but the fundamental skills that history education, public and academic, provides are relevant to so many aspects of intellectual and pre-professional development. The unessay option empowers students to play to their strengths and hone skills that are at once grounded in critical thinking and contextual understanding that also relate to their specific interests and goals. However, for students who were intimidated or uninterested in an unessay, they also had the option to complete a traditional research paper.

Similarly, the digital humanities emphasis in "The Age of Revolutions and Historical Memory," provided tremendous opportunities for unessays amidst scholarship at the "intersection of humanities and technology." Not only does digital history evoke relevant, timeless questions over what role mediums, methods, or tools of communication play in how we understand and interpret both our past and present, we took a very 'big tent' approach to digital work. Students included digital platforms from social media and podcasting to DH and data science methods like data visualization and computational analysis.[5] Importantly, digital tools were not solely for students using the unessay option, but for those invested in research papers as well.

The second circumstance, however, was more difficult. Although the majority of my colleagues resumed in-person instruction last fall, for medical reasons I am still unable to be in the classroom even though my students meet together on campus. With the support of a classroom assistant and a combination of zoom and OWL projectors, I taught virtually through a large screen while my students were physically in the room together.[6] It was a surreal experience where one can both marvel at the technology that facilitates such connection while also struggling under the limitations of separation. On the one hand, moving forward with unessays for the first time when I was not able to be in the classroom was a risk: I had limited experience teaching the assignment and was nervous that I would inadvertently confuse or create more work for my students as I navigated the unusual format.[7] But on the other hand, because I was relying on more digital components due to the themes of the course and my own teaching situation, there was a broader foundation for unessays than in any class I had previously instructed.

I taught "The Age of Revolutions and Historical Memory" with unessays in the fall of 2021 and the spring

[4] See: Edward L. Ayers, "The Pasts and Futures of Digital History," www.vcdh.virginia.edu/PastsFutures.html (Virginia Center for Digital History); Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Jeff McClurken, "Digital Literacy and the Undergraduate Curriculum," in Hacking the Academy: New Approaches to Scholarship and Teaching from Digital Humanities, eds. Daniel J. Cohen and Tom Scheinfeldt (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

[5] For this definition of digital humanities and other resources, see the Digital Humanities Literacy Guidebook: https://cmu-lib.github.io/dhlg/what-are-dh/. The DHLG is offered through Carnegie Mellon University as part of a grant from the Mellon Foundation. It is overseen by Scott B. Weingart, Program Director of Digital Humanities at Carnegie Mellon University, with key contributions from Susan Grunewald, Matthew Lincoln, Agile Humanities Agency, and many other community contributors. Please see the site for a full list of contributors. Thank you to Micki Kaufman for recommending this resource.

[6] Many thanks to Alban Rama and Elijah Williams for their work as course assistants and to my students in HST 316 for their patience with the dual virtual and in-person formats of the class.

[7] See: Rikke Toft Nørgård, "Theorising hybrid lifelong learning," *British Journal of Educational Technology*. (2021): 1-15. Thank you to Kevin Gannon and the 2022 Bright Institute for this recommendation.

of 2022 Rather than a preassigned subject, students selected any aspect of the Age of Revolutions – event, actions of an individual or group, or an issue, debate, or circumstance that speaks to a theme or idea of interest – and built on that topic in each assignment. I provided an overview of more than twenty ideas for an unessay but students could interpret those options as widely as they wished or come up with a concept of their own altogether. Drawing on unessay reflections, conversations, and feedback, it seems a large reason why students selected the unessay option was because it afforded them the opportunity to express their historical findings in a creative way, especially when they had concerns about their ability to produce a traditional essay. Conversely, those who chose the traditional essay option found themselves intimidated by the open-endedness of the unessay, unsure of what medium they could use that would come across clearly and effectively.

In addition to the focus of the course and the technological circumstances, another part of what drew me to unessays were the specific learning goals around which the class was oriented. As a centerpiece for digital humanities, the course emphasizes digital skills: students needed to come away from the class with an introductory understanding of what DH is and how it relates to their individual studies, so a range of assessment made sense. Similarly, students also needed to gain a degree of content knowledge about the American, French, and Haitian revolutions, and how each movement was remembered over time.

Other learning goals were university wide. As part of its core curriculum, Iona University has signature learning outcomes in each class, and for "The Age of Revolutions and Historical Memory," those outcomes were grounded in critical thinking. A broad yet essential skill, I framed critical thinking in terms of several aspects of what historians do, specifically understanding chronology, or the order in which things happen, and context, or what particular circumstances shape a given event, individual, or idea. Doing so not only supports students in in their work as developing historians but also in honing their awareness and skills in media and information literacy, civic engagement, and other personal or professional interests.

With these tools in place, students then considered what has changed over time and what issues remain constant, similar, or unresolved. For a course that considered the memory of the Age of Revolutions today, and indeed, the benefits and challenges of framing the late eighteenth century as an "age of revolutions," the ability to consider effectively and substantially what is similar about the past, what is different, and how both impact the present-day was the central outcome of the class. Doing so, I'd argue, encourages students to think confidently because they know their perspective is grounded in deeply researched and solidly based evidence.

This benchmark was achieved in the unessay project. It was evident in student feedback alone, not to mention the range and depth of the unessays themselves, that students formed grounded interpretations of connections and change over time that spoke to their specific perspective. Most clearly, students felt confident to think critically and expansively, particularly involving digital media. One student observed that "deciding to do the podcast format felt super freeing," especially because they were "able to incorporate some non-traditional sources."[8] Frequently, students who opted to proceed with the traditional essay option – and these were excellent, compelling papers as well – referenced feeling unsure that they would be able to do a "good job" as the reason for not selecting the unessay. Another student, a future educator, wrote that "as an adolescent education major concentrated in history, I think that many students would appreciate, as I did, the chance to present and share their historical findings in a way that helps showcase their artistic [skills] as some many not feel confident in their essay writing abilities."[9] "I can see myself using this method in my own future classroom," they concluded.

While there are innumerable benefits and (perhaps a few challenges) with unessays, I came away with three central observations that related to the goals of "The Age of Revolutions and Historical Memory." The first involves citation practices. One of my initial concerns with assigning unessays had to do with citations, and concerns that students would miss out on the related engagement with historiography, the peer review process,

[8] Anonymous, "HST 316 in-class evaluation," May 4th, 2022.
[9] Anonymous, "HST 316 in-class evaluation," May 4th, 2022.

and most specifically, the importance of giving credit to others. Citations are, as Karin Wulf and others have noted, essential to information and media literacy, and part of this is due to the methodical nature of tracing where evidence comes from, from primary sources to secondary analysis.[10] Yet another element of citation practice is the unpacking and clarification of which sources are which, a critical skill that teachers, myself included, overlook as we wrongly assume that students are clear on what sources come from the evidentiary record and what are analyses of them.[11]

While students produced bibliographies and companion reflections to their unessays, where citation practices most clearly came to bear was in the actual composition of the projects themselves. In several podcasts, for example, students referenced primary artifacts and interdisciplinary scholars, explaining in their narratives –sometimes fictional, others non-fiction—how these references formed the foundation for their own interpretations. To be sure, in other unessay formats this was a bit more challenging: detailed illustrations or artwork relied more on the supporting pieces (bibliographies and reflections) to explain the influence more directly on their pieces, but even the brief paratext that accompanied portraits and designs provided references.

In a similar vein to citation, I want to take a moment here to thank all the Iona students who kindly agreed to share images of their unessays, included in the appendix, and gave their permission to reference their work. To respect their privacy and that of their classmates, all students referenced in this article will remain anonymous, but I do want to highlight their generosity. Moreover, in providing generative and good-faith feedback about the unessay assignments, I was able to better understand what worked well about the project, and where I might make improvements.

Unessays proved extremely effective at getting at the many stakes of who, how, and why we cite the intellectual labor of others. As I considered why, my speculation is that this may lie in the independent nature of the work. Rather than each student responding to an identical or uniform assignment, an approach that I also think has tremendous value and one I've used in plenty of pedagogical settings, the unessay asks students to do a lot of deliberation on their own. Realities that historians frequently face, such as archival silences or gaps in evidence, ensuring multiple voices and perspective, and recognizing the work of others, became more immediate in unessays because not only did students have to select their own topic – students writing research papers did this as well – but they also had to create their own format and structure. The additional layer, I believe, rendered the stakes of citations more immediate.[12]

In selecting what they found to be the most effective medium of communication, students also considered the impact of their historical analysis. Each unessay took into account the value and relationship between accurate information and thoughtful research. As I read, viewed, and listened to various unessays, nearly each student addressed to some extent the connection between the primary and secondary sources they consulted and media and information literacy. Given the thematic focus of the course, students also observed parallels between contemporary discussions about citation practices, and how those discussions involving knowledge production stretched back to the eighteenth century relationship between enlightenment and empire.[13]

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[10] Karin Wulf, "Could footnotes be the key to winning the disinformation wars," *The Washington Post*, August 29th, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/08/29/could-footnotes-be-key-winning-disinformation-wars/.

[11] The weekly readings for the class were broken down into primary, secondary, and contemporary sources. My goal was to reinforce and clarify each week the fundamental differences between sources in the historical past, historiography and scholarly publications, and contemporary resources, from present-day news articles, documentaries, podcasts, and other mediums. The goal was and is to model effective citation practices and clarify the different ways in which one can determine reliability and relevance of sources.

[12] To contextualize some of the stakes involving citations, students read contemporary essays and listened to podcasts which focused on practices. For examples, please see: Anne Bailey, "Citations Are a Metaphor for Erasure in American History," *History News Network*, October 22nd, 2019, https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/173358; Michael Hattem, "The Historiography of the American Revolution," *Journal of the American Revolution*, August 27, 2013, https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/08/historiography-of-american-revolution/.

[13] Students often used the free online textbook, *The American Yawp*, as a reference. Available via: http://www.americanyawp.com/.

For many students, their consideration of the evidence at hand, or what was left behind in relation to their given topic, was echoed in the making of their unessays. For example, while some students focused closely on the physical expressions in which revolutionary thought was disseminated, from a detailed illustration of a printing press to propaganda depictions in the French revolution, others focused on deeply personal experiences, from a YouTube documentary on enslavement in Saint Domingue to a one-act play described an enslaved person's point of view on American independence (see appendix one).[14] Even with such varied approaches, each student was aware of the gaps in that record, and deployed specific elements of their unessay medium to address them, incorporating, as for example in the one-act play, sources directly into the narrative.

In considering the impact of sources and recognition on their research, I observed a second aspect of working with unessays: a process of linking sources of the past to mediums of the present. In this sense, unessays, not unlike historical writing, are also a process rather than a singular product.[15] As students crafted their unessays over the course of a four-part scaffolded project, they created unessays that analyzed the Age of Revolutions infused with contemporary components. For example, while one student created a physical story board of the legacies of the Stamp Act, others crafted a virtual exhibit of Washington memorabilia, a revolutionary Jeopardy, and a YouTube mini documentary on the interconnectivity of the origins of revolution in Haiti, France, and the United States (see appendix two). Not only did these unique interpretations of the assignment reflect individual arguments and interpretations, but they themselves became artifacts of the past year, incorporating technologies of the current moment. While all work, including traditional essays, are of course products of their time, the material presentation of unessays only further emphasizes that context.

To this end, each unessay either emphasized contemporary connections between revolution and today or key changes, and presented their historical knowledge as deeply relevant to other interests and concerns. One student, for example, considered the figures of Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement while another contrasted the use of specific language and texts in the late eighteenth century with nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century protest movements.[16] Regardless of whether students observed connections or changes, they considered how the composition of their unessays related to the historical subject. Such a connection did not mean that this particular student viewed the two movements as the same, far from it, but rather made the compelling case that better understanding anti-slavery, anti-imperialist struggles helped them to better understand their contemporary moment.

The unessays students created resulted in artifacts of 2021 and 2022 that in turn embodied a central tenant of our course and my third observation: levels of historical memory. In one sense, as Michelle Miller states, "questions about memory go to the heart of who we are and how we see the world" whether it is about the process of remembering or the subject of memory itself.[17] Creating unessays emphasized for students how historical memory is both a product of the past and of the present, a reflection of their subjects of study and of the contemporary context in which they created them.

Unessays in "The Age of Revolutions and Historical Memory" were akin to mousetraps, plays within plays of how unique aspects of the Age of Revolutions relate to (or sharply differ from) issues today. By choosing an interview with the Marquise de Lafayette, one student keenly juxtaposed how people from the past might experience current tensions, particularly around commemoration, while another used their skills as an artist to distinguish the political choices of different leaders in revolutionary France (see appendix three). Not only

[14] All student references throughout this essay are kept anonymous to protect their privacy and no grades are referenced. Images in the appendix are used with permission.

[15] See: Genesea M. Carter and David Korostyshevsky, "Valuing Process Over Product: Using Writing to Teach History in the Undergraduate History Classroom Authors," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 46 (1):10-22.

[16] Students relied specifically on Marlene Daut, *Tropics of Haiti: Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1789-1865* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015) and Chelsea Steiber, *Haiti's Paper War: Post-Independence Writing, Civil War, and the Making of the Republic, 1804–1954* (New York: NYU Press, 2020).

[17] Michelle D. Miller, *Remembering and Forgetting in the Age of Technology* (West Virginia University Press: Morgantown, 2014), 14.

did the process help students to better understand the relevance of history to today and the importance of change over time, but how their unessays are a product of this specific period as well. As a result, both the thematic goals of the course as well as critical thinking via context and chronology were equally and fully addressed.

