

## **You Are There:**

Handout for personal encounters with history in the making

12/04/22

I started on an adventure several years ago by beginning research into my family history. Rather than creating a family tree to trace bloodlines, I was looking for historical/biographical narratives. Every time an ancestor changed locations I'd ask myself what caused him/her to move, and what was the draw to the new place? It was thrilling to conjecture why one ancestor with a nail-making patent, for example, moved to a town in central Ohio just at the time the National Highway construction was going on there; how his descendant had moved to Minnesota at the time of its statehood; or how another had worked on Erie Canal restoration in New York state. Fleshing out their stories would become part of the larger narrative of US' westward expansion.

The individuals and their stories don't need to be remarkable, either; changes in occupation as noted in census data - a farmer becoming a railroad man, for example - brushes up against the effects of industrialization into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. How we experienced a noteworthy event in our own day (such as, say, Kennedy's assassination) could open-up numerous interesting possibilities for a presentation, too.

### **Presentations**

Presentations should focus on the selected historical subject (event, issue or trend et al); along with the speaker's personal connection to it. Participants are welcome to employ the tried-and-true power point format (ie an illustrated exposition); they are also encouraged to consider creative alternatives - to conduct interviews (*a la* Walter Cronkite), for example, or to orchestrate alternative personal testimonies (*a la* Rashamon) with other participants drawn to same/similar historical subject.

### **Resources**

Resources abound in our internet age; you all know the drill for finding its seemingly endless venues for research. For basic background info, however I'd recommend two items: the (Seminar) "Participant's Handbook" (under "resources" on 5CLIR's website); and the Ancestry.com app for family explorations.

I'd recommend Jill Lepore's [These Truths, a History of the United States](#) (Norton, 2018) as a comprehensive history text. Without citing specific texts, some, among many, historians I've enjoyed reading include: Joseph Ellis, David Hackett Fischer, David McCullough, James McPherson, Nathaniel Philbrick, and Heather Cox Richardson.

### **Moderator**

You could email or text me for any questions or areas of concern you may have, as well as to indicate your choice of presentation topic: Nancy Denig  
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