

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

21H.102 Spring 2003

The Emergence of Modern America, 1865 to the Present

Second Paper Assignment

Find a copy of a newspaper published on the day that one of your grandparents was born, the day one of your parents was born, and the day you were born. Look carefully at the entire issue of all three newspapers, including the news matter, feature articles, advertisements, comic strips, want ads, and even the obituaries. In **five or six pages**, compare a single theme or topic on all three dates. For example, an analysis of real estate advertisements could shed light on the changing patterns of residential life, or it could allow for an interpretation of the changing significance of home and family life in these years. Other topics include politics, economics, current literature and the arts, the role of women, entertainment, crime, fashion, attitudes toward technology, and so forth. Your paper should have a clearly defined theme, and—most importantly—an argument, in which an interpretation of American culture and history is supported by specific evidence from the newspapers.

Note: It is important that you examine the newspaper in its entirety, whether in a paper copy or through a microfilm. Do not use an electronic text-delivery service. This paper is designed to introduce you to research in primary documents in the MIT libraries, but it does not assume that you already know how to do this. If you have any questions, please ask me, or meet with one of the reference librarians, particularly at the Humanities Library. There are no dumb questions. You can use any newspaper you want as long as you use the same one for all three dates. If you are feeling particularly ambitious, the Boston Public Library has a far larger newspaper collection than MIT.

The first draft of the essay is due in Class #10. If you want to come in with an opening paragraph and examples, like we did for the first paper, that would be fine, or you can write something more ambitious. Don't write up a complete rough draft unless you would find feedback on such a draft helpful to you. Bring a copy of the draft with you to class, along with your articles or research notes; we will spend part of class that day on peer editing. The revised draft of the essay is due in Class #13. Extensions will be granted only for good reasons explained well in advance; computer malfunctions are never an acceptable excuse for a late submission. Adherence to standards of academic honesty is required; if you have any questions about how to go about your writing or cite your sources, don't hesitate to ask.