This brings me to the only challenge I encountered with the unessay, one that involves assessment and reinforced the value of interdisciplinarity to historical pedagogy.[18] Ultimately, it became clear to me that unessays are, in many respects, a quintessential interdisciplinary methodology as well as assignment. While the goals of the assignment, scaffolded and unfolding over a full semester, were clearly framed, there was not as self-evident a grading structure as with a traditional essay. I have grappled with the use of rubrics in the past, choosing not to use one with the unessay but still providing a break-down of different components each project needed to address. If all components – engaging with the prompt and central questions of the course, completing each step, and presenting a clear and persuasive interpretation of the assignment – were met, then that earned high marks. I was fortunate that in my first year of unessays all students met those standards. That may not always be the case, as some students may need more precise metrics. I will personally benefit from becoming more informed on scholarship of teaching and learning that considers how to most effectively and inclusively evaluate (and support) interdisciplinary student scholarship that brings together historical work with creative and other disciplinary tools.

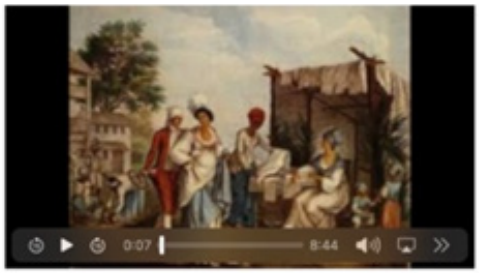
There were and are many moving parts in my experience with unessays which made them tremendously valuable both for myself and my students. As an educator, they allowed me to experiment with historical and contemporary stakes of communication in my own unique situation and to support my students doing the same. When it comes to unessays, there is no dichotomy between tools and ideas, learning content or critical thinking, or even, I'd argue, between "traditional" and "new" media. Foundational research and historical methods are just as essential, and in fact reinforced, in unessays, particularly when the subjects are as complex as revolutions and how they are remembered.

With contentious "history wars" occupying news headlines and the approaching 250th anniversary of American independence, the scaffolded process of unessays puts digital history directly in conversation with continuous debates in the study of the history of the United States and the very immediate circumstances of 2022.[19] Citation practices, media and information literacy, primary and secondary sources, interdisciplinary engagement, and the forms that they take are foundational to the study of history. Through their unessays, students produced outstanding, wildly creative, and inspiring scholarship which emphasizes how relevant communicating historical knowledge is.

[18] See: James Grossman and Julia Brookins, "Assessment Is What We Make of It," *The Journal of American History* 103, no. 4 (2016): 1132-1137; Ryan Jopp and Jay Cohen, "Choose your own assessment – assessment choice for students in online higher education," *Teaching in Higher Education: Critical Perspectives*. 27.6 (2022): 738- 755.

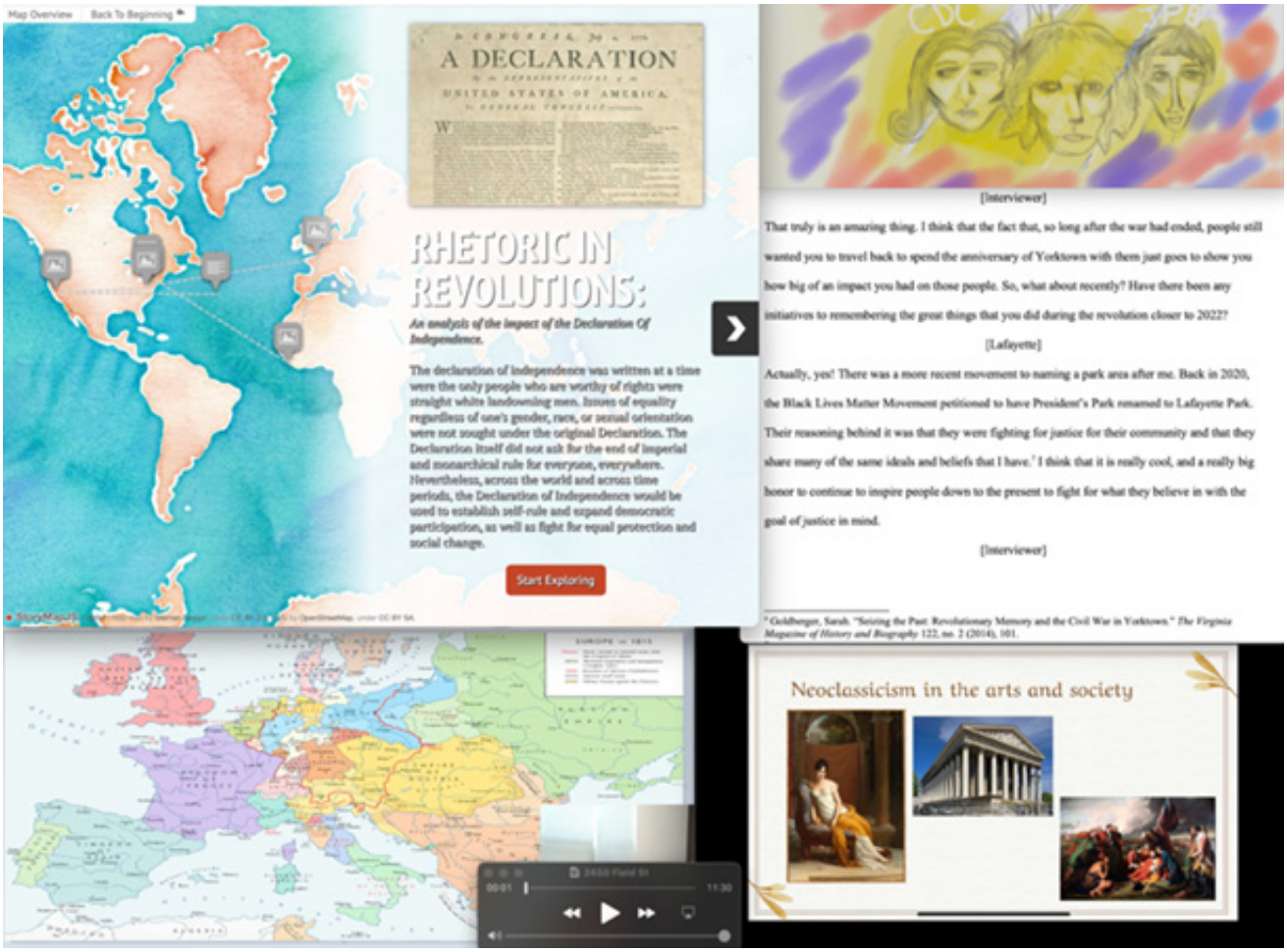
[19] For examples of the term, see: David W. Blight, "The Fog of History Wars," *The New Yorker*, June 9th, 2021, https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-fog-of-history-wars.

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Appendix 3


Map Overview
Back To Beginning
A DECLARATION
RHETORIC IN REVOLUTIONS:
An analysis of the impact of the Declaration Of Independence.
The declaration of independence was written at a time were the only people who are worthy of rights were straight white landowning men. Issues of equality regardless of one's gender, race, or sexual orientation were not sought under the original Declaration. The Declaration itself did not ask for the end of imperial and monarchical rule for everyone, everywhere. Nevertheless, across the world and across time periods, the Declaration of Independence would be used to establish self-rule and expand democratic participation, as well as fight for equal protection and social change.
Start Exploring
[Interviewer]
That truly is an amazing thing. I think that the fact that, so long after the war had ended, people still wanted you to travel back to spend the anniversary of Yorktown with them just goes to show you how big of an impact you had on those people. So, what about recently? Have there been any initiatives to remembering the great things that you did during the revolution closer to 2022?
[Lafayette]
Actually, yes! There was a more recent movement to naming a park area after me. Back in 2020, the Black Lives Matter Movement petitioned to have President's Park renamed to Lafayette Park. Their reasoning behind it was that they were fighting for justice for their community and that they share many of the same ideals and beliefs that I have.' I think that it is really cool, and a really big honor to continue to inspire people down to the present to fight for what they believe in with the goal of justice in mind.
[Interviewer]
Goldberger, Sarah. "Seizing the Past: Revolutionary Memory and the Civil War in Yorktown." The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 122, no. 2 (2014), 101.
Neoclassicism in the arts and society

The Un-essay in the Music History Classroom

Reba Wissner
Columbus State University

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Confession time: I love teaching but I hate grading, especially when I have 50 students writing a paper on the same topic. I confronted this problem several years ago when I was an adjunct who had far more students than I have now (I often taught seven or eight classes per semester). I had just joined Twitter and came across a conversation about something called "The Un-Essay." The title intrigued me and I clicked on the link that I found from historian Cate Denial.[1] After more exploring, I found out that the un-essay was being used in so many different disciplines. After scouring prompts, I began to think about what this would mean for music history classes and how having the choice of topic and medium would not only benefit students, but also benefit my sanity in a semester where I had around 250 final projects to grade. So, in Fall 2019, I began my un-essay journey.

This essay will discuss my use of the un-essay in music history classes. It is important to note that this is just one way to embark on the un-essay; chances are, if you ask any of my music history colleagues, they would have slight or complete deviations from how I structure it. I will discuss the un-essay's design through the use of Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). I will then provide details for how I use the un-essay. I conclude with a discussion of outcomes and challenges that the un-essay has brought to music history classes. Ultimately, however, the un-essay provides benefits for assessing in a discipline that is both writing and performance based.

TILT, UDL, and The Un-essay

To best understand my approach to the un-essay, having access to the prompt is necessary. The appendix contains the general un-essay prompt that I use and modify depending on the class.[2] The first important thing to note about this assignment is that Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles are at its core.[3] Using both of these pedagogical methods as the backbone for the assignment informs how I—and by extension—the students, think about the goal of the project in the context of the course goals.

The most important functions of TILT are that it "(1) clarifies to students the instructor's choices for lesson plans and (2) specifies how those choices relate to course goals."[4] With TILT pedagogy, students are given every detail of the assignment: why they are doing it (in my assignment the purpose), what they have to do (the task), what they will achieve, and how to achieve the best results (the criteria). More often than not, this includes a step-by-step roadmap, project guide, or checklist for what to do in the assignment from beginning to end. In the un-essay, this must be a bit more vague than more standard project because students have a great deal of choice about what kind of project to do and the topic of the project. However, in every case I provide a project outline covering the basics such as how student will choose and topic and the project medium and finding materials in the library. TILT also connects with active learning in that it helps students to fully participate in

[1] Cate Denial, "The Un-essay," April 26, 2019, https://catherinedenial.org/blog/uncategorized/the-un-essay/
[2] My prompt was inspired by and adapted from Marc Kissel's prompt. See "The Unessay," *Mark Kissel*, May 7, 2018, https://marckissel.netlify.app/post/on-the-unessay/
[3] I would be remiss to not acknowledge the Quality Enhancement Fellowship at Columbus State University and its participants in Spring 2021 for aiding me in adjusting the assignment to be in its final form here.For more about TILT, see Mary-Ann Winklemes, "Introduction: The Story of TILT and Its Emerging Uses in Higher Education," in *Transparent Design in Higher Education Teaching and Leadership,* edited by Mary-Ann Winklemes, Allison Boye, and Suzanne Tapp (Sterling, VA: Stylus Press, 2019), 1–14. For more on Universal Design for Learning, see CAST, "About Universal Design for Learning," 2022, https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl
[4] Alecia D. Anderson, Andrea N. Hunt, Rachel E. Powell, and Cindy Brooks Dollar, "Student Perceptions of Teaching Transparency," *Journal of Effective Teaching* 13, no. 2 (2013): 38.

the process of learning, which can only occur when the meaning of and reason for learning activities is clear to them.[5]

One of the reasons the un-essay is so successful in maximizing students' ability to achieve the learning outcomes of each course that it adheres to the basic principles of UDL: optimizing individual choice and autonomy; optimizing relevance, value, and authenticity; varying demands or resources to optimize challenge; activating or supplying background knowledge; offer ways for customizing the display of information; maximizing [information] transfer and generalization; illustrating [knowledge] through multiple media; varying the methods for response and navigation; and using multiple tools for construction and navigation.[6] But, the arts work especially well with UDL given that "arts education has always encouraged, and taught, expression through a much wider range of media."[7] For this reason, many music courses, like music theory, are at a disadvantage if one of these senses is impaired.[8] As a result, UDL permits the leveling of the playing field among *all* students and helps them to engage with the material using the senses and learning methods most appropriate for them. Granted, arts histories like music histories are not often as performance-based as other arts classes, they are dealing with a medium that explores multiple senses—vision (reading sheet music, seeing performances), hearing (listening to performances), touch (handling the instruments and feeling the keys and valves)—rather just one—vision found in non-arts classes.

Because music is such a multi-sensory discipline, I teach music history using active learning strategies, partially as a means to enact TILT and UDL principles but also partially because it just helps students learn better and retain and transfer the information more easily.[9] The un-essay facilitates students in carrying over these strategies in how they engage with the course material and allow them to choose how they use these strategies. Providing the students with choice, as Maryellen Weimer notes, has two benefits:

> The first is motivational—when students select the method they will use to master the material, they can pick an option they think they'd like to complete. And if an assignment option looks appealing, that increases the chance that students will spend more time working on it and more learning can then result. Second, the practice confronts students with themselves as learners. With teacher guidance, they can be challenged to consider why they find some assignments preferable. They can be encouraged to consider what skills the assignment involves and whether those are skills they have or need to work on developing. A strategy such as this moves students in the direction of autonomy and maturity as learners.[10]

These are skills we want to foster in our students. However, as we know from research, assignment choice facilitates learner-centered academic work, leading to increased student engagement, improved academic outcomes, and higher satisfaction levels in courses.[11] Especially in music history courses, where students do not

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[5] Jean Lave and Etienne Wagner, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 105.

[6] For more on all of these and other aspects of UDL, see CAST, "UDL Guidelines," https://udlguidelines.cast.org.

