

The Places of Migration in United States History
21H.221 Fall 2006

RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT

This paper is designed to give you a chance to examine a topic of interest to you that also intersects with the focus of our class on the history of migration to, from, and within the modern United States. You might choose to go into greater depth on a subject that the class covers: how did ideas about public health affect the living and working conditions of immigrants? You can research a single moment in time, say the passage of immigration restriction laws in 1924, or explore a theme over a long period of time: what have been the differences between male and female migrants and their patterns of work and return migration? How can current policy debates over immigration be placed in historical perspective? You might pick a particular place that you'd like to study in depth: your hometown, or a city that you know well. Or you can focus your paper around the experiences of a particular ethnic group, including ones that we have not read about in depth. Or you might explore a topic that our class doesn't cover at all, including migrations that we might not immediately consider as part of this class: postwar suburbanization, Appalachian migration to midwestern cities during World War II, movements of gays and lesbians to urban enclaves in the 1960s, expatriate American jazz musicians in France, Depression-era migrations from Oklahoma to California. Remember as well that history include more than politics, law, and economics, even if those are the focus of this class. You might choose to explore the photographs of Jacob Riis, the ballads of Américo Paredes, or the comedy of Margaret Cho.

Beginning with some background reading, emails, and conversations, you should develop a base of primary documents from the past broad enough to make substantial historical claims, but not so broad that you could write a book. In **eleven to fourteen pages**, present your argument and support it with close analysis of the documents. Although this is a research paper, the focus is fundamentally on your analysis and interpretation of the significance of past events, rather than your ability merely to document what happened. You will be evaluated in terms of the coherence of the argument, the effectiveness of your use of primary evidence to support your argument, and the depth and originality of the analysis you present.

This is not the kind of paper that you can write in one night, and so the requirements for the paper are set up to prevent that from happening. **By Tuesday October 24th, you should email me** at least some sense of what you think your topic might be. I will respond by email or in a meeting with you to give you some guidance. This is also the time to do background research. By this I mean textbooks, general histories, and

encyclopedias, rather than desultory Google searches. At this point, it's best to be general and broad, and to keep more than one option open, in case good material on your topic is not available. Leave time for dead-ends and changing your mind.

On **Thursday November 9th**, you should hand in a **research prospectus**—a brief description of your paper that describes the primary source material that you will use and the questions that you think your paper will answer. **This is required, and counts for 5% of your final grade.** You don't have to have a thesis statement, an opening paragraph, or an outline, but you might find it useful to draft something to give me (and you!) a sense of where you are headed. I will read it with an eye to whether the source material you've found can help you address those questions and vice versa, and to give you more suggestions about research possibilities.

I'm happy to read drafts of the papers and give you general feedback on your research and argument. But in order for that feedback to be useful, it's important to receive those drafts early, by **Tuesday November 28th**. This is **not required**, and does not guarantee that you will get a better grade on the final essay. Do it only if you want the feedback and are in a position to be able to take advantage of it.

The final paper is due at the beginning of class on **Tuesday December 12**. Bring your papers with you; we'll spend part of the time talking about them. I encourage you to work with a peer editor or a writing center staff member on a draft during the last couple of days.

Reference Librarians. These folks are very helpful, particularly with such issues as identifying on-line sources, working with microfilm and microfiche, or navigating secondary research. You can always walk up to the reference librarian at the desk (during hours when it is staffed), but it may be a better idea to set up an appointment in advance.

Citations. Please be careful to cite the sources of information and ideas that you use in your paper, both primary and secondary. Carefully consider questions of authorship and authority before using materials you find on the web. You may use any of the standard methods of citation (footnotes, endnotes, parenthetical references, etc.), as long as you are complete and consistent. The MIT Libraries website has links to online editions of all the major style guides. Be sure to leave enough time to prepare your citations in the proper format.

PS: In the words of Ben and Jerry, if it's not fun, why do it?