Un-Essay Assignment Guidelines
200 points total
Due No Later than December 12

Description

African American History is American History, and the past shapes our world today. Throughout this class, we have studied history from a variety of different types of sources, including historical sites, oral histories, documentaries, music, photographs, digital maps, and more, in addition to scholarly books. Your final project will not be a traditional research essay, but you should choose a topic that you would like to explore in more depth on your own. Although the research process is similarly rigorous, the creation and presentation of your historical knowledge will be more creative.

An "un-essay" is "any form or media that helps you make a compelling and effective argument that uses textual evidence," according to Daniel O'Donnell. Students who choose to submit an "un-essay" as their final assignment will choose their own topic, as long as it's relevant to a theme in class, and will decide the best way to present it. Students will be evaluated on how compelling and effective the overall project presentation is. Be creative! Come up with alternative ways to explain a specific topic or theme related to the history of the African Americans. Consider your strengths, talents, skills, intellectual or career interests, and think about how to apply them.

Directions

Un-essays will include a short abstract or summary of the project that explains the content, the goals, and its significance. It will also include a bibliography of sources that informed the un-essay. Topics and formats will be proposed in journal form by **November 28**. You will submit your un-essays on the **NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 12!**

Possibilities

You are limited only by your creative energy. Consider what types of media you most enjoy learning and viewing. You might create a podcast episode or YouTube video with a dynamic conversation about an event, person, or theme in African American history. Maybe you're an artist, musician, poet, or an influencer. You could create a series of Tik-Toks, or perform through spoken-word or dance. You could create a piece of art. Perhaps you're interested in culture, sports, or literature during a specific period in history. Consider what is the best way to express that cultural and historical moment? Perhaps you could create a highlight reel, song, political speech, Congressional testimony, informative pamphlet, protest signs, petitions, newspaper articles (e.g. *The Chicago Defender*), or editorials (like for *The Crisis)*. Perhaps you want to create a series of personal letters or a diary, imagining an event from the perspective of historical actors, leaders, activists, students, people in a community, politicians, children, or even your ancestors or family members. If you're interested in law, you could conduct a mock trial of a historical injustice. If you want to be a teacher, you could create a lesson plan

or lecture. Consider the best media to express these ideas: personal letters, signs, clothing, official documents, graphic novels or comics, speeches, songs, websites, digital exhibits, 3-D printed items or models—there is a world of possibility. Check out some of these amazing examples from Dr. Aparna Nair, Dr. Jacqueline Antonovich, and Dr. Hilary Green.[1]

Criteria for evaluation: compelling and effective
Un-essays are compelling when they achieve the following, in as much as the topic and approach allows:

- Interesting
- Complete (doesn't leave the audience thinking that important points are skipped or ignored)
- Truthful (supported by historical evidence)
- Argumentative: it makes a point based on the research or course materials

Un-essays are effective when they achieve the following, in as much as the topic and approach allows:

- Understandable, accessible: the production value is appropriate
- Well-crafted, thoughtfully organized, and stylistic (not rushed or un-edited)
- Appropriate: the genre, media, or form are appropriate to the content
- High quality/attractive: presented in way that audience believes arguments, examples, and conclusions

Show the Evidence

3 Primary sources: consult a *minimum* of three primary sources (oral histories, memoir/autobiographies, newspapers, photos, films, historical/government documents pamphlets). I have shared a list of resources, archives, and databases to locate sources on the Canvas page, including the Library of Congress Civil Rights Project, or Chronicling America Newspaper Database, SNCC Digital Gateway, and the National Archives, VT Libraries databases and subject guides, such as the Proquest "Black Freedom Struggle Primary Sources," or "African Americans and Jim Crow: Repression and Protest," but you can always feel free to ask me for more ideas.

2 Secondary sources: consult a minimum of two scholarly sources (historical books or articles). You may select readings from the class, and use any library resources and databases.

Proposal: 10 points (journal), due Nov. 28
Include details about your topic, how you intend to present the project (medium), and at least two sources that inform your project.

[1] This Un-Essay assignment prompt was inspired by the work of Dr. Aparna Nair, Dr. Jacqueline Antonovich, Dr. Hilary Green, and Dr. Jennifer Vannette, who generously shared her prompt with me.

Abstract: 75 points
500 words which explain the content and significance of your project and connects it to the sources.

Bibliography or Works Cited page: 25 points
Must cite at least five primary and secondary sources

Un-Essay Submission: 100 points