5080 Advice on writing and organizing your This Birthday in History paper

Dear Students,

Please allow me to offer some advice on writing and organization. This applies to your This Birthday in History Paper, but most of the advice is appropriate for your final paper/project on a historical journalism or media mentor:

You're telling a story with this paper, right? So in your introduction, put me on the scene in one of the years you're covering. Show me what the most critical event in the news that day was like by describing it and its apparent impact on the world. This only needs to be a few sentences.

Your second paragraph needs to tell me the topic of your paper and the research question that guides your analysis. Example of a sentence that does both: "The research question guiding this study is: How did representation of racial uprising in American cities in 1967 compare with racial uprising in American cities in 1919?"  What theme are you exploring? The difference between news values in the two years under study? Differences in the representation of a specific race, ethnicity, or other group of people? The differences or similarities in the ways heroes were lifted up (or villains put down)? Then tell me which newspapers and dates you're examining, and whose birthdays are represented (yours plus which elder relative's?).

Then you move to the body of your paper. Each section of your body should emphasize one specific theme. The best organization is a thesis statement or an argument, followed by evidence, followed by a sentence about how that evidence supports your argument, followed by a transition to the next paragraph.

The last sentence of each body section should be a transition to the next body section. The last sentence of the last body section should be a transition to the conclusion.

The conclusion can be two paragraphs. The first paragraph restates the research question or questions that guided your study. It also briefly summarizes what you found.

The second paragraph of the conclusion is your chance to try to explain why those two times differed. "Based on my review of the reporting in these two time periods, the Detroit Free Press of 1967 had reporters who apparently had more sophisticated training in the use of data that helped them to recognize the reasons for the 12th Street uprising that followed the murders at the Algiers Motel. Reporter Phil Meyer presented a nuanced explanation based on depth interviews with experts and actual residents of the community whose stories simply hadn't been told. That contrasts with coverage of the 1919 Chicago race riots, where the Free Press took police accounts at face value."

I hope you find this guidance helpful. Please get in touch with questions via email: [fr1136@wayne.edu.](mailto:fr1136@wayne.eduy)

My best,

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