

Short Paper Option 1: Making History Personal

Your Assignment:

In this assignment you will consider the past in the context of its own time by examining historical popular media. To accomplish this, you will use your imagination to put *yourself* in the past. You will choose a location, month, and year between January 1776 and December 1990 (for example, Chicago, July 1893). You will then conduct research on your chosen time period and location. You should include in the paper a bibliography of all the sources you consulted for the project. The paper itself will be a first-person narrative, so you won't need in-text citations. Your essay will be written from the perspective and experience of a person your own age, gender, socio-economic status, and race/ethnicity living and communicating in that place and time.

TERRIBLY IMPORTANT NOTE: In other words, write this as if it could be read by a media historian today as a *primary source* from a past time.

You should explore the following questions:

- How would you, as a young adult living at that time, have used media?
- What media would have been available to you for entertainment? For news and other information? For socializing?
- What opportunities would you have had or not had at that time? Would you have been restricted by race, gender, economic necessity?
- What would be your realistic expectations as to education, employment, and family. In other words, what would you have expected your future to be like?

In order to answer these questions, you must accomplish the following:

1. Choose a time and place to investigate.
2. Nothing exists in a vacuum. Put the media at the time in historical context. What was happening in the world then? In your community? How did it affect your life? In order to find this out, conduct *secondary* research to familiarize yourself with your chosen time and place. Take note of any major national, international, or local events occurring during this period that might have influenced your life. Familiarize yourself with any social, legal, and economic limitations a person of your age, gender, and race/ethnicity might have faced. Did you have access to an education? Could you vote? Attend college? You can consult reputable web-based sources for this part of the research.
3. Conduct a survey of the local or national media that would have been available to a person living in your time and location. Which general or specialized media would you have consumed? Perhaps you read a national woman's magazine, a local ethnic newspaper, or a workingman's publication. If you are living in the early twentieth century, which film titles and/or radio programs might you have seen or heard that month? What music was at the top of the charts?
4. Using a combination of resources. Use *primary media sources* you might have read, heard, or watched during your chosen month. These can be national magazines, local weekly or daily papers, plays, newsletters, music, popular films, or radio programs. Many radio programs can be found online as can many old films and a wealth of period music. Immerse yourself in this material. Try to put yourself in the shoes of someone living during that time.
5. Write your paper based on your findings. Since this is a first-person piece, you could write in diary, journal, or letter form. It is up to you. Most of all, be creative and have fun!

Important notes:

- There is more to media than just newspapers and radio. For example, if you were to pick New York City in 1908, what music would you have listened to, and what form would it have taken—sheet music, recordings of some sort, local bands? How would you have corresponded with friends? Would you have owned a typewriter? A telephone? The same types of questions would apply to any period you pick. Only the available media would change.
 - **Special Note about Television:** Television was in its literal infancy during the 1930s and early 40s. TV sets were rare, very expensive, and not particularly reliable. And, although there were a few television stations, they were essentially experimental with spotting programming usually limited by geographical area. During WWII, no television sets were produced. Thus, citing television usage during this time period, while literally possible, would be very unrealistic.
- In order to make this work, you must pretend you actually live in the period you've chosen. Don't use your "today" mind to think about this period. This is called "presentism," which means writing about the past as if you have knowledge of the future. You must write as if this is the world you inhabit.

Requirements:

- Be sure to answer all questions asked by the assignment.
- Grammar and spelling count. So does proper style.
- **Your finished essay should have no more than five pages, excluding your bibliography.**
- This paper does require research, but not in-text citations. However, you should cite the sources that you use *at the end of your paper* in a bibliography using an acceptable style such as APA or Chicago. All information retrieved online should include the complete URL.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

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