

After standards
The Future of History

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

A History SoTL Project



Tell me everything that happened.
Then tell me what you think it means.
Rear Window, 1954

assignment Without looking anything up,
Write a history of the United States of America

THE SCENARIO: Imagine you are traveling in a foreign country where they don't know too much about the U.S. You're in a cafe enjoying the local coffee—very strong stuff, by the way, probably laced with some kind of narcotic. You strike up a conversation with a man/woman about your age, who knows English. Ah—what a pleasure! To be in a foreign country, sipping strong espresso, enjoying the fine weather, and talking to a charming, attractive stranger who is clearly into you!

Suppose that after awhile the conversation turns to serious stuff. Your new friend is very interested in America, and wants to go there someday. S/he says to you: "Tell me about the history of your country!"

What would you tell your new friend?

the details:

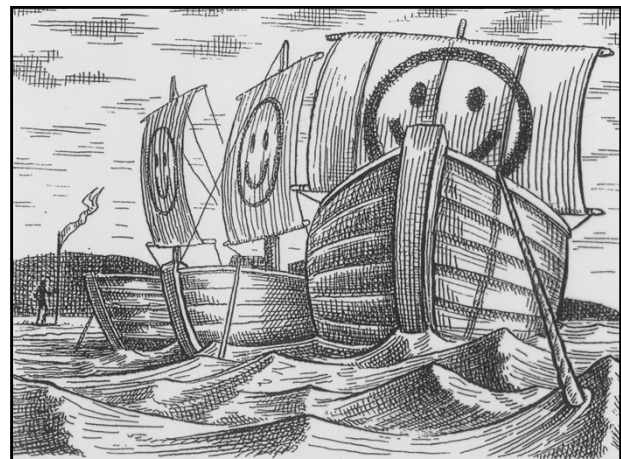
- 2 pages max.
- Typed, of course. Double-spaced? Absolutely.
- Graded? Yes—pass/fail. *But this is not a test to see what you know or don't know.* There's no need to look anything up in a book—I want you to write this history from out of your head.


And here's the criteria for evaluating how successfully you complete this assignment:

- the care you take in carrying out the assignment
- creativity
- ability to express yourself clearly

What is the story?

*"The world is made of stories, not of atoms."
-Harold Rosenberg*





Our family's story is one that spans miles and generations, races and realities. It's the story of farmers and soldiers, city workers and single moms. It takes place in small towns and good schools, in Kansas and Kenya, on the shores of Hawaii and the streets of Chicago. It's a varied and unlikely journey but one that's held together by the same simple dream.

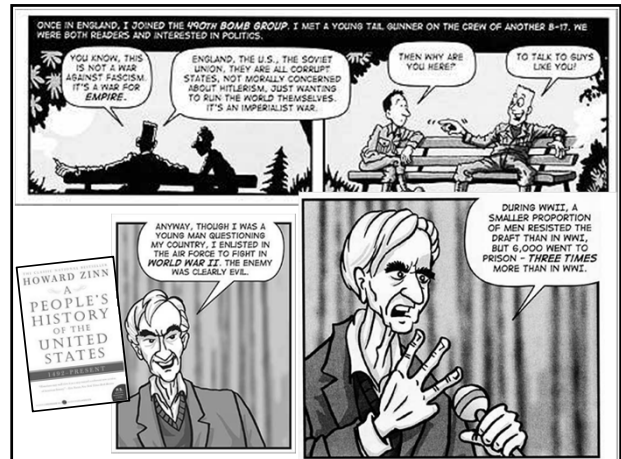
And that is why it's American.

That's why I can stand here and talk about how this country is more than a collection of Red States and Blue States—because my story could only happen in the United States.

That's why I believe that we are not as divided as our politics suggests, that the dream we share is more powerful than the differences we have—because I am a living proof of that ideal.

The politics of hope does not mean hoping things come easy. Because nothing worthwhile in this country has ever happened unless somebody somewhere stood up when it was hard, stood up when they were told, no you can't, and said, yes we can.

And where better to affirm our ideals than here in Wisconsin, where a century ago the progressive movement was born. It was rooted in the principle that the voices of the people can speak louder than special interests, that citizens can be connected to their government and to one another, and that all of us share a common destiny, an American Dream.



ONCE IN ENGLAND, I JOINED THE **WOMAN BOMB GROUP**. I MET A YOUNG TALL GUNNER ON THE CREW OF ANOTHER B-17. WE WERE BOTH READERS AND INTERESTED IN POLITICS.

YOU KNOW, THIS IS NOT A WAR AGAINST FASCISM. IT'S A WAR FOR EMPIRE.

ENGLAND, THE U.S., THE SOVIET UNION. THEY ARE ALL CORRUPT STATES. NOT MORALLY CONCERNED ABOUT HITLERISM. JUST WANTING TO RUN THE WORLD THEMSELVES. IT'S AN IMPERIALIST WAR.

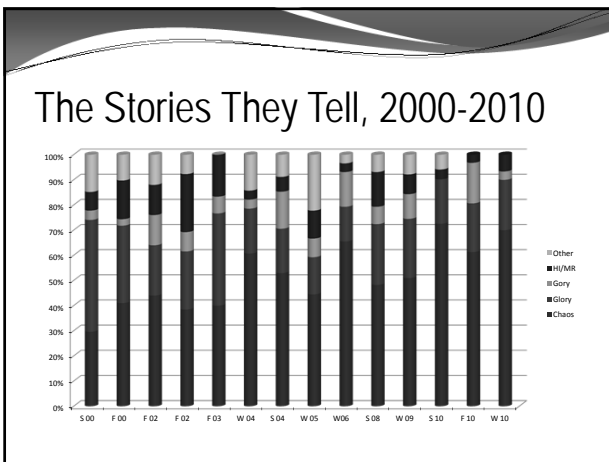
THEN WHY ARE YOU HERE?

TO TALK TO GUYS LIKE YOU!

ANYWAY, THOUGH I WAS A YOUNG MAN QUESTIONING MY COUNTRY, I ENLISTED IN THE AIR FORCE TO FIGHT IN WORLD WAR II. THE ENEMY WAS CLEARLY EVIL.

HOWARD ZINN
A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

DURING WWII, A SMALLER PROPORTION OF MEN RESISTED THE DRAFT THAN IN WWI, BUT 6,000 WENT TO PRISON - THREE TIMES MORE THAN IN WWI.



History is the story of the past. Historians gather the facts and ideas that were going on during important periods of our past and write it down so the future generations can learn about it.

The Moral of the Story

Questions

- How many, and who, believes history is meaningless?
- If narrative is declining or dead, what explains this?
- What is the status of narrative history in history teaching?
- How does exposure to narrative history that seeks a *moral to the story* affect student motivation to study the past?
- What does narrative history contribute to moral inquiry?
- How can the contributions of narrative be operationalized in teaching & learning practices?

