

HIST 301 (Fall 2020)
DUE: October 30th

Creating Your Research Trail, Part III Building a Primary Source Research Base

The following assignment requires you to follow each exercise and turn it back to me on a typewritten sheet the following week. This is the third of four total exercises, and it focuses on how you can find and build a primary source research base. Taken together, these three “research trail” exercises will form your “research journal,” which is to be turned in along with your final paper. Please remember that the research journal should be an on-going project, where you record your findings and material beyond this current task.

As a class, each of you will submit your research journal to your “research peer” to review problems you encountered and obstacles you overcame in designing your research topic. As part of next week’s class discussion, we will review everyone’s research journal. The research journal will continue beyond these four discrete assignments and you will submit your research journal to me along with your draft.

You have now also been introduced to the resources available at SBU’s Library and Dr. Eric Filstrup has kindly created a research resource webpage designed specifically for this course. In the following exercises, you will need to consult the course webpage and draw on the resources listed. You should all feel perfectly welcome and encouraged to take Dr. Filstrup up on his offer to assist you in your research and with your questions.

EXERCISE 1: Write down your topic. At this stage, your topic should be more than a general subject, such as the policing brutality and the Black community. Your topic at this stage should be more narrowly defined. It should be a specific event, idea, or person and it should occur in a narrowly defined time-frame so that you can handle the subject in a single semester of research. What is your time frame and how have you narrowed your topic?

EXERCISE 2: Digital Primar Sources. Your paper needs to be based largely on primary sources. While newspapers do constitute a primary source, most papers will need more material than just newspapers in order to construct a first-rate historical project from a variety of viewpoints. Drawing from the “Primary Source Resource Guide” on our library website, select two digital archival resources that might fit your topic. Whether or not you can or should actually use this archival resource in your paper is less important for this exercise than in **learning** how to find archival material.

Select two of the archives, visit their website and determine if that archival resource has any interesting collections that might pertain to your topic. The first step in this process is for you to visit their website and determine if they have what is called a “finding aid.” A “finding-aid” is an index of individual collections. If they do indeed have a finding aid on-line, then look carefully through it and determine if your subject is covered, and what kind of material they have that you might possibly research. Howard University’s Moorland-Springarn Collection, for instance, maintains an on-line index to over seven hundred oral histories on the Civil Rights Movement. Their on-line index can be found at:

<http://www.howard.edu/library/moorland-spingarn/ohindex.htm>

You should also try doing an electronic search, if the website has a search engine. Write down the “search terms” that you use, the names of collections that you found, and the items in the collection that you think are most valuable for your paper.

EXERCISE 3--Reading Memoirs as a Primary Source: Chose between two memoirs, either: *Becoming Mrs. Burton: From Prison Recovery to Leading the Fight for Incarcerated Women* or Albert Woodfox’s *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary*. Read the excerpt for one or the other (or both, if you wish) and write a one-page analysis of how you would use this source in a paper. What is the author trying to say and how does it make a difference that this a first-person narrative? What are the strengths of the source and what might be some the ways that one could balance a personal memoir alongside other sources?

EXERCISE 4: Media Interpretations. Newspapers are an excellent source that records history as it happens. But, as all good historians know, newspapers provide a particular perspective from a certain point-of-view, which often varies widely depending on the newspaper covering the event. For this exercise, you must pick a moment or event having to do with your topic. You must then consult the website that Chris Filstrup and I developed for this course. In that website, you will find a listing of African American and underground newspapers. From that list, pick a newspaper and find, read, and copy one newspaper article on your topic. Then, using the same date, look up the same event in the *New York Times* index or the *Washington Post* index. Locate, read, and copy the *New York Times* and/or *The Washington Post* article. Note in your research journal if you discern any differences between the reporting in the two or three newspapers that you consult. Write the title of the newspaper, the title of the article, the date, and any differences in the reporting and approach. Bring a copy of the newspaper articles to class and submit a copy of the articles along with this assignment.

Now pick another event having to with your topic and do the same thing using either *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, or *Choice* magazine and compare it with either *Jet* or *Ebony* magazine. Again, you must locate, read, and copy the article that you find in both magazines. If your topic does not have anything to do with African Americans and if you find a magazine or newspaper that represents another minority group, please feel free to substitute it.

Exercise 5: Rewrite your topic. Narrow it, make it specific to a time and place. You now have a sense of the secondary and primary material on which this paper will be based.