[7] Don Glass, Anne Mayer, and David H. Rose, "Universal Design for Learning and the Arts," *Harvard Educational Review* 83, no. 1 (2013): 110.

[8] Bruce W. Quaglia, "Planning for Student Variability: Universal Design for Learning in the Music Theory Classroom and Curriculum," *Music Theory Online* 21, no. 1 (2015), https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.15.21.1/mto.15.21.1.quaglia.php

[9] John Biggs and Catherine Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University,* 4th ed. (Berkshire, England: Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press/McGraw Hill, 2011), 125.

[10] Maryellen Weimer, "Adding Choice to Assignment Options: A Few Course Design Considerations," *Faculty Focus*, February 20, 2014, https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/course-design-ideas/adding-choices-assignment-options-course-design-considerations/

[11] See Cheryl Hanewicz, Angela Platt, and Anne Arendt, (2017). "Creating a Learner-Centered Teaching Environment Using Student Choice in Assignments," *Distance Education* 38, no. 3 (2017): 273–287.

always see the connection between their work as performers and studying music history. The un-essay is a kind of self-design, which "put[s] the students more directly in charge of their learning, encourage self-reflective and independent thinking, and help them better achieve—and often *surpass*—their learning goals" (italics in original).[12] Inherently, self-design modules are flexible, allowing students to have choice in the projects upon which they embark.[13] Having the choice in an un-essay allows students to use their skills to bridge the divide and experience how the two disciplines connect.

Using the Un-essay in the Music History Classroom

To be blunt, many music students do not often want to take the required music history sequence. Often, this is because they do not see the connection between their lives as performers and teachers and studying the history of music, say, from the early church or Elizabethan courts.[14] This is one obstacle that I and many music history professors frequently face and must overcome. One way to do this minimize this obstacle is to show students how they can use their knowledge of music history in these lives. The un-essay is helpful in this regard.

The un-essay has been shown to be valuable for a variety of reasons, one of which is for public engagement and this is especially clear in the music history classroom.[15] Public musicology, or music history for the public, is analogous to the discipline of public history and becoming increasingly important, with my own university implementing the first public musicology undergraduate certificate in the nation in fall 2022. Students must learn to engage with the public and speak about music in terms that the average listener can understand. As Patrick Sullivan writes: "Disciplines such as history, art, and the human sciences offer us very different, unique, and valuable ways of looking at the world."[16] Thus, using the un-essay in a class that combines history and art—music history—is ripe for engaging with these different ways to view the world and think deeply about them in a manner that the discipline encourages and even necessitates. But it also helps students to think in terms of how they can use their knowledge in the world. Can they compose music in a period- or composer-specific style? Can they arrange a piece of music that can only be found in a sketch? Can they write blog entries about a subject? Can they even write an *Onion* article that uses their knowledge of music history?[17] The un-essay can allow them to connect the "real world" and the music history classroom in ways that the traditional essay cannot.

As the prompt in the appendix shows, the un-essay is structured while still open-ended. Students are not relegated to focusing on topics studied in the course. If they want to study something we have not covered but it is within the realm of the course, they are welcome to do so. For instance, one music education student embarked upon a project on women's musical education in seventeenth-century Venice, something that I only

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[12] Brian Alegant and Barbara Sawhill, "Making the Grade (Or Not): Thoughts on Self-Design, Self-Assessment, and Self-Grading," *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy* 1 (2013), http://flipcamp.org/engagingstudents/alegantSawhill.html

[13] Aam Hamdani and Amay Suherman, "Self-Design Project Based Learning: An Alternative Learning Model for Vocational Education," *Journal of Technical Education and Training* 13, no. 3 (2021): 76.

[14] J. Peter Burkholder, "The Value of a Music History Survey," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 5, no. 2 (2015): 59.

[15] Rhiannon P. Jakopak, Kavin L. Monteith, and Bethann Garramon Merkle, "Writing Science: Improving Understanding and Communication Skills with the 'Un-essay,'" *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America* 100, no. 4 (2019), https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/bes2.1610

[16] Patrick Sullivan, "The Un-essay: Making Room for Creativity in the Composition Classroom," *College Composition and Communication* 67, no. 1 (2015): 23.

[17] I began including the *Onion* article option in the Un-essay prompt after one particular article was released, which demonstrates that students would have to know about the genre of the cantata to write something like this. See "Fauci Warns Public Against Holding Any Large-Scale Celebrations Commemorating February 1708 Release of J.S. Bach's Cantata 'Gott Ist Mein König,'" *The Onion*, February 5, 2021, https://www.theonion.com/fauci-warns-public-against-holding-any-large-scale-cele-1846198177

alluded to briefly in class. Another student who was a double major in music and math did a video essay on the physics and math of music in ancient Greece. This allows the students to study something in detail that they are interested in and can directly connect to their career paths, one important goal of music history curricula.[18]

Students can also work individually, in pairs, or in small groups (no more than four but the largest group I ever had was three students). While some instructors may frown upon having groups embark on a semester-long project such as this, it has several benefits. First, it alleviates grading for large classes. Second, "groupwork is also one of the most expedient ways—along with work placements—of ensuring that students develop transferable skills for life-long learning (teamwork, leadership, project management skills, communication skills)."[19] But having the option to conduct the project as a group also benefits those students who work better with others than alone for a variety of reasons. Because students must submit their own statement with the final project and actively present, there is no room for "winging it."

On the whole, I scaffold my version of the un-essay assignment so that students must propose a topic with a bibliography that I approve their project before they begin the work. They must also present the project in class on the day that they would have had a final exam (I no longer test in my classes). The un-essay project is a work in progress, as I would like to scaffold it even more in the future, including requiring students to complete one more lower-stakes assignment between the proposal and the final product. Ultimately, the assignment of the un-essay comes after a class on how to "do" history; that is, what it means to construct or reconstruct a history of something through creating, writing, producing, performing, and imagining in the discipline and the discussion that there are many histories of a subject.[20] What it means to do history is important in all of histories subdisciplines, with students participating in this activity as early as their freshman year of college.[21] So, why should we limit the doing of history to class time when we can expand it outward? The answer to this is the un-essay.

I have used this assignment in my music history sequence courses (ancient to modern), music in television course, and music in gender courses at several universities. The projects and their presentations are ungraded, which means that through a self-assessment and self-reflection process, students reflect on how they approached the assignment, whether it adhered to the stated parameters, and provide a grade to themselves.[22] I, in turn, provide feedback rather than a grade.[23] The un-essays in my courses have resulted in one-person plays, mock interviews with dead composers, video essays, lecture-recitals, designs of historical opera costumes created in cross stitch, flip books, mini graphic novels, building of existing (and functional!) instruments using hardware store materials, songs and pieces in various genres, arrangements of pieces of music and editions of pieces only available in piano reductions, concept albums with original art, even recreating the "healing" cookie recipe of composer Hildegard von Bingen by examining primary sources and finding out what ingredients

[18] Melanie Lowe, "Rethinking the Undergraduate Music History Sequence in the Information Age," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 5, no. 2 (2015): 66.

[19] W. Martin Davies, "Groupwork as a Form of Assessment: Common Problems and Recommended Solutions," *Higher Education* 58 (2009): 564.

[20] Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton, *Doing History*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 4.

[21] Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker, "From Learning History to Doing History: Beyond the Coverage Model," in *Exploring Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind*, edited by Regan A. R. Gurung, Nancy L. Chick, and Aeron Haynie (Sterling, VA: Stylus Press, 2009), 20-21.

[22] Accurate assessment can be especially difficult when working with creative projects, especially in the arts. For ideas on how to create rubrics and handle assessment in this context, either through traditional grading or ungrading, see Natasha Haugnes, Hoag Holmgren, and Martin Springborg, *Meaningful Grading: A Guide for Faculty in the Arts* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2018).

[23] On ungrading see Susan D. Blum, ed., *Ungrading: Why Ratings Undermine Student Learning (and What to Do Instead)* (West Virginia University Press, 2020); Jesse Stommel, "How to Ungrade," JesseStommel.com, March 11, 2018, https://www.jessestommel.com/how-to-ungrade/

would have been available in her time. Many—if not all—of these projects and others directly involve active learning. Yes, I still receive some written essays, but having those interspersed with other media makes the grading palatable and, dare I say it, something I actually anticipate happily and enjoy doing. This is incredibly important for our own well-being since the pandemic has strained so many of us and increased so much of our workloads. Anything that we can do can make our labor more rewarding and pleasurable should be a top priority and encouraged! This also helps students who may be stressed about the idea of writing a final paper. By incorporating UDL into the un-essay framework, we are able to release some of the stress that can inhibit student performance, create a welcoming environment for all students, and allow them to create a final product that they actually want to do.[24]

The presentation component occurs during the final exam slot in a live class and students have a short time slot in which to present their projects to the class. They can bring their projects to class if they are tangible (constructed instruments or cookies), discuss their project including playing parts of interviews or videos, or perform if their project involves music making. In an asynchronous online class, students post video presentations. Students will have to watch all of the presentations and like the rest of the semester, students will comment on the presentation using their method of choice—written post, video, or audio file—consistent with UDL's tenet of multiple means of expression.

Interestingly enough, most of the students who I teach are music majors or minors and are overwhelmed at the prospect of being creative or having so much choice in the topic and medium of their final project. This is one of the obstacles that I face. Students can find too much choice overwhelming, leading to increased cognitive load.[25] Instructors looking to create inclusive classrooms must offer choice and autonomy, even though nontraditional structures can reinforce inequity and exclusion without sufficient structure and support.[26] This choice, which leads to inclusion, helps to create equitable classrooms, which "ensur[e] that everyone has what they need in order to be successful."[27] Employing this kind of assignment can also be challenging for those who do not fulfill the stereotype of what a professor looks like, namely women, persons of color, those who look young, and disabled professors, to name a few.[28] Despite the anxiety of choice, at the end of the semester, students express appreciation for the ability to consider something related to the course based on their own interests in on their own terms. The assignment covers the same parameters as a traditional research paper, especially given that students choose their own topics. The difference is that they can express their creativity, with which assignment choice has been correlated and connected to critical thinking skills development.[29]

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[24] For more on how UDL can help student stress, see Andratesha Fritzgerald, *Antiracism and Universal Design for Learning: Building Expressways to Success* (Wakefield, MA: CAST, 2020), 35.

[25] David S. Ackerman, Barbara L. Gross, and Kirti Sawhney Celli, "Having Many Choice Options Seems Like a Great Idea, But…: Student Perceptions about the Level of Choice for a Project Topic in a Marketing Course," *Journal of Marketing Education* 36, no. 3 (2014): 222.

[26] For more on this, see Joan Dabrowski and Tanji Reed Marshall, *Motivation and Engagement in Student Assignments: The Role of Choice and Relevancy* (Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2018), https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593328.pdf

[27] Mirko Chardin and Katie Novak, *Equity by Design: Delivering on the Power and Promise of UDL* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2021), 14

[28] For more about how to handle this, see the essays in the forthcoming volume, *Picture a Professor: Interrupting Biases about Faculty and Increasing Student Learning*, ed. by Jessamyn Neuhaus (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2022).

[29] Elizabeth Betsy Lasley, "Giving Students A Choice in Assignments Can Boost Creativity and Motivation," *Favulty Focus*, September 19, 2013, https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/course-design-ideas/giving-students-a-choice-in-assignments-can-boost-creativity-and-motivation/

Conclusion

Ultimately, the un-essay, which I discovered after teaching as instructor of record for thirteen years, changed how I think about assessment. It also changed how I teach. For many years, I thought of teaching music history as an exercise in coverage rather than skills acquisition. To be fair, music history—and really any kind of history—is a little of both. We want our students to think critically and analyze the historical material that we give them.[30] However, I—and my students—have learned that creativity can be a catalyst for critical and analytical thinking and skills, especially within historical context. The results of the creative endeavors of the un-essay facilitate those skills and engagement with history in a way that most essays cannot. And seeing my students engage with the material in new ways makes grading actually enjoyable.

[30] Reba A. Wissner, "Active Images: Teaching Students Critical Thinking and Analysis Skills with Picture Postcards," in *Innovative Approaches in Pedagogy for Higher Education Classrooms*, edited by Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessenger (United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Group, 2022), 68.

APPENDIX

GENERAL UN-ESSAY ASSIGNMENT PROMPT

FINAL PROJECT: THE UN-ESSAY:

PURPOSE: Creativity makes us human, so it is ironic that by the time we reach first grade, creativity begins being educated out of us in school—and even discouraged! The main project for this class will be an un-essay, a creative project that allows you to engage with the course material in any way you deem appropriate. The un-essay is a way for you to explore the course material in a way that interests you and that you might be able to apply to your future career and/or current interests or hobbies. It also conforms to the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in which course material and demonstration of skills and knowledge can be optimized for students' individual strengths. For instance, the un-essay conforms to the following UDL guidelines: Optimizing individual choice and autonomy; optimizing relevance, value, and authenticity; varying demands or resources to optimize challenge; activating or supplying background knowledge; offer ways for customizing the display of information; maximizing [information] transfer and generalization; illustrating [knowledge] through multiple media; varying the methods for response and navigation; and using multiple tools for construction and navigation (for more on all of these and other aspects of UDL, see https://udlguidelines.cast.org).

TASK: The first step is to decide what you would like your topic to focus on. Over the first few weeks of class, use the syllabus and think about a topic of relevance to the course that you think is interesting, important, and relevant to you. In other words, you can choose your own topic as long as it can be associated with the course material. To do this, consider the following questions: What aspects of the course interests you? What would you like to know more about? What do you think others should know more about? Feel free to connect your own knowledge, interests, and experience with the topic you choose to make it more meaningful. Remember that there is a wide spectrum of music beyond what and who we study, so feel free to branch out to something we've either discussed in detail, minimally, or not at all, as long as it concerns [course topic]. You can start looking at what topics might be out there through a Google search, but only as a first step. The sources you'll need to consult for the project will be scholarly and found through the campus libraries.

