

Assignment 3: History through Narrative

Our final project asks you to produce a narrative of your own. In this project, you will explore an aspect of Asian American history through the telling of a single person's story. Your primary sources for this project could be a personal interview, an oral history (we will be looking at several online oral history collections), a diary, letters, or other archival material. How can this person's story help us better understand an aspect of Asian American experience? (We take American to broadly include North and South America). For this project, you must decide the best form – essay, multimedia presentation, graphic novel, etc. – in which to convey this narrative. Non-essay projects must also be accompanied by a reflection explaining the project's intent and source material.

STEP 1: FIND A PRIMARY SOURCE

First, you will need to find a primary source. You may choose to:

- Conduct a personal interview with a parent, grandparent, friend, or acquaintance. If you are doing this, be sure to let the person know 1) what the interview is for, 2) what the final product will be, and 3) with whom it will be shared. Conduct interviews ethically by respecting a person's boundaries and only sharing information they agree to. Note that because this is a historical project, you will probably be more successful with older interviewees rather than your peers.
- Listen to (or read transcripts of) online oral histories. There are several websites that collect oral histories, letters, and other documents online:
 - <https://libguides.rutgers.edu/AsianAm> lists websites where you can find oral histories of Chinese laundry workers, Vietnamese refugees, Seattle cannery workers, South Asians in the Pacific Northwest, and more.
 - <http://www.densho.org> is an enormous repository of information about the Japanese American internment, including over 750 videos
 - <http://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/>. UCLA has collected oral histories of Asian Americans, including Korean Americans and South Asian Americans.
 - <http://www.calstatela.edu/caohp>. Cal State LA has collected oral histories of Chinese Americans in Southern California.
 - http://via.library.depaul.edu/oral_his/ Focuses mainly on Asian Americans in the Midwest
 - <https://sites.uci.edu/vaohp/> A collection of Vietnamese American stories collected by students at UC Irvine.
 - <https://www.saada.org/browse/type/oral-history> The South Asian Digital Archive
 - <https://guides.nyu.edu/southasiandiaspora/Oral-Histories>. More resources for finding South Asian American histories.

See our library resource guide on Sakai for more collections of online oral histories! Avoid published autobiographies and memoirs for this project. Published works have already undertaken the task of curating and shaping a narrative, which is what I am asking you to do.

STEP 2: DECIDE WHAT STORY YOU WANT TO TELL

Your next task is to decide how the information you have collected tells us something about Asian American history. For example:

- Does the story emphasize the importance of the 1965 Immigration Act? In that case, you could tell the story of Asian exclusion laws and how the 1965 Immigration Act that allowed this person to immigrate changed the demographics of the U.S.
- Does the story tell us about what life was like in the Japanese American internment camps? If so, what does it emphasize? Hardship, resilience, disruption, pain, tedium, betrayal, resettlement?
- Does the story show us a history seldom acknowledged, like Asian Americans in the South, or early Korean American immigrants? If so, what can we learn from knowing these histories exist?

Try to avoid telling a narrative that is clichéd or well-known. For example, the “hard-working immigrant who came with nothing and pulled himself up by his bootstraps to become a successful American” is nothing new. How does your story complicate this narrative? Your narrative should add to the conversation. “Most people think x, but this story shows y.”

STEP 3: RESEARCH THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

You will need to place this person’s story in historical context. For this, you will need **at least three historical sources**. Erika Lee’s book may count as one. For this project, journal articles will be too narrow; books are your likely best bets. The librarians and I will be happy to recommend and help you find books for your research.

STEP 4: DECIDE ON A FORMAT

Finally, you will need to decide on the best format to tell this story. Some suggested formats include:

- An essay (the advantage of this format is that you could submit an essay to Duke’s journal of first-year writing, *Deliberations*)
- A slideshow with photographs, music, and voiceover
- A graphic novel
- A short story or poetry collection
- A podcast
- Other format of your choice

STEP 5: SUBMIT YOUR FINAL PROJECT WITH A REFLECTION

Essays will be submitted with a Works Cited page. If you are not writing an essay, you will need to submit a reflection to accompany your project. This reflection should address 1) what you hope to show with your project and 2) your sources for the project. The reflection allows me to grade you on your intent rather than your artistic skill.