

The Unauthorized Autobiography of US

He who controls the past controls the future.

He who controls the present controls the past.

George Orwell, 1984

Assignment Overview

What stories about ourselves and our nation do we tell each other and how have such stories changed over time? As the quote from George Orwell indicates, the story of the past is written by those who control the now or the present. Such stories (histories) then powerfully shape what happens next. Throughout our exploration of American history we have examined how stories – presented as biographies, autobiographies, paintings, photos, and other narratives – have shaped the master narrative of American national identity and of nation. Our studies reveal how such master narratives of American identity are contested, shift, and change over time. Ultimately, the construction of national identity is a political act about selection, inclusions, exclusions, and erasures.

Your assignment here is twofold. **First**, as part of a group project, you will create a brief biography of America. Your group is free to determine the form this narrative will take. But it must be relatively brief. You will have to decide what to include and what to leave out. In the process of making such determinations about the importance of this event or that over another you will necessarily be making an argument. Selection is inherently argumentative. What story of America will your group decide to tell? **Second**, you will each, individually, be asked to write a final report on your project, detailing why you choose to tell the story in a certain way, explaining what was discussed but left out, and what additional information you wanted to include or would have included if you had more time.

The group portion of your assignment is worth 15% of your final grade.

The individual final report is worth 25% of your final grade.

Assignment Format – Group Project:

The first part of your final project will be to produce – as part of a group – a brief biography of American history. Your group is free to determine the form this narrative will take. Just below are a list of applications and website that you could use to produce a collaborative group project. You may decide to make a film, write a straightforward narrative history, produce a power-point presentation, create a comic book, among a host of other options. One of the essential, early tasks for your group will be to decide on the form your group project will take. Having decided on the form you will then have to decide on what to include in your narrative reconstruction of American history. What are the important events, people, ideas, and changes that America has experienced? How are you going to re-tell the story of America?

As stated above, just by making selections about what to include and exclude you will necessarily be making an argument. Your time to tell this story, however, will be limited. Whatever format your final group project takes, you will have to make sure that it is not too long: 5 to 8 minutes for a movie, 5 to 7 pages for a straightforward narrative, 10 to 15 to 20 slides in a multimedia production. The limit on time and length will force your group to make hard choices and exercise your critical and analytical thinking.

Team Roles: Each team will have a lot of work to do. It is up to each team to determine exactly how to approach their project, how to organize your work, how to divide your labor and responsibilities. Your entire team will be getting a single grade for this component of the project. It is important to work

together and think through potential problems early. It may be helpful to think about the different roles this project requires.

Some possible sites that you may wish to use include (but are not limited to) the following:

SLIDE SHOWS WITH SOUND

My.brainshark: <http://www.brainshark.com/mybrainshark>

Photo Peach: <http://photopeach.com>

STORY TOOLS

Storybird: <http://www.storybird.com/>

Storify: <https://storify.com>

VIDEO EDITING

WeVideo: <http://www.wevideo.com/>

NON-LINEAR (SPATIAL ZOOM IN/OUT)

PRESENTATION TOOLS

Prezi: <http://prezi.com/>

emaze: <http://www.emaze.com/>

ANIMATION

Powtoon: <http://www.powtoon.com/>

Voki: <http://www.voki.com>

Blabberize: <http://blabberize.com/>

COMIC CREATORS

Bitstrips: <http://bitstrips.com/>

Rage Comics: <http://ragecomics.com/>

Toondoo: <http://www.toondoo.com/>

Comic Master: <http://blabberize.com/>

Stripgenerator: <http://stripgenerator.com/>

INFOGRAPHICS

Easel.ly: <http://www.easel.ly/>

Piktochart: <http://piktochart.com/>

Infogram: <http://infogr.am/>

thinglink: <https://www.thinglink.com/>

WEBPAGE AND WEBSITE BUILDERS

Tackk: <http://tackk.com/>

Jimdo: <http://www.jimdo.com/>

Weebly: <http://weebly.com>

TIMELINES

MyHistro: <http://www.myhistro.com/>

Tiki-toki: <http://www.tiki-toki.com/>

Time Glider: <http://timeglider.com/>

Timetoast: <http://www.timetoast.com/>

AUDIO RECORDERS

Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com>

Audioboo: <http://audioboo.fm>

QUOTATION TOOLS

Recite This: <http://recitethis.com/>

Inspirably: <http://inspirably.com/>

MISCELLANEOUS

TypoEffects: <http://www.typoeffects.com/>

Image Slider

Maker: <http://imageslidermaker.com/>

Big Huge Labs

(assorted): <http://bighugelabs.com/>

Graffiti Creator: <http://www.graffiticreator.net/>

Assignment Format – Individual Report:

Your individual report should be a paper, 4 to 6 pages long, typed and double-spaced, and include a bibliography of at least 7 references you used to research your group project. Your report should have 3 sections. **First**, you should detail the specific contributions you made to your group project. **Second**, you should explain the choices your group made in putting your project together. What considerations and discussions determined your particular approach? **Third**, you should discuss what you would have done differently if given more time or if you had more control over the decision making process? What did you leave out of the story and why? What additional information would you have included and why? **Finally**, conclude by taking a stab at what you learned from this project. Remember that I have endeavored to present an image of American identity that is always changing, tacking between master and subversive narratives. How might the stories you examined participate in this current of identity? How has your understanding of American history changed over the course of our studies?