Once you've chosen your topic, think about how you want to conduct it. You can do your project any way you please (written word, illustrations, music, video, cross-stitch, invented and built instrument, etc. ANYTHING!!). Think about your strengths, hobbies, and interests. Do you like building things? Are you a doodler? Do you compose for fun? Is cross stitch your stress relief? You can work in groups or on your own, depending on the scope of the project. Some possible examples:

- Make a video, video essay, or podcast about some aspect of the course
- Create a new musical instrument or notation system
- Make a series of pieces or songs in the style of a composer or period we've studied
- Create a series of cartoons or a comic book that illustrates something associated with this class
- Create a website about a topic related to the course
- Collect specific data and analyses and present it in a unique way
- Make a series of Buzzfeed style listicles (with a clickbaity headline!) or Onion articles
- Embroidery, knitting project
- An 80s-style fanzine
- An interview and discussion with a composer or musician
- Regular essay/research paper

I am happy to meet with you individually if you need help deciding on a topic or mediumt. The most important thing is that you use what skills and interests you have to present a project on something you'd like to explore more that you can be proud of (without being stressed out!).

As part of the project, you will submit a proposal, do the project, write a 1–2-page statement (1 full page minimum) on your motivations and approach, and deliver a 5–7-minute presentation on the scheduled day of the final exam.

Project Proposal (Due September 27): You will submit a short proposal outlining your topic, thesis, its relevance to the course, and the medium in which you will present your un-essay. In the same document, you will also submit a bibliography of 5–10 sources that will help you to complete your project. The purpose of the bibliography is two-fold: 1) For you to start doing research to see what information is out there (if nothing or very little exists, it might be a good signal that this may not be a good course topic) and 2) To show me what sources you've been looking at so that I can make suggestions if I see something important missing. For help with finding sources and using the library, refer to the screencasts on the course website under the Screencasts tab in the Table of Contents of the Content tab that will guide you through using the library and databases. **If your proposal is not approved the first time you submit it, you must resubmit it until I approve it.**

Un-essay Project and Presentation (Due December 6): When you submit your final project, include a short explanatory essay ('The Statement') that explains what you did, why you did it, and how you went about producing the un-essay. This will give me insight into your creative and intellectual process. If you chose to do a standard essay/paper this can be your place to be more open about the process you used to create the piece. This statement should be 1–2 pages long. If working in a group, everyone should submit their own statement that reflects their personal views on the project.

Assess your work on three criteria (see rubric):

1. Deadlines met (for proposal and un-essay)
2. The full synopsis is well-written and shows clear thought and a plan
3. The content and presentation of the un-essay

CRITERIA: You will be successful in your un-essay and presentation if: a) you submit your proposal on time for approval, b) your project shows critical and active engagement with the course material, insight, and creativity and demonstrates time and effort devoted to creating something thoughtful, c) the chosen medium works persuasively with the design and polish of the un-essay, d) the project's structural and formal elements productively serve the core concept of the un-essay, e) the un-essay includes a clear and insightful connection and reflects a convincing and nuanced thesis, f) shows an effort to creatively evaluate the information with clarity, g) contains a clearly-written and grammatically correct 1 full page minimum, 2 full pages maximum statement with the project, h) has a clearly-organized 5–7-minute presentation that shows the class your project and discusses your approach and findings.

The Benefits of Nontraditional Assessment for Historical Thinking

Haley Armogida
Ball State University

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In both classrooms and across academia, nontraditional forms of assessment have been growing in popularity in recent years, and for good reason. There is now more of an emphasis on digital assessment tools than ever before, and the processes of historical thinking and research are not exempt from this trend. As a nontraditional student, I have experienced two distinct types of post-secondary assessment, first in my late teens and early twenties (2010s), and now again in my early thirties (2020s). Ten years ago when I was working towards my associate's degree at Ball State University in Muncie, IN, most of my professors focused on more traditional forms of assessment, such as speeches, portfolios, slideshow presentations, research papers, and written exams. Now that I am back at Ball State working towards a bachelor's degree in Social Studies Teaching and History, I see a clear embrace of nontraditional assessments, most of which have public-facing and digital components, including podcasts, blogs, websites, video documentaries, and other creative project options. This change is meaningful because it allows students to express themselves creatively while still demonstrating their mastery of course objectives. In recent years there has been a shift towards an emphasis on public history, and the university is more focused on technology and community engagement than ever before.

A prime example of this combination producing nontraditional assessments was my experience in Dr. Jennifer Mara DeSilva's World Civilizations I class in Fall 2020. As this course was taught online (due to COVID-19 restrictions) and used many digital tools and public resources, the entire experience was nontraditional compared to courses I had taken at Ball State in the past. Our midterm and final projects were the creation of two artifact-focused podcast episodes, which had been modeled for us throughout the semester with assignments related to episodes of the BBC's *History of the World in 100 Objects* podcasts with Neil MacGregor, then director of the British Museum. However, before we could prepare those major projects, we had much to learn about the processes of historical thinking and the sourcing of artifacts.

Learning how to properly source, corroborate, and contextualize artifacts was a precursor to the major podcast assignments. Dr. DeSilva provided scaffolding for these processes early in the semester. At first, I felt I was struggling, but once I realized that there were formulas for historical thinking, it all began to fall into place. Each week, we focused on artifacts from different civilizations, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, India, the Mediterranean, Africa, Northern Europe, and the Americas in preparation for choosing one artifact to investigate more fully. For each artifact we studied, we answered questions using historical thinking processes articulated by the Stanford History Education Group. For sourcing questions, we determined the date the artifact was created, the place of origin, who would have created it and for what purpose, the type of evidence the artifact was, and the known context, all while using the historian's vocabulary (*e.g.*, primary and secondary sources). For corroboration questions, we compared the creation dates, the places of origin, creators, and overlapping content for multiple artifacts to determine whether various artifacts were able to corroborate one another. Historical context was also important and we explored what was going on in the world at the time that might cause someone to create the artifact. What might their motivations be? What could we infer about the past based on the artifact in question? Was the artifact useful in answering the question we are asking about the past? This scaffolding might seem tedious, but it prepared me to be precise about what I knew based on my artifact observations. I would use this very specific evidence-based writing style in the podcast episodes that I would create for the midterm and final projects. If I'm being honest, it made me a more observant and thorough historian.

As we embarked on the podcast assignments, we had the freedom to choose an artifact (within certain parameters) from the David Owsley Museum of Art on Ball State's campus. For the midterm project, I created a podcast episode examining and contextualizing a Bodhisattva statue from sixth-century CE China, and for the final project, I chose a bust of the Mexica God of the Flayed Skin, Xipe Totec (1469-1481 CE). Being free

to choose the artifacts that I investigated allowed me to follow my passion and made me enthusiastic about sharing my research through these podcast episodes with family and friends.

Writing a podcast script required narrating historical analysis, which drew on my skill at sourcing and corroborating artifacts. I also realized how important it was to place artifacts within the correct historical context and present concrete evidence to support my argument about the artifact's use and user. In constructing my podcast scripts, I learned to find scholarly sources and how to properly incorporate them into my analysis. That was a great learning experience for future history classes and an important step towards the historian's best practice. In my own secondary education, for the most part, I was not taught the processes of historical thinking in a methodical way. We learned mostly key terms, names, dates, and some of the context that events occurred within, but not how to use specific evidence and reasoning to reach conclusions about that information, or why it was important for us to know the process. Digital products like podcasts or websites can put historical analysis on public display and make it more accessible outside the classroom. Demonstrating how you came to your conclusions about the past reinforces the idea that historical reasoning is important for everyone, not just historians.

The podcast projects from World Civilizations I encouraged me to develop a specific evidence-based style as a historian and taught me the foundations of historical research. The podcasts combined the freedom to follow my passion with a clear analytical process that we had practiced throughout the semester. The resulting podcasts were personally interesting, but also useful summative assessments of skills that I developed over the semester. I have followed these steps in subsequent historical projects, and I will carry them with me when I teach history in my own future classroom where the recordings that I created can be used to show my students how they too can follow the historian's process. The nontraditional character of the podcasts reflects the new ways that historical research can be assessed, but also publicly presented and preserved.

Mapping Out the Historical Process in Novel Ways

Samantha Kidder
Ball State University

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The standard final assessment for Dr. Max Felker-Kantor's undergraduate Ball State University course, "American History 1877 to the Present," was a research paper, and that is exactly what I planned to do. I had written my paper and was content, yet after reviewing the rubric to make sure I had met all the requirements, I found that there was another option available that I had never considered. Instead of writing an essay, I could choose a public history alternative: compose a historical site marker or create a more interactive history with the web-based ArcGIS StoryMaps application.[1] Using local historical sites as a way to think about national movements and events made them seem more compelling and led to using a greater variety of evidence (e.g., visual, video, and textual). These new options opened a door in my early experience as a historian and allowed my work to become more creative and inclusive. Choosing the nontraditional option resulted in stronger research that could be shared with a wider audience.

The project started with selecting two Indiana landmarks. Then students provided a detailed history of these two sites by expanding on the story behind the construction, the people who lived in these buildings, and connecting them to topics that we had touched on throughout the semester. The majority of students chose to create historical markers to describe the landmarks' significance. Following these brief histories, students wrote short reflections, providing specific examples of how these sites were connected to our classwork. Students could also use the ArcGIS StoryMaps application to present their work, which offered a more interactive experience for the audience than a plaque would provide.

StoryMaps creates a webpage that visitors scroll through to view maps, pictures, videos, and text. Combining these materials in one integrated experience explicitly displays the historian's knowledge and skills. Although I had already completed an essay, for the next 36 hours before the assignment was due, I poured myself into creating a StoryMaps project. This new platform allowed me to strengthen my voice as a public historian at the same time that I worked with new and exciting historical materials. The ArcGIS StoryMaps site provided me with all the tutorials needed to bring my project to life, although I did not delve too deeply into them and mostly created my work by trial and error. But this process was also key to figuring out the type of narrative I wanted to provide about the Benjamin Harrison Presidential Site (Indianapolis, IN) and the Lincoln Gardens Housing Project (Evansville, IN).[2] Somehow the importance of argument, justification, and the need for context becomes more obvious when building a public-facing project.

When planning my StoryMaps project, I gathered all of the primary and secondary sources I could find, and this was my first mistake. Not that I was using material that was not relevant, but rather that I was reflexively, uncritically accepting the words I had read without further investigation. At this point I was thinking that History is a bunch of facts about the past, when I should have realized that History does not happen in a void. It was only when I began engaging more actively in the historical process by locating and presenting primary sources and identifying connections to course materials, that I starting to move past the history-as-chronology mindset and see the complexity of long- and short-term factors.

Historians must question all of their sources in case of potential bias or irrelevance. This requires the historian to explain their choice and investigate the source's origin and creator. I felt like I was failing in the right directions as I contextualized the landmarks and how they forged a connection between Indiana's past and present and the nation as a whole. In the post-Civil War period, Southern Indiana provided a sanctuary for African Americans, but in the 1930s the New Deal did not improve African American communities to the

[1] *ArcGIS StoryMaps*, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/.
[2] Samantha Kidder, "Engage in Indiana's History," *ArcGIS StoryMaps Project* (May 2021), https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/31c8117776444b1e8058cbb6b6805ae7.

extent that it helped majority white communities. Investigating the Lincoln Gardens Housing Project revealed that it was opened by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1938, who was an important African American ally, initially housed 500 residents, and also included a USO for WWII servicemen. Although the housing project fell into disrepair and closed in the 1970s, from 2007 the site provided for the community in a new way, when it reopened as the Evansville African American Museum.[3]

There was a second hurdle I ran into during my work, which was luckily solved through the StoryMaps' structure. I was so focused on providing as much information as I could and my own thoughts, that I had not considered the landmarks' own stories. Only through experimenting with the different features of the StoryMap did I understand the type of narrative that would make the most sense with my sources. Using videos and images I was able to transition more smoothly and strengthen my argument. To show how African American housing was a key product of Roosevelt's New Deal, I used informational videos as secondary sources to provide interested viewers with a quick and compelling way to further explore the subject. In a public history project, offering optional material is a way to provide value-added paths, while maintaining the visitor's focus on the core argument. Similarly, photographs visualized the site's history, reminding us that the past looked and thought differently. The flexibility of this platform was a great benefit as these additions provided different perspectives and more exciting ways to understand the material presented.

Reflecting on this project, I see how StoryMaps influenced my developing historical skills and encouraged me to explore and defend my argument in novel ways. By broadening my research materials, I encountered sources that I would not have considered before. I brought different domains together, like geographic information systems and mixed media, which will attract a wider audience. I did not know it at the time, but this project honed my skills as a historian at the same time that it led me to public history. As the world becomes more comfortable with fully digital products, using apps like ArcGIS StoryMaps, helps historians show that history is relevant and easily accessible.

An Interview with Dr. Catherine Denial

Catherine Denial
Knox College
Jessamyn Neuhaus
SUNY Plattsburgh

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For the fall 2022 special issue of *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, focused on teaching history with the un-essay, I'm delighted to include my recorded interview with Dr. Catherine Denial.

Cate Denial is the Bright Distinguished Professor of American History, Chair of the History department, and Director of the Bright Institute at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. A Distinguished Lecturer for the Organization of American Historians, Cate is the winner of the American Historical Association's 2018 Eugene Asher Distinguished Teaching award, and a former member of the Digital Public Library of America's Educational Advisory Board. Cate currently sits on the boards of the *Western Historical Quarterly* and *Commonplace: A Journal of Early American Life*. Cate is at work on a new book, *A Pedagogy of Kindness*, under contract with West Virginia University Press. Her historical research has examined the early nineteenth-century experience of pregnancy, childbirth and child-rearing in Upper Midwestern Ojibwe and missionary cultures, research that grew from Cate's previous book, *Making Marriage: Husbands, Wives, and the American State in Dakota and Ojibwe Country* (2013). In summer 2018, Cate was an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, PA.

