History 381/581: Digital History, Fall 2012

Research Project Plan

<u>Note</u>: This is an unusual assignment, so please read the directions especially carefully.

This semester, we're learning some of the challenges of sharing, organizing, and using historical documents and artifacts (e.g., texts, audio, video, and objects) in the digital world. We often hear about how the digital revolution is making it easier than ever to do research. And it's true—as researchers, we find the digital, networked world we live in is superior to one dominated by card catalogs and print materials available only in libraries and in special collections. That said, the vast majority of documents and artifacts has not yet been digitized and made available online.

<u>Your challenge in this assignment is to pick a historical topic of interest to you, then plan a 15- to 20-page research paper that relies solely on primary sources that can be viewed online.</u> (Note: for the purposes of this paper, you can analyze information you glean by working with "big data" aggregated in various databases, but the majority of your research should engage with primary source documents and artifacts. So, for example, you could refer to Google Ngram searches, but the relevant books themselves would be the primary sources. Do not use "born-digital" publications like blog posts as primary sources; focus on the pre-digital era.) You should study the sources, attempt to make an argument, then outline the paper you would write, citing which sources you would use as evidence and explaining why you would use them.

Your project plan will take the form of an annotated outline of your hypothetical research paper. (Good news: you don't have to write the actual paper.) I'm providing a template for this outline on the next page.

Deadline: Beginning of class, October 3

Examples of digital/digitized primary sources
I know you will have lots of questions about what qualifies as a primary source. The answers to your questions will vary depending on the topic of and context for your paper. I'm happy to help you determine what "counts" as a primary source. Meanwhile, however, let me give you some examples of digital (or digitized) primary source collections online.

- The Trans-Atlatic Slave Database has information on nearly 35,000 slaving voyages. http://www.slavevoyages.org/
- The Library of Congress American Memory site comprises multiple databases of primary sources—audio, visual, and textual—documenting U.S. history. http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html
- The National Archives has digitized many U.S. government records and documents. http://www.archives.gov/
- Archive.org has hundreds of thousands of texts, audio recordings, and videos, including oral history transcripts. http://archive.org/

- The Bancroft Library Regional Oral History Office offers hundreds of oral histories. http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/
- The Densho Digital Archive documents the Japanese American internment during World War II. http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx
- Boise State's Albertsons library subscribes to the Manuscript Women's Letters and Diaries from the American Antiquarian Society. Access the database via the link at http://library.boisestate.edu/find/databases.php#M
- Boise State also subscribes to the database Welcome to the Sixties: http://asp6new.alexanderstreet.com/sixt/ (You must be on campus or logged in with your Broncoweb username and password to access these databases.)
- Ancestry.com has a wealth of primary-source documents of interest to historians. You can can get a free one-week subscription. http://ancestry.com

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Template

Introductory paragraph for your paper, <u>with your argument/thesis statement underlined</u>

Section 1: [First subclaim in support of the argument]
- Bullet points summarizing each piece of evidence that supports Section 1's subclaim
- Each piece of evidence must be cited, with hyperlink to the piece of evidence you're using

Section 2: [Second subclaim in support of the argument]
- Bullet points summarizing each piece of evidence that supports Section 2's subclaim
- Each piece of evidence must be cited, with hyperlink to the piece of evidence you're using

Section 3: [Third subclaim in support of the argument]
- Bullet points summarizing each piece of evidence that supports Section 3's subclaim
- Each piece of evidence must be cited, with hyperlink to the piece of evidence you're using

[You probably only need three sections, but if you have more, that's fine—just continue in this pattern.]

Concluding paragraph of the paper

Annotated bibliography of secondary sources you would use to help you make sense of the primary sources you cited in the outline

Paragraphs reflecting on this exercise: 1.5- to 2-page reflection on the opportunities, challenges, liabilities, and/or limitations of relying only on primary sources that have been digitized.