Research Questions, Project Proposals & Intro to Maps

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Goals for Tonight

1. How to ask good research questions
2. Review the Project Proposal Assignment
3. Introduction to mapping
First...

• Everybody remove the Spellchecker plugin.

• Then update your sites.
Good Research Questions

.. Fuel good projects
Asking Questions

A good research question defines the focus of your project.

- sets boundaries to help you figure out where to go next
- defines which evidence you need to collect and which methods you will use to access and analyze your documents
What makes a good research question?
What makes a good research question?

1. It addresses causes or effects in history.
2. It is open-ended (it doesn’t have a yes or no answer or isn’t answered simply by stating facts.)
3. It is argumentative (it can be answered using a variety of ways.)
4. It is specific.
5. It is answerable!
Bad Research Questions

1. Was it moral to drop the atomic bomb on Japan at the end of WWII?
2. How did Hitler’s stupidity doom the German war effort?
3. Why did so many people die when Titanic sank?
4. Why did Lizzie Borden kill her parents?
5. What events led to the rise of Alexander the Great?
6. Would Reconstruction have worked better if Lincoln hadn’t been shot?
Asking “Better” Questions

Instead of:
Was it moral to drop the atomic bomb on Japan at the end of WWII?

How about:
How did debates over concepts of “morality” influence Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan at the end of WWII?
What impact did racism have on the decision to drop the bomb?
Asking “Better” Questions

Instead of:
Why did so many people die when Titanic sank?

How about:
What impact did the doctrine of “women and children first” as a rescue strategy have on American society in the aftermath of the Titanic disaster?

OR

What impact did the Titanic disaster have on subsequent British and American maritime travel in the early 20th century?
Framing a research question

For my example project *Murder in Chicago*:

What was the ethnic and racial distribution of crimes by women in Chicago between 1870 and 1929? How does the distribution of crimes by women in Chicago reflect the changing state of immigration – both foreign and domestic – affecting Chicago during this period of rapid population growth?
Framing your own question

1. Look at your topic and everything you know about it today.
2. What else do you wish to know?
3. What questions are left unanswered?
4. What questions have come up since you began this research?
5. What doesn’t make sense?
6. What questions are still left unanswered in your mind?
As you attempt to answer your research question, it may evolve. Let it.
Framing your own question

- Keep asking yourself “why”? Why then? Why there?
- Search for related sources.
- Read and evaluate them.
- Make an initial argument.
- Iterate your question as you find new evidence.
- Know when to stop.
Assignment: Project Proposal

Due April 18th before class
Assignment: Project Proposal

• Formal written assignment with complete thoughts, paragraphs and correct syntax and spelling.
• Post it as a blog post.
• You must turn it in via the Assignment Submission Form by 7:30p on April 18th (before class). Late submissions lose points per the late policy. If you don’t turn it in, I will not grade it.
• These proposals are to help me understand where you are right now with your project plan based on all the work you’ve done to date.
• These are formal proposals BUT you can continue to refine them.
• They are worth 10 points. That’s more than a blog post and half the Midterm.
Assignment: Project Proposal

Your project proposal should address three key components:

1. Your research question.

2. The main primary sources you plan to use to complete your project. Please include a brief description of each source or collection of sources so that I have a good idea of what you plan to use as the basis for your historical analysis. Please completely cite all sources and include the website, collection, or archives where each is located.

3. The best secondary sources available on your project topic. Please provide a brief description of their arguments and their importance to informing your analysis going forward. You must include a full bibliographical citation for each source.
Assignment: Project Proposals

Your project proposal should address three key components in one cohesive document:

1. Your research question: What are you studying? Why? What do you hope to understand?

For example:

I state my working question as: What was the ethnic and racial distribution of crimes by women in Chicago between 1870 and 1929? How does the distribution of crimes by women in Chicago reflect the changing state of immigration – both foreign and domestic – affecting Chicago during this period of rapid population growth?
Assignment: Project Proposals

2. The main primary sources you plan to use to complete your project.

For example:

• This collection of data will help me map the 750-plus homicides by women so that I can understand the geographic distribution of crimes.


• This Report included statistical data, descriptions of judicial and legal institutions, and is a model of data collection
Assignment: Project Proposals

3. The best secondary sources available on your project topic.

*For example:*

- Bienen & Rottinghaus explain in detail the strengths and weaknesses in the data in the Chicago Homicide project and give basic crime stats during the period.


- Cohen argues that ethnic and racial distribution of individuals in Chicago was quite rigid and based on where ethnic and racial groups worked. She also explains the fluidity of race, specifically conceptions of whiteness in Chicago at this time.


- Grossman outlines the history of the massive migration of thousands of African-Americans from southern states to Chicago and their settlement and work patterns.
Intro to Maps
Maps are Old
Geography

Geographic factors have had a major impact on our history.

• Location of settlement areas and migration patterns.
• Industry, transportation, and communication.
• Cultural factors – where you live determines your society and culture.
• Potential for geographic patterns and trends that other sources don’t or can’t reveal.
Spatial History

“It is a means of doing research; it generates questions that might otherwise go unasked, it reveals historical relations that might otherwise go unnoticed, and it undermines, or substantiates, stories upon which we build our own versions of the past.”

- Richard White
Types of Maps & Spatial Projects

• **Narrative maps** – using maps to tell stories by tracking the movement of individuals or groups through space and time.

• **Data maps** – using maps for data analysis, visualization of spatial data to understand patterns or trends in the sources.

  • To display OR discover knowledge
  • To answer a question OR to help historians ask new questions.
DONNER PARTY: A DISASTROUS GAMBLE

In April 1846, George Donner and his brother Jacob packed their families into covered wagons and left Springfield, Illinois en route to a new life in California. George would later take the lead of the so-called “Donner Party,” a group of westbound emigrants who became trapped in the Sierra Nevada Mountains during one of the most brutal winters on record. The pioneers were forced to spend five months hunkered down in makeshift tents and cabins with almost no food or supplies. By the time they were finally rescued in early 1847, nearly half of them had perished. Many of the rest, including the children, were forced to cannibalize the bodies of the dead to survive.
The Process of Mapping

Find/create data → Clean/tidy data → Explore data → Map data → Interpret map
Seeing Emancipation

• “Seeing Emancipation,” by Ed Ayers and Scott Nesbit.

• 1. What argument are they making about emancipation?
• 2. What evidence are they using?
• 3. How are they using maps to help them?
Visualizing Emancipation

http://dsl.richmond.edu/emancipation/ -- An example of an interactive data map with deep data layering

1. Examine the “Visualizing Emancipation” map for January 1863. Use the timeline and legend/info box (marked “i”) to determine where slavery was still legal after the Emancipation Proclamation.

2. Find and read the Emancipation Proclamation.

3. Then examine one document from January 1863. Who wrote the document? Where was it written? If it is a letter, to whom did he or she write?

4. What does this document describe?

5. Does the document author mention the Emancipation Proclamation?

6. Do you think the Emancipation Proclamation mattered for the people involved? If so, in what specific way did it affect the people involved in your event?
Next Week

• Turn in your proposals!
• We’ll start mapping data with Google’s My Maps