

History Harvest – Prof. Jones

Family Artifact Assignment

DUE DATE: Tuesday, August 28, 2012

The History Harvest project is based on the idea that we all “possess history” and that everyday people are, in fact, the main “keepers” of our history, in the things they hold onto and in the stories they have to tell. The project aims to bring some of these historical objects from our local communities out into the open to be shared with others through the web-archive we are creating. Later in the semester, when we conduct our own History Harvest in Lincoln focused on local refugee communities, we hope to collect a number of interesting objects that shed light on the rich and varied cultures and histories present in these refugee communities. You will be handling these objects, digitizing them and processing them for the web-archive. This assignment is aimed at helping you begin to think about personal objects as historical artifacts.

Here is the deal...

Your task is to identify ONE interesting historical artifact from your family. This might be something you own, or something someone else in your immediate or extended family owns. Historical artifacts might include letters, diaries, photographs, pamphlets, records, legal documents, memorabilia from local or national events or campaigns (buttons, fliers, posters, programs, etc.), popular culture objects, artwork, graphic arts, textiles, signage, clothing, or other three-dimensional objects that have some sort of historical significance. The artifact could be directly related to your family. For instance, my dad has a photo of his father and uncle during the 1920s pushing a baby carriage. Inside the baby carriage isn't a baby, but rather bootleg beer that they were smuggling home to drink during prohibition. This photo is a family photo, but it connects with a significant broader issue, theme or era in American history and reveals something about that past. Or, the object may not be directly family-related at all, but simply in your possession. For example, I study the civil rights era, so I have a variety of actual historical artifacts from the civil rights movement that I have been given or have purchased/collected over the years. Either kind of artifact is fine. The key is that it must come from your own family.

Once you identify the artifact, you must make a digital copy of it, either scanning it, or photographing it, depending on the object. You will print out this digital copy and turn it in with this assignment.

Next, you must write a roughly 3-page, single-space mini-essay about the object and its historical significance. Here, you want to explain what the object is, how your family came to have it and what it reveals about the past (why you think it is “historically significant”).

Lastly, print out your mini-essay and staple it to the print-out you made of the digital copy of your artifact. Bring this to class to turn in on Tuesday 8/28.

In addition, each student will give a 5-minute presentation in class about their artifact and its historical significance. To this end, you are required to email me the digital copy of your artifact no later than NOON on Monday 8/27, which is the day before this assignment is due. I will then put each of the artifacts into a PowerPoint slideshow so that you can easily bring it up and show it to the class as you are giving your presentation.

If you have any questions about this assignment, please do not hesitate to let me know. Otherwise, have some fun with it. I look forward to seeing what you have to share!