On a personal note, I was on a panel about un-essays with Dr. Denial at the Teaching History conference in 2021. Her work on un-essays, generously shared via open-access platforms and social media, is groundbreaking.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Thank you for joining me, Dr Denial. How did you become interested in using the unessay assignment in your undergraduate history classes?

Cate Denial: I first became aware of unessays because of Christopher Jones. I saw on Twitter that he had shared a number of his students' projects from their un-essay assignment. And they were spectacular! I remember someone had made an incredibly detailed map and I kept zooming in on it and pulling out and trying to see all the things that they had put into this map. It just seemed so fun, and so I asked some questions and then I started googling and I realized this was something I really, really wanted to do in my classes.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: There's definitely a Twitter connection there, isn't there?

Cate Denial: Yeah, yeah.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: In my experience many historians seem to be receptive to using the unessay in their classroom. Why do you think so many educators in our discipline specifically are interested in the unessay assignment?

Cate Denial: I think there's a couple of things. One of the things is that unessays allow us to practice some of the principles of universal design for learning, and to give students multiple entry points into showing us what they have learned. So, for students who really struggle with a lot of reading or a lot of writing, or who don't do well under timed conditions—all kinds of ways of assessing learning that can really be an obstacle to students with disabilities are removed in the unessay practice. Because the students really get to design something that is authentically theirs, and that plays to their strengths.

Also, I think the unessay is a wonderful way of having students get personally connected to the business of doing research and assessing argument and comparing sources in a way that is much more lively and hands on than many of the more traditional ways we might approach that. So, especially as opposed to writing a paper, for example. I do still have my students write papers in my class, but the unessay becomes something in which they're very personally invested, because they have the freedom of choice about what it is that they do, And so suddenly concepts that have maybe seemed a little dry or a little removed from their world suddenly come

alive, and there is nothing quite like that, I think, for getting people excited about the purpose of *doing* history instead of just thinking about history.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Okay, I think you actually addresses both of my next two questions in that incredibly good answer [laughter]! But I'll just give you the opportunity to if you want to add anything: How does the unessay benefit student learning and engagement in history, specifically, and learning generally? And then the next question attached to that was how it supports inclusive and equitable teaching practices.

Cate Denial: The thing that has struck me the most in several years of doing unessays now is that it gives me the opportunity to assess what my students know instead of what they can write, which are two very different things. If I want them to write like a historian, I need to spend a lot of time on the conventions of how to write like a historian. If I want to know if my students are understanding the big picture of my course, if they are understanding how to assess evidence, compare and contrast arguments, think critically about how knowledge is constructed, I don't need them to write to do that. Or they might choose a different modality of writing. I've had people write screenplays and poetry and make crafts and all kinds of stuff, but they get to choose how they demonstrate that they have been paying attention. There were times in the pre unessay days, where I might have thought, "someone is not paying attention right now," or "someone is checked out." I have never thought that since I started doing un-essays! [Because] it turns out the modality was absolutely everything.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: That's what's so interesting! The way that student choice, and also it sounds like your enthusiasm, really combined to increase their opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and engagement in the class. As an introvert by myself, I know that I'm always telling people don't just look to how much students talk in class to assess how engaged, they are that's not the only way.

Cate Denial: Right.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: And the unessay definitely gets to that.

Cate Denial: Yeah definitely.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: But it's not all rainbows and unicorns! [laughter] So what kinds of challenges and obstacles have you encountered using the un-essay?

Cate Denial: The biggest challenge was that when I started using the unessay I still gave them a paper option and they could choose between the two. That undermined the purpose of the unessay because people who are very good at writing chose to write a paper because it was not . . . well who could blame them? They wanted a great [grade]; they knew they were good at history writing [and] this was the swiftest and safest way to get that great grade, right? So, I took away the paper option eventually to make sure that everyone was on a level playing field; that this was equitable; so that no one had an advantage over anybody else because everybody got to make the same kind of choices about their strengths their weaknesses and their interest in a certain subject.

Another challenge was taking it online once the pandemic started. How do you have unessays—creative things—when you can't actually go *get* the thing, [when] they can't bring in the diorama or the embroidery or the whatever they're doing. But I found that if I asked them to make a video or take photographs of what it was, it worked great. They still put just as much effort into what they were doing, they still asked for just as much help, they were still as engaged. I wish I could have had the tactile experience of some of those projects, but I still got an appreciation for the work that they had put in in the things that we're trying to communicate to me.

Some students need more direction than others, for sure. But that's why there is a proposal component to the unessay in my class, so that I can read that proposal and immediately say "this is a life's work you can't do this in three weeks," or "I think this needs to be expanded," or "here are some books, you should look at this is a great article," you know, really give them individually-tailored feedback. Which is very quick and easy to do! I think some people think the unessay is going to be just a tremendous amount of work for themselves, but I have not found that to be the case. Because it's not about assigning a grade to all these component parts, it's about just giving honest feedback in a timely manner so that students can be on track. So, I think that the proposal stage really sort of identifies for me where people are struggling, very, very quickly, and I can give them the advice and the feedback that they need immediately and that seems to work.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Thank you. Following up [on] that, what is your student population like and why do you think they have been particularly responsive to the un-essay assignment?

Cate Denial: I teach at a small liberal arts college, we are about 40% students of color, about 14% international students, about one third first generation students, about one third Pell [grant] eligible. My classes top out, when they're at their largest, at about thirty, I'm more often teaching twenty-five students. If it's an upper-level seminar it's only fifteen, so I have the opportunity to be able to really dive into these projects with the students. If you have a class of 80, this is a much harder project to do. That said, I think we put a lot of work into structuring writing assignments and it's just the same kind of thing; you've got to structure it so that everybody's on the same page, and they are so much more fun to grade than papers! Okay, remind me the question because I think I drifted.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Let's go back to the inclusive part of using un-essays.

Cate Denial: I do think [un-essays can increase inclusivity] because I'm asking people to make connections to things that really interest them; to things they're really good at; to things that they're pursuing other places on campus, for example. People are given the freedom to really draw on their cultural background, their cultural interests; they are able to draw on things that are important to them . . . . For example, they were able to sort of connect [the study of] biology to history. All of these different ways of drawing in connections from across the student's life are implicit in an unessay, so I've had people write rap, really good songs, where I'm just like I could never figure that kind of rhythm and everything myself, but I can absolutely appreciate it once I'm hearing it and seeing it. People have written classical music; people have cooked things; people have tried out entirely new skills! I had a student who made a star quilt which was something that was taught to many Native girls in boarding schools, so he was sort of exploring the history of boarding schools by making a quilt for the first time. He had never made anything on a sewing machine. People are drawn to the things that matter to them, and this gives my students the opportunity to say what it is that matters to them, rather than me saying this is what's important and you must comply. And what matters to them varies wildly and that's one of the real thrills of doing this project.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: And also, it seems like key to why it's effective for learning, because our brains are smart and they conserve their energy for what matters to us. And if it's not important to us, it's almost literally impossible for our brain to take in that new information and adapt and build new skills, if it just doesn't seem very important. Especially when we're teaching and learning in a pandemic crisis world, with intersecting multiple crises.

Cate Denial: Yeah, and I think that, especially in history where our inclination is to teach a lot of content and we want to cover everything, the unessay gives us the opportunity to step back and say, well it's impossible anyway, right? The unessay gives us the opportunity to step back and say to our students, "Look, I might not be able to cover everything that is really meaningful to you. But you can go out and do the research about the thing that is super meaningful to you." And so they get that autonomy to pursue their interest in the historical subject I'm teaching, as well as just in terms of you know, the modality in which they're going to show me what they've learned.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Okay, so let's finish with some advice: What specific and practical advice would you give other history instructors who would like to try designing and implementing an unnecessary assignment, the big do's and don'ts?

Cate Denial: I will say the short answer is that I have written a lot of this stuff on my blog (https://catherinedenial.org/blog/). And I will say the longer answer is, have your students make a proposal to you. It only needs to be a paragraph, they don't need to have done research yet. But they must have a sense of the subject they want to investigate, and some sense of what the modality will be for them in demonstrating their learning. Having that come in and turning it around really fast is key to making this successful. You don't have to write on all of those [proposals], by the way, you can record the little voice memos, which are very personable and very quick. So going through those and making that a priority is important. So, when you are scheduling an unessay in

your course design make sure that you scheduled time in your week when those are coming in, so that you can immediately turn them around again, rather than trying to, sort of, fit them in around all the other things that you have to do in a given week.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: I just have to say those could be required and assessed but not graded [which] makes the turnaround time a little bit easier as well.

Cate Denial: Absolutely, I do not grade any of those proposals, not only because I am committed to ungrading, but because it takes away the pressure on the students to think about proposals as something that have a certain appearance, a certain set of rules to them. I just want to see what their ideas are, right? And taking away the grade means that they're going to be much more honest with me about what those things are.

I would say another "do" is do give your students, wherever possible, the opportunity to interact with each other's projects. I used to make the unessay the very last assignment of the of the term. And so, then they would turn them into me, and I would get to enjoy them, but they didn't get to see each other's work. So now it's the second assignment in a term, and the day that it's due everybody just brings everything to class and we do a gallery walk. And they do it in like two rounds, so that everybody gets a chance to tell people about their [project], but then they get to go around and ask questions of other people. That, I think, is so, so important, and I know in my student evaluations, they have talked about how meaningful, it is for them to see what other people have done, for them to be affirmed in the choices that they made by their peers as well. That's really important.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: And increasingly important, since all the research is showing students are having more and more trouble connecting with their peers, feeling isolated all exacerbated by the pandemic. So, a community-building activity like that this can really make or break a class.

Cate Denial: Do factor in a couple of days of preparation, of group workshopping. I take my students to the library very early in the term and say: "What do you want to know if you were given the opportunity to learn anything about whatever the subject of the class? What would you choose?" And then they end up, by the end of that class—they have to have gone to the bookshelf and pulled a book and showed me that they have the book. So that's one [workshop], and then I have at least one workshop where the class period is literally come and work on your own. So, whether that is doing research, writing something up, whether it's creative and you bring some things with you, whatever it is—just be present and do some work on it and then I'm there to answer questions to go around to sort of see where people are in the process, you know? That also was [also] community-building, because they would form a little group, and they would talk to each other about their work and [pose] questions.

Don't grade things unless you until you really have to, you know. Be supportive, give feedback, but don't grade the component parts that lead up to that final project, give them the freedom to get some things wrong without there being any real consequence other than [generating] a great conversation with them.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Well, thank you so much, Dr Denial. Your work is cited in several of the other articles in this special edition of the journal, so I really appreciate your time today.

Cate Denial: Thank you.

An Interview with Dr. Jacqueline D. Antonovich

Jacqueline D. Antonovich
Muhlenberg College
Jessamyn Neuhaus
SUNY Plattsburgh

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For the fall 2022 special issue of *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, focused on teaching history with the unessay, I'm very pleased to be able to include my recorded interview with Dr. Jacqueline D. Antonovich.

Dr. Antonovich is an Assistant Professor of History at Muhlenberg College and historian of health and medicine in the United States, with particular interests in how race, gender, and politics shape the medical field and access to health care. Her teaching interests include histories of public health, alternative medicine, disability, reproduction and childbirth, and epidemics, as well as the history of the American West, nineteenth-century America, and the Gilded and Progressive Eras.

Her current writing projects include a book manuscript on women physicians and medical imperialism in the turn-of-the-century American West, and an article on the public health politics of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. Dr. Antonovich is the co-founder and executive editor of Nursing Clio, a peer-reviewed blog project that ties historical scholarship to present-day issues related to gender, health, and medicine.

On a personal note, I was on a panel about unessays with Dr. Antonovich at the Teaching History conference in 2021. Her work in this area is truly impressive and I'm delighted to be sharing her insights on this for our special issue.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Welcome Dr. Antonovich and thank you for speaking with me today. Let's jump right in! How did you become interested in using the unessay assignment in your undergraduate history classes?

Jacqueline Antonovich: I'll start off by saying that as a teacher and an educator in general I've always been really interested in active learning. And you know in my courses, you know we do a lot of you know, traditional you know historical textual analysis and things like that. But, for me, I really like to mix up low stakes and sort of higher stakes assignments, so in my classes we're always doing you know things like you know writing poetry or doing graphic comics or playing games, or doing things like that, so I feel like I was naturally drawn to a project like an unessay.

I had never heard of it until I came across it on Twitter, which is surprisingly a very great space for finding new pedagogy. I think Cate Denial, Christopher Jones, and Aparna Nair, those are three people who I saw on Twitter showing examples of student on essays and for me this seemed like a really intriguing way to create a capstone project for my history students and in a way that different from the traditional essay.

So, for me, unessays just seemed like a natural fit for the classroom for me already, and I will say also that I'm at a small liberal arts college in which most of our students are double majors majoring in minor ring and a lot of different things, and they're very active in the arts and in sports and so to me, this was also a great fit for my college, because our students sort of very naturally or interdisciplinary. And it feel it felt like this was a great way to get them to think about history, through an interdisciplinary lens.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: So in my experience many historians in particular seem to be receptive to using the unessay in their classrooms. Why do you think so many educators in our discipline are interested in the unessay assignment?

