

## FINAL PROJECT: UNESSAY OR ESSAY

HIST 11: U.S. History Through Reconstruction  
Dr. Lauren Golder, Santa Monica College

The final project for this course will be a research project that draws on skills you've developed in and out of class that will demonstrate what you've learned during the term. It will be worth 20% of your final grade.

You will have two options for the final project:

- Option 1: a creative "unessay" on a topic of your choice
- Option 2: a 6-7 page research essay on a topic of your choice

### LEARNING GOALS

- Demonstrate historical thinking skills in an argument, prove that argument using primary and secondary source evidence
- Research, analyze, and discuss a historical issue
- Demonstrate creativity and insight
- Present a clear and well-researched argument/point of view about a historical issue

### CHOOSING A TOPIC

I strongly recommend that you build off of the work you did for your Annotated Bibliography assignment. You can use the same topic and research question from that assignment. If you would like to explore a new topic, please let me know asap.

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### OPTION 1: UNESSAY

#### WHAT IS AN UNESSAY?<sup>1</sup>

For the unessay, I ask that you think inventively and creatively about an issue raised in the course and present it in a compelling, thoughtful way. The goal of this assignment is to spur you to think, research, and write (or not write!) about history more creatively beyond the confines of the traditional essay. It should be based on research and use at least **3 scholarly sources** (see "Bibliography" section below).

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of the unessay comes from innovative professors in a variety of fields, including Emily Suzanne Clark, Ryan Cordell, Cate Denial, Christopher Jones, Daniel Paul O'Donnell, and others.

In an unessay you have complete freedom of form: you can use whatever style of writing, presentation, or media you want. What is important is that the format and presentation you use helps rather than hinders your argument about the topic. The form your unessay takes is limited only by your imagination. A few possibilities:

- Draw a comic book
- Write a short story
- Create a video or podcast
- Create a map of a historical event
- Create a piece of art
- Make an object such as a quilt
- Make a magazine or [zine](#)
- Write an imagined memoir from a person in history
- Create a board game
- Design an infographic
- Write a series of poems
- Cook historical recipes
- Write and record a music composition
- Visit a historic site and make a video about it
- The sky is the limit!

Check out the [unessay examples page](#) for some inspiration!

Your unessay should consist of two parts:

1. A creative project that explores a question or issue from US history before 1877
2. A short (600-900 word) reflection on your project

There are no strict length guidelines on the unessay, but whatever you create should have the same level of research and thought as you would put into a traditional research essay. You will be presenting the same in-depth information, but in a creative format. That said, here are some general suggestions:

- Short stories, imagined memoirs, zines, and comic books should be approximately 5-10 pages
- Videos and podcasts should be approximately 8-20 minutes
- Social media pages should have at least 15-20 posts

## REFLECTION

In addition to your unessay project, you will need to write a **600-900 word reflection** about your unessay and what you have learned. This will be worth **20%** of your unessay grade. The reflection can include:

- An explanation of your unessay -- What is it? What are you trying to say with it? How did you create it?
  - Why you chose this topic and format
  - A discussion of any difficulties or obstacles in creating your unessay
  - Any additional evidence or analysis relevant to your project
  - What you learned from this project
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## OPTION 2: RESEARCH ESSAY

For the essay option, you will present and analyze one issue, debate, or question in American history before 1877. Your essay should present a clear argument that is supported by evidence from outside sources.

- Research your topic using scholarly sources from the SMC library
- Based on the evidence you find, craft a thesis/argument that supports your perspective on the issue
- Present your research, evidence, and argument in a well-organized essay
- Explain the topic's effects on the historical time period and the present

Here are some guiding questions to help you think about your topic:

- - How and why is this issue significant in US history?
  - What events, people, and trends have been most important in this issue?
  - How have historians interpreted this issue? Do they disagree, and if so, why?
  - What is your perspective on this issue? Use the evidence you gathered in your scholarly sources to support your perspective

## **ESSAY REQUIREMENTS**

- **1,500-1800 words** (approximately 6-7 pages double spaced)
  - Your essay must have a clear **thesis** and argument
  - You must use at least **3 scholarly sources** (see "Bibliography" section below)
  - It should include at least **4 quotations** from your sources (quotes should not be more than a sentence in length)
  - You do **not** need to include a reflection if you write a research essay
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## BOTH OPTIONS

### SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Your research should include at least three scholarly sources, which should be listed in a bibliography at the end of your reflection.

- The [SMC LibraryLinks to an external site.](#) should be your first stop for research. Look at the [Research Resources](#) module for additional information about using the library effectively.
- What counts as a scholarly source?
  - Scholarly sources: books, academic journal articles, academic book reviews, primary source documents, .edu websites
  - Non-scholarly sources (will not count toward your two sources): textbooks, encyclopedias, Wikipedia, dictionaries, non-.edu websites, newspapers/magazines (including online newspapers/magazines)
    - You may use non-scholarly sources (encyclopedias, etc.) to gather background information, but these will not count toward your 3 scholarly sources

### EVALUATION

Because the form of unessay can vary so widely, it's difficult to grade them according to a single rubric. Instead, your final project (essay or unessay) will be evaluated based on several questions:

- Does the project **critically engage** with its topic?
- Does it effectively synthesize and analyze historical **evidence**?
- Does it have a clear **perspective/argument**?
- Does it demonstrate **insight, creativity**, time, and effort?
- Does the chosen **format** make sense with the topic?
- Is the final product logically formatted, **polished**, and well-crafted?
- Does it cite at least **3 scholarly sources**?
- If it is an unessay, does the accompanying **reflection** provide a clear explanation of the project?
- Is the **topic** appropriate to the course?

Please look at the assignment rubric (below) to see how your work will be evaluated!

### SUBMITTING YOUR WORK

If your final project is in a **digital** format (video, website, essay, etc.), you may simply upload it and your reflection to the assignment page on Canvas.

If your project is in a **physical**/"analog" format (painting, model, food, etc.), please take photographs and/or video with your phone and upload that to the assignment page on Canvas. Make sure to take enough photos/videos so that I can get a clear understanding of your project and the work that went into it.

If you are doing an unessay, don't forget to also upload your **reflection!**