

Video 1: Historical Process

*Featuring Dr. Edward Gonzalez-Tennant, University of Central Florida,
Department of Anthropology*

How do we know what we know? A simple question with a complicated answer. In the webinar [Historical Process](#), Dr. Gonzalez-Tennant explores the way historians, archeologists, and archivists make sense of the past and how the fragmentary nature of evidence shapes the stories they can tell.

Key Concepts

- Historical Narratives and Facts [03:10 - 06:00]
- Who Writes History? [06:10 - 09:15]
- Where Historical Data Comes From [09:10 - 15:20]
- Finding and assessing historical sources [15:23 -18:18]
- Creating and locating historical data (oral history) [18:12 - 20:02]
- New Opportunities for Using Data (historical archeology) [20:10 - 22:15]
- Case Studies in Emerging Trends
 - Document archeology in Rosewood, FL, the site of the Rosewood Race Riot [22:30 - 25:50]
 - Mapping history with the “Green Book” collection at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture [26:00 - 30:30]

New Jersey Student Learning Standards

Grades 6-8

9.4.8.DC.1: Analyze the resource citations in online materials for proper use.

9.4.8.GCA.1: Model how to navigate cultural differences with sensitivity and respect (e.g., 1.5.8.C1a).

Grades 9-12

9.4.12.CI.1: Demonstrate the ability to reflect, analyze, and use creative skills and ideas.

6.1.12.HistoryCA.2.a: Research multiple perspectives to explain the struggle to create an American identity.

6.1.12.HistoryUP.2.a: Using primary sources, describe the perspectives of African Americans, Native Americans, and women during the American Revolution and assess the contributions of each group on the outcome of the war.

Review Questions

1. Dr. Gonzalez-Tennant emphasizes several times in his talk that history researchers have a duty to present accurate and inclusive historical narratives. Considering that history includes many perspectives and truths, what does it mean for a historical source to be credible? What are examples of “inclusive historical narratives?” How do you ensure that historical narratives engage various audiences and perspectives?
2. What is limiting with the adage, “history is written by the winners?” Why might this create a limited historical narrative?
3. What are the “5Ws” questions you should ask when considering the quality of a historical resource?
4. Dr. Gonzalez-Tennant suggests that monuments are more reflective of the time they are created (or erected/dedicated) than of the actual time they commemorate. What does he mean by this comment?
5. Explain what you think Dr. Gonzalez-Tennant means by “writing history backwards” and how this expands understanding beyond the chronological teaching of history.
6. Is an autobiography a primary or secondary resource? Explain your answer. When a source is secondary, how is it useful in understanding the context of a time period?
7. Dr. Gonzalez-Tennant suggests there is a value to contradictory histories. Explain what he means by this statement. What is the value in considering multiple points of view?
8. Provide an example of when an oral history interview would be a primary source. Provide an example of when an oral history might be a secondary source.
9. Individuals who are interviewed in oral histories can be subjective or may remember events differently than others. If these accounts have the potential to be unreliable, what is the value of oral history?
10. What is “historical archeology?” How does historical archeology contribute to historical research? How does historical archeology support inclusive historical narratives?

Activities

1. Conducting historical research is like doing detective work. You need to search for “clues,” to bring together a story (or multiple stories). Researching a topic of your choosing, find five sources to analyze using the “5Ws” questions you learned from Dr. Gonzalez-Tennant to evaluate any resource. What would be your next steps in using these sources? Would you use all five sources or are there any that you would eliminate? Explain why.
2. Consider an example of a monument that was removed. Applying the ten questions from James Loewen’s, *Lies Across America*, what was considered or not considered in removing the monument?
3. Think about a new monument you would like to install in your town. What person, event, or issue would you want to commemorate? What type of monument would you want to see, if any (mural, statue, artwork, book, digital project, etc.)? Write out what your plaque/marker would say or explain why you would not erect a monument in your town. Consider how you would acknowledge multiple people and perspectives with your decision.
4. Research your community:
 - a. Do you know people who lived in your community for a long time? Conduct an oral history interview with them to find out what they remember about your town.
 - b. Try to find “hidden data,” like a census, map, or photographs of your town or region in the past.
 - c. Are there secondary sources written about your community? How do these sources present your town and its history?
 - d. What are some facts you learned about your town from each of these sources? Do any of these historical narratives surprise you or provide a new perspective? In what way?

Note for teachers: This is an extended activity that takes a week. It can be done as a class jigsaw lesson with groups of students presenting five to seven key facts they learned about their town. After the group presentations, students can write a reflection on how these facts affected their perspective of their town.

Resources

The Library of Congress has free access to newspapers from 1777 to 1963 in their “Chronicling America” collection at <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is a free source that provides access to historic documents, photos and records at <https://www.archives.gov/>.

The New York Times has two sources available to subscribers including the “New York Times Article Archives,” which provides partial and full-text digital versions of articles from 1851 to today and “TimesMachine,” a browser-based digital replica of all issues from 1851 to 2002 available to print and digital subscribers.