

Reflection Essay

1. Process

i. Search Process

My first step was choosing a research topic. I have always been particularly intrigued by reparations, and decided to focus on the Japanese American redress movement. I perceived this movement as successful, and wondered which aspects of the movement set it apart from other, less successful movements for redress in the United States. Following that, I decided to meet with Professor Moon-Ho Jung. I had taken Race and American History with Professor Jung wherein we spoke of Japanese American incarceration. As there is expansive scholarship on the movement for Japanese American redress, I thought it would be beneficial to meet with Professor Jung and understand what scholars in the field were looking at. Thus, my search process began with my taking in a great deal of secondary sources and attempting to parse through for a focus. What was the scholarship saying about the redress movement in terms of how it found success?

ii. Changing Course

After meeting with Professor Jung, however, the course of my research project was entirely changed. Professor Jung challenged me to think about the framing I was using for the redress movement. Instead of framing it as a victory, he asked me to consider the limitations of the movement. When you don't look at the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 as a resolution but instead as something that should have opened up a greater conversation in the United States, what sorts of questions do you find? When a movement takes a frame of citizenship and civil rights, what are the limitations and what is the implication of such limitations? Following this conversation, I drastically rethought my search strategies. Instead of searching for existing scholarship on what made the redress movement culminate in the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, I sought to find what was hiding behind the act.

As I continued to do research within this framework, my approach for finding information changed. I found out about the incarceration of Japanese Peruvians in the United States during WWII. The stories of the Japanese Peruvians constituted a history I had never learned about, and my research project became focused on their experience. How had the Japanese Peruvians been left out of the movement for redress, and what were the consequences of omitting them from the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. Specifically, my scope narrowed immensely.

iii. Growth

This project contributed to my growth as a scholar as it showed me the importance of questioning historical narratives. When looking at a particular history, who might it serve? Who is being presented as the victor, what is being presented as a victory, and who might it benefit for the narrative to be written in such a way. I learned about the importance of oral histories. In history, it is often the powerful who write the story. Given that, I learned how important it is to seek out sources taken from the perspectives of those not in power. I learned that research uncovers entire histories that may be written out of mainstream narratives.

Moving forward, I believe my approach to research will be drastically changed. When looking at a new project, I now understand how important it is to first ask what it is that you don't know. What perspectives are missing, whose voices haven't been included in the narrative, and where might I go to find that information.

2. Search Strategy

i. Description

Seeing as there wasn't expansive scholarship on Japanese Peruvian or Japanese Latin American incarceration, I sought to research the experiences directly and focused on a primary source search. My strategy was to locate primary sources in the form of oral or written histories and news reports that incorporated the voices of those incarcerated. In doing so, I was allowed a window into the experiences of Japanese Peruvians which greatly aided my analysis.

ii. Encountering Obstacles with Search Techniques

In response to an underwhelming amount of secondary source information, I got creative with my search. To begin, I used a variety of search techniques including flexibility in search language and source type. Instead of looking for books directly on the topic, I was comfortable with a book that had a key word of Japanese Peruvian internment and parsed through to find relevant information. Additionally, I read dissertations authored by students which proved immensely helpful in understanding the analysis of others on the topic.

Additionally, I was creative with my search terms and how I found information. I started broad (Japanese Peruvians during WWII, Japanese Peruvian internment, Civil Liberties Act of 1988 + Japanese Latin Americans) and let each source and its listed keywords guide me to my next search. By tracing individuals like Art Shibayama whom I found through other sources, for example, I was introduced to a world of information and history.

3. Resource Use

Through this project, I was introduced to the world of knowledge within UW Libraries. The number of resources available is awe-inspiring, and required me to focus the scope of my research. For example, there is an interesting dynamic between Peru and citizens of Japanese descent which led Peru to seek Japanese Peruvian incarceration in the U.S. While I was intrigued, I had to limit my scope to sources that would get me closer to my overarching questions: the limitations of civil rights frameworks and the consequences of omitting Japanese Peruvians from redress.

Research guides were helpful in my background research of the Japanese American redress movement. Because there is expansive scholarship, using guides as reference points was immensely valuable. When I began researching Japanese Peruvians, I was introduced to interlibrary loan library services. This was extremely beneficial in reaching sources that were very specific to my topic yet unavailable through common databases. Finally, the databases and archives of the UW libraries were key in securing primary sources on the topic. There was a wealth of newspaper archives that were invaluable to my understanding of the topic and the experiences of Japanese Peruvians.