Jacqueline Antonovich: I think the unessay assignment has become more popular in the last few years, precisely because of the moment that we're in, what I would maybe classify as sort of a public history turn and I think that historians are becoming more aware of the ways in which they can't simply replicate this sort of ivory tower mentality, with their students and we're in a moment, where we're trying to think about how do we get students to think about history, and everything around them right now and that history can be translatable

and to all sorts of audiences and into all different formats and to me that's one of the most exciting things about unessays is teaching our students that writing rigorous research papers is important but that also history shows up in almost everything that you do. Whether that's a board game, or you know, a knitting project or anything else. The unessay powerfully demonstrates to students that history is a translatable field into all sorts of different things, does that make sense?

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Absolutely, yes, and that actually it's a perfect segue to our next question, we can dig in a little more here. How does the unessay benefit student learning and engagement and history specifically, and learning generally? You've already touched on some ways, can you expand on those for student learning?

Jacqueline Antonovich: I think it does a couple of different things that sound contradictory, but actually are not. On one hand for students who are very tied to learning to writing a research paper they know how to do it they're good at it right they're used to it because, maybe their history majors and they've taken a few courses and they feel like they're on familiar ground. Giving them an unessay assignment is a challenge. I always give students, the option of writing the traditional research paper if they don't want to do the unessay but I do like to have conversations with those students when they decide that; just kind of dig in a little bit deeper and find out what what's the fear here? And for the most part, once we have that conversation, for the most part they do decide to do the unessay. And I think what that ends up doing is, really, allowing them to think about their major in a totally new way and for some students that scares them, and then it's a conversation. I think my job is to sort of guide them through that so that it's not some scary and for students who maybe are either new to history or maybe are not new to history but are scared of the research paper and were

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Interested.

Jacqueline Antonovich: Or disinterested or were ambivalent or whatever they are, the unessay

provides more of freedom to explore it sort of untethered them from the structure of an essay. I feel like they can you know learn more about history, without having to worry about, you know. whether they have great transition sentences and their footnotes are correct, and you know all of these things, and I think that's really beneficial for students.

And in terms of just learning in general, this sort of ties back to the first thing I said, and when we first started talking, and that is at my college, we really do emphasize the sort of learning across the curriculum and again for me that enables students who maybe are really good at painting, for example, or something else. I feel that that gives them a base, then, to know that they're good at something and also tie that into doing historical research.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: It sounds like you're talking about how it can enable students to build new historical knowledge on previous knowledge and that previous knowledge is expanded when you offer the unessay.

Jacqueline Antonovich: Yes, that too. You can see students building this historical knowledge through doing the unessay. But then in some really special cases, you can also sort of see them building their skill set and another they're more confident about; that duality of learning coming together that you don't see in other on it and in other sort of traditional history.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: And there's a good fit for your student population and your college's mission.

Jacqueline Antonovich: Yes, yeah.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: That actually is the perfect segue to my next question! Are there ways that the unessay supports inclusive and equitable teaching practices.

Jacqueline Antonovich: I mean, absolutely. At mt college, we have a pretty high percentage of students who identify as disabled and I also teach a history of disability course and one thing that I found about the unessay is in terms of the way that it's structured and the way that I structure it and is that it really does allow students more agency in crafting and executing their final project, so you know students who have various sort of different learning, I don't wat to say "learning styles," don't say that! [laughter]

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Learner variability.

Jacqueline Antonovich: Yes, learner variability and learning variability.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Accommodations?
Jacqueline Antonovich: One of the things students do when they submit their [unessay] proposals is they include a plan of action, where they are allowed to sort of say "Okay, well, I'm going to do this, and this is how I'm going to do it, and this is the way that I want to do it." What I find is that allows students more agency than if I'm planning out their essays. So how I look at it is I'm not "accommodating" them, right, because accommodating to me sort of you know feels very top down.
Jessamyn Neuhaus: Right.
Jacqueline Antonovich: I'm not "accommodating" but rather students are the ones telling me how they're going to do a project, and I find that from the feedback that I've received from my students, they find that very empowering.
Jessamyn Neuhaus: And that's really speaking to the importance of structure that Vijy Sathy and Kelly Hogan often emphasize about inclusive teaching practices requires. Providing structure so that there's lots of ways that student fields students can see how they can succeed and you're taking that even a step further by providing a lot of structure *co-created* with students, so that the students when they undertake the unessay project, they have a lot of structure in place at least some of which they've helped build before they start in on the project.
Jacqueline Antonovich: Yes, absolutely and I think once they are, just to back up for a second and say that I absolutely 100% agree with the structure part and I think that's what one of those fears that pops up with students, you know is that the idea of the unessay feels very unstructured and untethered and that really freaks out some students, right?
Jessamyn Neuhaus: Absolutely.
Jacqueline Antonovich: But you know again, it's part of having those conversations about unessays up to the point where they start the proposal and then actually build the project and where they have their plan of action that's their sort of self-structuring. But leading up to the unessay there, it is very scaffolded. I do feel like that scaffolding, that structure, does create the foundation for them to feel confident, to be a little bit more imaginative. And I always emphasize with them that the grading has nothing to do with the final product. Like I'm not grading you on [your] artistry or any of that. So I use very low stakes scaffolding, that we do along the way.
Jessamyn Neuhaus: Right. And the transparency that you're offering early on. Well, thank you that's very that's inspiring! But what kinds of challenges and obstacles have you encountered using the unessay? Let's not put on rose-colored glasses here.
Jacqueline Antonovich: Yeah. Well, using the unessay is a long term [pedagogical] project, in which you are constantly figuring out what works best, and I will say I have sort of two challenges that I want to highlight. One has to do with exactly the structure thing that we were talking, about the very first time that I did a non-essays as a brand new professor inspired by the Twitterverse.
Jessamyn Neuhaus: And all of them look like wonderful unessays [on Twitter] and I was like, "I want to do that!" [laughter]
Jacqueline Antonovich: The very first time I was so bare bones, I did like, okay, "I want you to submit a proposal I want you to do a bibliography and it wasn't even an annotated bibliography and the unessay, and then a two page reflection." And they were fine. Those student rose to the occasion. There were some great unessays but I left the semester feeling like it just wasn't rigorous enough and I didn't really get a good sense of assessment. I didn't get a good sense of what did [students] learn other than having conversations with them and I felt a little bit unsatisfied.
Jessamyn Neuhaus: With measuring students' increased historical skills?
Jacqueline Antonovich: Yes, yeah. And I mean, again yeah, this is great, but as an educator I was just uncomfortable with the assessments. Rather than give up on the whole thing, because I did find it quite inspiring, I just decided that there needed to be more scaffolding. There needed to be more conversations, there needed to be things like an annotated bibliography. Our unessay projects now have about ten steps! I've created

these very low stakes assignments rate and all along the way, that allowed for me to assess more accurately [how and what] they're learning over the course of the whole project. So I've become a lot more confident with that, but it was a little bit of a disappointment, the first time.

And the other challenge that I face which I'm sure a lot of folks who do unessays faced in the last few years was teaching unessays online. I was teaching and we had an unessay assignment when we pivoted online and I thought about not doing it.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Spring 2020.

Jacqueline Antonovich: Yeah I was really worried about how it would come together. One of the most amazing things to do when you do an essays is to have your presentation day or a couple of days, when it's almost like a gathering and students are really excited to see what other students have done. I've had students in the past do cooking where we get to sort of taste their Civil War cooking or whatever and it's just really so rewarding and I thought, "Well, how are we going to do that online?" It isn't going to be as rewarding and meaningful. So that was a challenge and just even figuring out how that works, like how you how do you upload this? Like, say, a knitting project? But you know, we did find ways around it and, and it did work out, I will say it wasn't as amazing as it is in person, but I do think it's actually worth thinking through how to do a project like this and translate it online for a lot of folks who teach online courses. With just a little bit more planning and creativity and creating a space for students to share their work with other students. It can be done and it's a little harder.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: That might be the best use of zoom yet.

Jacqueline Antonovich: Exactly, exactly.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: I was just wondering if we might go back to the scaffolding? And if you would have an answer if somebody asks: "So it sounds like you're saying the unessay is a lot more work for me, as the instructor." Have you found that to be true?

Jacqueline Antonovich: No, Absolutely not. The scaffolding actually isn't anything else that I wouldn't do teaching in the class otherwise. I just sort of fold it into the final project. So if I could give you an example. You know my students and when I teach history of medicine courses or history of public health courses, most of my students have never taken a history course college level history course in their life, most of them are science majors public health major, pre-med. That's a very different population than history majors and minors or liberal arts, you know their liberal arts things. So, for me, part of the challenge, then, is in my hesitation in doing unessays with them was I only have one semester to teach them how to how to do history. [If] I do the unessay, it will that somehow take away from their experience of taking that one college level course that usually ends with like a 10 page [paper].

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Right.

Jacqueline Antonovich: And so to me this is where the scaffolding, and my need to teach them history, sort of collide, and where I don't actually see it as is much more work for these courses. The way I scaffold work before we ever even get to their proposals is that we do these very low stakes, one-page papers. That's their first [assignment] and it's intended to teach them how to do historical research and how to think about historical research and all of that folds into their unessays because to do their unessay they need to do that research. They'll do many papers, and [I'll tell students] go explore an old newspaper database on a topic that interests you, then our second one will be let's go explore what scientific journals are saying about that topic.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Okay.

Jacqueline Antonovich: Then let's do another mini paper on what historians are saying about that topic, and I've just added a new one where can you find your topic in digitize letters and diaries. So how are regular people talking about these in their everyday life? And then I have them do a short reflection, take a step back, and think about all of these sources that you found in these different databases, how do they talk to one another, do they contradict each other, do they reinforce one another? And again, these are one-page papers, very low stakes, it's not a lot of grading.

And I also ask them to reflect on the search process itself. So that they kind of get an idea of the challenges

[of doing historical research] when, after they have all of that. Then [when] it's time to make their unessay proposals, they have this archive that they've created of sources to think about creating their unessay project.
Jessamyn Neuhaus: Right.
Jacqueline Antonovich: And the feedback that I've received from students is twofold. One, it was amazing that by the time they got to the unessay they already had all of this research, and they have the skills to do more research for their projects. They really actually appreciated the part where we have them I have them reflect on doing the searching and the research.

So that's a long way around of saying that I think it only feels like a lot more work but it's really not.
Jessamyn Neuhaus: Well, and I guess, I would also add that it sounds like, based on my approach to teaching, is that it allows you to nerd out about the things you love doing as a historian, meaning we got into this job because we wanted to bury ourselves in archives and look at all these interesting sources. This approach allows us to share a little bit of that archival love with students and build their skills and it sounds like that's exactly what the scaffolding process allows you to do work.
Jacqueline Antonovich: It also creates these very interesting sort of reflection. It creates the basis for great conversations. Students will be like, "Dr A, I have found all of these things in the scientific journals about my topic, but I can't find any newspapers that are talking about this, nothing!" And I love to tell them finding nothing is a finding. Why is that? And let's talk about that. Especially in history of medicine courses, maybe it's a topic that's too taboo for presses to talk about. But maybe you're using the wrong terms, maybe they were using a different term during that time, so it creates these moments of conversation and to nerd out with students. [laughter]
Jessamyn Neuhaus: And research historical research.
Jacqueline Antonovich: Exactly and I will also add that by the time they get to the end of this process, they could write a research paper.
Jessamyn Neuhaus: With the sources they have.
Jacqueline Antonovich: Or they could do an unessay!
Jessamyn Neuhaus: And incidentally, they may have just increased their skills, with how to sort out fact from fiction online, for example.
Jacqueline Antonovich: Yes, yes, absolutely yeah.
Jessamyn Neuhaus: Okay, so my final question you've already touched on a lot. You've [shared] a lot of great suggestions and ideas, but is there any additional specific and practical advice that you would give other history instructors who would like to try designing and implementing an unessay assignment? Maybe the big do's and don'ts in addition to the ones you've already touched on? Or you want to reiterate?
Jacqueline Antonovich: The scaffolding to me is the big one and the other one, I would also say, one of the big things that you really need to do with your students is [help them view] it as a long term project. [Emphasize to students that they will have the chance to] figure out what works for them specifically and what doesn't work. Because one of the first things that you're going to which the pushback that you're going to get a lot from students is a fear of being graded on something that they've never done before. So building that into the process in your assignment sheets, in your syllabus, in your conversations, about not grading for artistry. Giving them that comfort zone is really important. If you don't have a lot of students, I would also recommend having individual conferences with students and early on, maybe even before they do the proposal so that you can help them troubleshoot things that they're thinking about. Another big "Do" is what the unessay sort of does naturally—creates community in your classroom. So don't wait until presentation day to have students share their ideas or share their presentations with the class! Give five minutes or ten minutes every once in a while throughout your class to have students group up and talk about what they're doing and how to troubleshoot with each other. Discuss the process and resources on campus where they can take advantage of like the digital learning assistance on my on my campus. That can help them with a podcast.

Help them create a website. We have all sorts of things like that and campus recording space. Share with

them early and often that those resources that are available to them and so they don't necessarily have to do it alone. There's help on campus to figure out. "I really want to do a podcast but I've never done a podcast before, what do I do?" Well, we have resources on campus that will help you.

Jessamyn Neuhaus: And in a large class you could even create a low stakes kind of group not, not a graded project but like a work group. So there's fifteen people who are interested doing podcast so you meet a couple times go to the support services and if there's questions, run into problems, as a group, you can pass it on to me so that might make it more manageable bigger class.

Jacqueline Antonovich: Exactly. And in one last thing that I will say the scaffolding does help students stay on task, but I believe also having those moments where they check in with each other sort of forces them to stay on task, and that was one of the challenges that I also ran into early on, is that, how do I make it so that or how do I facilitate student learning so that they don't save it to the weekend before?

Jessamyn Neuhaus: Thank you so much!

Jacqueline Antonovich: Thank you.

Pekka Hämäläinen. *Lakota America: A New History of Indigenous Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. Pp. ix, 530. $35.00.

The people gathered in 1776 to celebrate. They had come together to witness an act of creation – the establishment of a nation and formal homeland. There were prayers and songs; music and pageantry; speeches and tales told about the land and the future that they hoped would bring prosperity. They came to pay respect for those in the past who sacrificed and built their nation, and, in the end, they concluded that the nation's founding was the "heart of everything that is" (93). These individuals stood on ground they found sacred and believed needed protection from global forces of ruin – empires, economies, and politics that threatened their ability to be independent. Their modern history started in that place, and they marked it with documents recounting the origin. It is where their lives were to forever have meaning. 1776 was their birthright as a people.

It might seem that this description fits the origin story of the United States of America. And, in many ways it does. But this is the story of the Lakota Nation – a Lakota America – as told by American Horse (1840-1908), the Oglala elder, warrior, and count keeper who told this story to the U.S. Army officer, William Corbusier. It was American Horse's explanation for the centrality of Pahá Sápa – the Black Hills – to his people and his nation in 1879. He told it just as the other nation born in 1776 determined that it was its right to take Lakota land and imprison Lakota people in reservations.

It is this twin beginning and twin struggle on the North American continent that animates Pekka Hämäläinen's sweeping history, *Lakota America*. Two nations occupying a large land mass with imperial dreams and military power; two nations who organized sacred places and sacred texts that defined themselves as people and nation. These two nations determined the structure and history of North America from the early eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century. *Lakota America* brilliantly tells the story of Lakota nation-building. Hämäläinen reshapes how historians and history teachers might approach indigenous worlds and complicates the traditional ways that the U.S. national narrative has been told.

Hämäläinen is already well-known for his excellent *The Comanche Empire*, which tells the story of Comanche empire building in the Southern Plains alongside European nation states (especially Spain) and the United States before and after the Mexican-American War. But he goes even further and deeper here in tying indigenous power, indigenous nation building, and indigenous modernity to the building of the United States as a modern national power. No review can truly do justice to the complex, detailed, and often thrilling story that Hämäläinen weaves in *Lakota America*. But there are two main contributions in this well-written tale that stand out immediately: the effective use of winter counts throughout the book as sources of Lakota world views and Lakota understanding of their nation; and the focus on the Lakota ability to change – or shapeshift, as it were, like the trickster character Iktómi.

First, and most importantly, is that Hämäläinen uses source material that has not been fully integrated into other narrative histories of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries: the Plains winter counts that tell the story of peoples throughout the region. Although these accounts have been saved, displayed in museums of history and art, and discussed as indigenous forms of cultural expression, they have rarely been so fully utilized as forms of narrative. Hämäläinen uses these sources throughout his work. His focus remains as much as possible on what Lakota people thought, believed, understood, and explained. And he constantly comes back to these (often providing the pictographs themselves) to demonstrate Lakota ways of thinking about events large and small. As he argues, the winter counts are "[at] once a record of the past and an act of remembering, of giving meaning to the past… they open an alternative, counterhegemonic window into the American past, allowing us to observe Native motives and meanings directly, without a foreign filter" (8). By using these sources as narrative histories as well as artistic expression, Hämäläinen opens up the Lakota as historical actors, and he opens up the process of historical thinking for students confronting these for the first time. By offering a narrative that does not privilege the written word alone – a written word generally in the hands of Euro-Americans – he gives us fully human indigenous people shaping and organizing their world.

The second contribution, and a leading theme throughout the narrative, is the Lakota ability to change, react, and reconfigure themselves given the broader structures of economics, politics, national interest, war, environmental considerations, and cultural norms. These were not a "homogenized," traditionalist people stuck outside of time and confronting a rapidly changing, modernizing world that they cannot understand and do not embrace. Instead, they were shapeshifters – adaptable and creative theorists of an indigenous modernity throughout their history and, in particular, in their relationships with the U.S. government/military from the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. Hämäläinen uncovers the complex ways that Lakota people interacted with U.S. government officials for their own interests in creating an empire of their own. Sometimes they behaved as simple trading partners seeking goods; sometimes as partners against Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara peoples in both military and economic terms seemingly to United States' benefit. But they always sought for their nation's advantage and were never passive supplicants for U.S. hegemony – though the United States often did not recognize this particular Lakota ability. For example, at Horse Creek in 1851, the United States wanted to bring together Indian nations to engineer an agreement over reservations in the Great Plains that would allow free land for railroad building, overland trails, and a great settler migration westward. Americans thought they might cajole, force, and domesticate Indians by identifying friendly "chiefs" and providing incentives for these chiefs to accept personal gain while giving away large swaths of indigenous territory. It was a tactic used many times throughout colonial occupation. But the Lakota actually commanded the negotiations – entering Horse Creek with great fanfare, meeting in private council to decide who took the lead in negotiations, and forcing smaller nations to submit to their overall authority. As Hämäläinen suggests, the Lakota "thought in terms of geopolitics and, like, Americans, they had grown to command the world around them like an imperial power" (218). The Lakota always were and still remain Lakota.

Moreover, in later negotiations with the Americans after the Civil War, the Lakota's shapeshifted again creating a new political philosophy of *iwáštegla* – articulated most effectively by Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and Red Cloud in the late 1860s through the 1880s. Essentially, they articulated a political ideal that they would "go slowly" toward white modernity: "[it was] a new political philosophy that recognized that Lakotas would have to gradually learn to live with wašíčus [whites], whose presence in their world had become an irrevocable fact…Confident as Lakotas may have been about their place in the world, they remained flexible and receptive. They would survive the wašíču version of modernity by selectively embracing it" (299-300). Rather than stick to old ways of thinking about their land, Lakota leaders recognized the need to shift slowly toward American versions of modernity – markets, consumption, education, etc… -- in order to protect their own.

The one possible criticism of *Lakota America* is where the main narrative ends. Hämäläinen winds down his central story with the events at Little Big Horn and the terrible massacre at Wounded Knee. It was at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890, that Spotted Elk's band was brutalized and murdered by U.S. soldiers. It was a catastrophe for the Lakota people where "America's indigenous civilization seemed to have died…turning more than two hundred thousand Indians into relics" (379). It might seem that this simply recasts an old story of Indian endings (the indigenous heart "buried" at Wounded Knee) in contrast to the rest of the narrative that centers indigenous power and authority. One longs to hear more than this ending. Hämäläinen does add an epilogue that carries his story through allotment, the remaking of Indian land in the Indian Reorganization Act, the loss of land again in reclamation projects such as the Pick-Sloan Dam, and onto the recent events at Standing Rock against the Dakota Access Pipeline. But this is a short account of these events of Lakota recovery and survival. Although the book is long, one would love to read Hämäläinen recount this story as well. Perhaps that will have to await another volume.

For teachers, *Lakota America* offers much to build upon in the classroom. The book certainly works in courses on Native America and even works well alongside traditional textbook accounts of U.S. history. It can be used effectively in both college and even upper level high school classrooms to counter dominant narratives of the United States, and show the interconnections between Lakota power and U.S. interests in building their continent wide empire. Moreover, the work can fuel a broader re-thinking for treating indigenous modernity

and indigenous views of statehood as serious visions for how North America might be imagined as a historical space and avoid overly deterministic accounts that assume an inevitable receding frontier of US authority across the continent. Highly recommended.

Edward C. Rafferty
Concord Academy (MA)

John Thelin. *Going to College in the Sixties*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 2021. Pp. 198. $22.95.

In 1961, high school students anxious about entering college could read, *Preparing for College Study*, a new book by Norman A. Fedde, a faculty member at Yale University. Although Fedde warned his readers that teaching and learning in college would bring new challenges due to the promising changes in education in the postwar period, neither the author nor his readers could imagine much of what lay ahead in the 1960s. In *Going to College in the Sixties*, historian John Thelin provides a brief, accessible account of American higher education at the time that aims at a "reasonable reconsideration" of a topic often dominated by journalists' accounts, nostalgic memoirs, and popular culture. (xiii)The result is an analysis that, despite the book's title, include very little of the personal experiences of students and, instead, offers an instructive commentary on the largely overlooked aspects that nevertheless revolutionized higher education. Thelin spent the entire decade of the 1960s as a college student and his work illuminates the crucial features of the decade that few students, and perhaps even the general public, appreciated at the time.

Thelin's analysis largely avoids the "pitfalls of nostalgia" and directly challenges more conventional accounts focused on student protests on well-known campuses. (6) He reminds readers that conservative student unrest at the University of Mississippi in 1962 belongs next to the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in 1964. "Volatile student demonstrations," Thelin explains, "coexisted with intercollegiate athletics, fraternities and sororities, student government, and the 'business as usual' of a university." (xiv) College life created both liberal activists and the conservative students eager to connect with the "states' business and political establishment." (xiv) This approach means that Thelin includes effective discussion of the first half of the decade and, with less success, the breadth of higher education that includes schools in the Midwest and the South as well as the expanding role of junior colleges.

If our collective memory often centers on dramatic student unrest and the counterculture, *Going to College in the Sixties* excels in its treatment of what Thelin identifies as the "vital statistics" of higher education. Thelin's analysis weaves together demographic factors, budgets, the employment of faculty and staff, and tuition to portray an educational environment invigorated by postwar prosperity, the improvement of the nation's public high schools, and unprecedented support from state and federal government. His treatment of college admissions during the period is especially strong as the author describes the increasing attention to public relations and the role of the media. With little concern for protecting the interests of students as consumers, colleges sold a romantic vision of college life and upward mobility while maintaining exclusionary practices. While Thelin's discussion of racial, gender, and class discrimination is unfortunately limited, his account is clear that colleges modernized while perpetuating a "caste system across hundreds of institutions." (50)

One of the more intriguing features of the book is Thelin's description of the "knowledge industry," the crucial role of an array of new forces that reshaped higher education at the time. The decade brought the growing influence of research centers and institutes, private foundations, state and federal agencies, enormous state systems, the Department of Defense, the Educational Testing Service, and international alliances that ranged from non-profit organizations to the Central Intelligence Agency. These aspects and large federal grants, 80% of which went to just twenty federal grant universities in 1963, fueled increased commitment to promoting

research, graduate programs, and external relations. This led to, as Thelin argues, the irony of American colleges and their leaders becoming even less interested in the experiences and concerns of traditional students just as historical forces and increased enrollment brought more political unrest.

While *Going to the College in the Sixties* provides little of what history students anticipate from a narrative of the decade, it is precisely these ironic connections between the structural issues of higher education and the more conventional images of the period that make the book valuable to teachers of survey courses and postwar electives in U.S. history. The author is cautious about claims that campus unrest brought substantial social and institutional change. In the end, issues ranging from race and gender in American society to foreign policy may have been shaped by colleges far less than often assumed and today's growing attention to equity, inclusion, and diversity is a testament to both the success and limitations of such activism in the 1960s. However, Thelin's eye for the less dramatic aspects of the period allows him to illuminate connections between more familiar stories of unrest and educational reforms that have become staples of contemporary college life such as innovative curricula, academic advising, career planning, tutoring, and financial aid. Teachers interested in helping students grapple with the complexity of social change in U.S. history will appreciate a text that helps students to understand, for example, that the same forces that led student activists to occupy administration buildings in 1968 also resulted in the almost widespread use of student evaluations of courses and faculty teaching by the eighties.

Richard Hughes
Illinois State University

Omnia El Shakry. *Understanding and Teaching the Modern Middle East*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020. Pp. 384. $39.95.

The only teaching challenge not addressed in this practical and thought-provoking collection of essays is that of finding curricular space and institutional support for including the history of the Middle East in a student's education. However, for those lucky enough to have room for a unit or a year on the region, El Shakry's book includes everything from suggested resources to pedagogical strategies to philosophical reflections that will enrich any classroom. It is a useful resource both for those working at the high school and university levels and, with its wealth of ideas on the challenges of teaching contentious topics, might be interesting as a text in a class for teachers in training. Overall, the volume is both a field guide to key topics and changing debates in the discipline as well as a series of meditations on the challenges of communicating the complexity of Middle East history for a U.S. audience.

The twenty-one essays that make up the book are divided into sections organized around the trials of teaching historical content, examining contemporary issues, and selecting resources and methods. This attempt to categorize the essays is the only unsuccessful aspect of the volume for the essays are just too rich to be labeled so narrowly. The major topics one would expect do enjoy separate chapters (the legacy of Islam, Colonialism, Israel/Palestine, the Iranian Revolution, etc…). There are also chapters focused on using film, literature or diplomatic cables in the classroom, as well as more contemporary chapters addressing the War on Terror, the Arab Spring and Refugees, but the essay topics are mere starting points for wide ranging discussions. For example, Rochelle Davis' "Refugees in and from the Middle East" does review the content markers for lectures on the history of displacement in the region, but it also suggests ways to question the Western preference for seeing refugees as humanitarian rather than political victims.

The variety in each author's approach could be off-putting for a teacher looking for specific suggestions on an unfamiliar topic and finding instead an esoteric disquisition on the dangers of narratives and chronology, but the variety is what makes the volume valuable even for experienced teachers. Readers will find many resource suggestions, but they will also find universally applicable strategies for sparking discussion and critical inquiry.

For example, the essays by Sherene Seikaly on "the History of Israel/Palestine" and by Alma Rachel Heckman on "Nuancing the Narrative: Teaching the Jewish Modern Middle East" both include resource suggestions, but they also offer ideas on handling emotional and contentious discussions in the classroom. Of course, those same suggestions can be used to talk about post 9-11 militarization, the history of Islam or the prism of Gender and Sexuality (also topics explored in the book), other areas where many students have emotional investments in particular interpretations. Another teacher might delve into Naghmeh Sohrabi and Arielle Gordon's chapter on Iran and find ideas about periodization and global context, but they will also find suggestions for helping students question how politically consequential narratives and iconic images emerge and are reproduced. In short, the questions and strategies raised in essays have applicability far beyond the narrow topic each essay tackles.

Although the book has useful insights for all who teach, it occasionally assumes a level of familiarity with the region's history which might not match the situation of all who find themselves responsible for teaching the subject. In the last two decades many U.S. school systems rapidly introduced classes on the Middle East, but preparation was often limited to short in-service classes that sometimes reiterated the same Orientalist tropes that El Shakry and her fellow essayist, Michael Gaspar, lament in the book. But for those many dedicated teachers who seek out ways to explore and teach the complicated context of events, this book will help both them and their students rethink easy narratives. Even the most abstract essays, like El Shakry's introduction that explores the challenge of teaching on a "region" while trying not to reduce the array of separate histories, economies, and cultures to a homogenous spectre for Western convenience, are mercifully jargon-free and focused on the challenges facing the classroom teacher. If a teacher does not yet have the background to fully appreciate all of the essays, they can still benefit from the intellectually intriguing discussions.

A very few of the essays felt slightly misplaced in this volume. Christine Philliou's chapter on "the Armenian Genocide and the Politics of Knowledge" concentrates almost completely on exploring the historiographic context surrounding the 2015 publication of Ronald Grigor Suny's *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide*. It is an excellent essay but leaves the question of how and what to teach on the controversial topic unaddressed. Darryl Li's essay on "Teaching the Global War on Terror" spends its energy on challenging the narrow understandings of a very few points, like Jihad and Al Qaeda, when what is sorely needed is some guidance on making chronological and narrative sense of the recent past. And, unfortunately, some of the suggestions for specific social media blogs or online news sites shared in Ziad Abu-Rish's essay on incorporating the contemporary in the classroom will have short shelf lives. However, the broader suggestions he makes on how to engage student interest in the contemporary without reducing history to a pat backgrounder reinforcing ideas about the present, will remain relevant long after students have switched from Instagram, to Snapchat to whatever comes next.

Understanding and Teaching the Modern Middle East is not a comprehensive teacher's guide, nor does it intend to be. It does offer practical suggestions that can enrich any teacher's repertoire for pushing students into deeper inquiry and it does sketch out ways in which recent scholarship reframes our view of some key themes, but the value of the book ultimately rests in its overall tone. This is a book whose authors reflect on their grave responsibility as teachers to shape, for better or worse, relationships of power. The authors share far more than ideas on how to teach the topics, they reveal their discomfort with being part of the politics of U.S.-Middle East relations and their awareness that their teaching can either recreate or undermine the political dynamics of that relationship and other relationships crossing national, racial, religious and other boundaries. This collection does not consistently examine every topic that might come up in teaching the history of the Middle East, but it does consistently respect teaching as a political endeavor of tremendous consequences, and that is always worth reading about.

Janice Lee Jayes
Illinois State University

Leah Shopkow. *The Saint and the Count: A Case Study for Reading Like a Historian*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. Pp 216. $24.95.

How do historians, especially of the pre-modern past, wrestle with limited textual sources while maintaining historical accuracy? How can scholars identify biases, motivations, and errors by piecing together disparate narratives from a handful of texts? With refreshing honesty, Leah Shopkow demonstrates the historian's process, highlighting discoveries and pitfalls along the way, in her short but rich monograph, *The Saint and the Count*.

Shopkow begins her study with a passage from Stephen of Fougères' (d. 1178) *Life of St. Vitalis,* which details the saint's intervention in a local count's marriage due to the nobleman's acts of domestic violence. While the events of the selection hook the reader with questions of medieval relationships, gender roles, and family dynamics, Shopkow uses the excerpt as the catalyst for her investigation into the reliability of textual sources, the subjectivity of authors, and the purpose of primary sources. She presents the problem succinctly: "The people in the story died well before Vitalis did" (2). What, then, do we do with the passage? Why did Stephen include it? Should we discount the entire *Life* because of an apparently falsified portion?

In order to tackle these questions, Shopkow surveys different types of (mostly pre-modern) written sources, such as hagiography, with texts surrounding Vitalis as her examples. She explains the typical contexts, audiences, and authors for various genres, emphasizing that no source exists in a vacuum. Outlining the facts of Vitalis' existence in the eleventh century, Shopkow provides the reader with a historically accurate narrative of the saint before examining Stephen's life and textual compositions, as well as the networks of patronage and authorship that existed in the Low Countries and southern England in the twelfth century. Shopkow then turns back to the issue of genre, teasing out the characteristics of medieval hagiographies. Although modern readers often dismiss seemingly miraculous stories in such texts as fake, Shopkow argues for the value of unbelievable tales to the source as a whole. She historicizes the advent of "scientific" knowledge and "objective" criticism, and asserts "although we cannot determine whether a miracle actually occurred… we can ask instead what cultural work the author intended the miracle to do" instead of completely discounting the text (90).

Shopkow concludes by returning to the beginning passage with a scholarly investigation into medieval violence and gender. Just as the first four chapters show her process working with primary sources and historical facts, this chapter displays the historian's craft of researching themes, topics, and tropes with secondary sources in relation to primary sources. Shopkow examines medieval thought surrounding violence, property, marriage, and holiness, ultimately stating primary sources invite scholars to "start asking questions… to uncover the context in which the stories are being told" (110). She ends with an assertion that appears throughout *The Saint and the Count*: authors and creators always filter knowledge, and texts are a product of the environments in which they are created. Shopkow also calls attention to her own subjectivity and biases, making her own positionality clear to the reader.

Overall, *The Saint and the Count* is very readable and accessible to a wide audience outside the academy. Shopkow's clarity and transparency regarding both historical facts and the historical process make this work great for undergraduate courses such as an introduction to medieval history, a general history survey, or an upper-division class that interrogates sources and historiography at length. Particularly valuable to the student of history is the glossary, which explains basic terminology used in medieval history, and Shopkow's English translations of Stephen's *Life of St. Vitalis* and *Life of St. Firmat*, appended at the end of the monograph. With these tools and Shopkow's earnest guidance, the audience feels confident to contextualize and analyze sources from the medieval past and reading like a historian.

Sarah Luginbill
Trinity University

Cassanello, Robert, Oswmer Louis, and Lisa Mills, Directors. *Marching Forward*; 2020; Orlando, FL: UCF Burnett Honors College, WUCF.

In April 1964, just months before Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 challenging aspects of racial segregation in American life, the *Orlando Sentinel* published a groundbreaking photograph that included both white and black high school students. The students, two African American girls from Jones High School and two white girls from Edgewater High School, wore their respective marching band uniforms as they collaborated on a community fundraising campaign to help their bands perform at the 1964 World's Fair in New York City. The documentary film, *Marching Forward*, chronicles the experiences of the students and teachers to explore how the city promoted both racial cooperation and the reputation of Orlando, Florida at the height of the civil rights movement.

Produced by students at the University of Central Florida and accessible for free online, the short documentary relies largely on oral interviews and archival film and photographs to argue that school bands in Orlando during the early 1960s provided both a sense of identity for the city's segregated communities and an important vehicle for racial change. Edgewater High, which was all-white, received the initial invitation to perform in New York, but the stellar reputation of the marching band at Jones High led school officials and community leaders, including the *Orlando Sentinel*, to campaign for the unprecedented inclusion of the city's black high school. While the suggestion that Disney ultimately chose to create Disneyworld in Orlando, rather than St. Augustine, due to the success of the city in minimizing racial conflict and supporting both schools remains unsubstantiated in the film, *Marching Forward* is clear many perceived the issue of the bands at the World's Fair as crucial for the city's image. Political leaders and members of the business community needed the positive story of the marching bands to attract investment, future residents, and tourists to the area that, by 1964, faced increasing public pressure due to the civil rights movement.

At less than an hour, *Marching Forward* is far too short to provide today's students with substantial discussion of many subtopics related to the bands and the World's Fair. Viewers encounter little historical context for developments in 1964 with only brief comments on the history of Jim Crow, the evolving struggle for racial justice, or the broader history of Orlando or the South. More importantly, the film does not address the provocative story of the World's Fair until the second half of the narrative. Even then, viewers hear students describe the excitement and teenage fun associated with visiting New York for the first time without, unfortunately, any sense of how the Florida students, both white and black, encountered northern race relations for the first time. Brief references to strict gender segregation on the trains traveling north, girls and boys were forced to ride in different train cars, and etiquette lessons on public dining before the trip raise unexplored questions about the intersection of race, gender, and class at the time. *Marching Forward* does include some description of efforts to desegregate schools in 1970, including a public drawing aimed at determining where both white and black teachers would work in the newly integrated district. However, the reality today that only 1 percent of students at Jones High School are white and that students of color now make up the majority of students at Edgewater High School underscores the limits of any narratives about Orlando "coming together through music." (www.marchingforwardfilm.org)

In contrast, *Marching Forward,* which also has a PBS website with film clips and secondary teacher materials, succeeds when the film focuses on the voices of students from both schools and the two accomplished school band directors, James "Chief" Wilson and Del Kieffner. The students describe the challenges black students faced in public places and how little the white students at Edgewater understood about the lives of their black peers. The film prioritizes Wilson and his students at Jones High School as some were involved in civil rights sit-ins and, unlike Kieffner at Edgewater High, Wilson faced ongoing challenges to minimize racial conflict that could threaten his program while also advocating for increased opportunities for his students. These perspectives enrich the film's narrative and provide current students of history with valuable evidence of the breadth of civil rights activism. Contemporary media accounts of the movement often emphasized

dramatic public conflict such as protests, arrests, and violence at the expense of less vivid yet crucial aspects such as community organizing and political negotiation. Historiography, public history, and textbooks frequently reinforce this narrow version of the movement. However, the experiences of individuals in Orlando, both white and black, in using music education in the 1960s to confront racial segregation provides instructors with an accessible example of how activists leveraged visible yet seemingly less important aspects of education in the Jim Crow South to promote meaningful social change.

Richard Hughes
Illinois State University

Robert Cassanello and Lisa Mills, Directors. *Filthy Dreamers*. Orlando, FL: UCF Burnett Honor's College, WUCF, 2020. Film.

Florida's educators, and other teachers across the nation today, face censorship in their classrooms. Educational institutions are under attack for teaching "divisive concepts" and calls have emerged for books, often those with LGBTQ+ themes, to be removed from library shelves and course readings lists. Unfortunately, this scenario is not something new. In *Filthy Dreamers*, a short documentary film created by students and faculty at the University of Central Florida, the filmmakers look at a moment in the 1920s when religious fundamentalists ridiculed the curriculum, faculty, and administration at Florida State College for Women (FSCW) in an attempt to influence what students could be taught. At the time, this establishment stood as the only college for women in the state, making it a site of particular concern for those interested in policing morality and advocating a conservative definition of white womanhood.

In a period when more American women than ever were attending college, specifically white, middle and upper-class women, and some American women were experimenting with higher skirts, short hair, and taking advantage of their newly won right to vote, increasing anxiety emerged over the proper role for women in American society. At the same time, debates over the teaching of evolution were taking center stage on a national level with William Jennings Bryan and the "Scopes Monkey Trial." Both of these forces are at play in *Filthy Dreamers*, as a local religious crusader and his followers accused FSCW of teaching atheism, free love, and other "unchristian" values to its students. The dispute went so far as to get a state senate committee to investigate supposedly salacious textbooks. Students themselves spoke out against the accusations, writing in a statement from student government that the allegations unfairly stained their reputations, using their position as ladies to fight back. Ultimately, FSCW's President managed to protect an embattled faculty member and made no changes to the curriculum. To tell this story, the film features interviews with women who attended FSCW in the 1940s, archival photographs, footage from the period, political cartoons, and statements from academic experts to paint a picture of the broader period and the specific controversy at FSCW.

With a run time under thirty minutes, *Filthy Dreamers* can be screened and discussed in a single class period. The film would be appropriate for undergraduate courses focused on women's history, gender, the history of Florida, or the history of education. The film could work for advanced high school students, though the focus on college life will likely resonate more strongly with university-level learners.

The film has an accompanying educational website hosted by PBS LearningMedia. The website offers short clips from the documentary as well as a variety of activities, such as a Venn diagram, a graphic organizer, a mock debate, and discussion questions. The activities are geared towards a K-12 audience, though some of the discussion questions could be modified for use in the university classroom. There is one newsletter activity that would benefit from stronger guidance for instructor implementation. Copyright may make this difficult, but it would be enriching to have some of the primary sources used in the film available for students to explore.

The production quality is great, but there are a few aspects of the film that could be improved upon. The first is that the documentary could continue to make more explicit the connections between gender and allegations

of immoral course content. It remains a bit unclear if groups like the Florida Purity League particularly targeted FSCW, or were these same issues being argued across the state? The program could also talk more about racial tensions in Florida and the country in the period. While the film nods to controversies over curriculum at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College during the period, a racially segregated college for Black students, and the firing of the College's President, a more thorough look at this incident would also help to illuminate the debates at FSCW. For instance, the film mentions advocating interracial marriage as one of FSCW's critics' concerns, but does not take time to contextualize the charge. Finally, more could be said about the broad composition of the student body at FCSW in the 1920s. About how many students attended the college? Were they mostly from middle-class families? From rural Florida?

Filthy Dreamers is a great example of the local as a microcosm for national debates, and though the setting is a very specific one, the film can be used as an opening to discuss some of the key social issues of the 1920s, especially relating to women and gender. Ultimately, the film sheds light on a forgotten moment in Florida education history that is uncomfortably topical today.

PBS Streaming site: https://www.pbs.org/video/filthy-dreamers-vshf7s/
Film Website: https://filthydreamersdocumentary.org/
PBS Learning Materials: https://florida.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/filthy-dreamers/

Eliza Martin
Georgia State University