

Pathways to Freedom Autoethnography Assignment

In “Subverting the Master(s) Syllabus,” Patrick Camangian defines autoethnography as “writing about yourself as a member of a larger social group.” Camangian’s guidelines for his students writing autoethnographic narratives are: “(1) to examine social injustice; (2) to connect [student’s] experiences with communities that experience social injustice and/or are organizing for social change; and (3) to articulate the problem and/or offer a strategy for social change.

The objective of this assignment is to apply Camangian’s framework to our inquiry into the idea of “freedom” and other related terms—equality, democracy, social justice, etc.—that we have been studying in the Pathways learning community.

Please note: Your autoethnography will form the basis for your research essay, which will incorporate your ethnographic research into a substantial inquiry into the community you choose to explore.

Autoethnographic narratives require the writer-researcher to draw from his/her own experience, placing the self-in-relation to, for example, a topic of study. Autoethnographic narratives can be used to:

- Increase self-insight (critical self-reflection)
- Challenge previously held assumptions
- Locate one’s self in social, cultural, structural contexts
- Connect or interweave stories from the past with self-discovery in the present
- Enhance compassion and empathy
- Theorize models and strategies for social change

For this assignment, you are asked to write a 3-5-page autoethnography, a narrative in which you situate yourself in relation to the topics we have read about and discussed so far this year (in English 16C, COS 50, History 1, and History 2) relevant to our theme “Pathways to Freedom.” Field notes on the germ for your autoethnography—based on memories or observations—due 2/26 (1-2 double spaced pages); draft due 3/7; final due April 2.

You are asked to critically and creatively:

1. Introduce, describe, and situate (or locate) yourself and your community/communities. Your description of your community can be based on memory or close observation. In either case, you should “thickly” describe the community using strong sensory (all five senses—sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste) details. Aspects of community culture you might choose to address include, among others, language, customs, belief systems, values, and social, political, and/or economic power. Communities may be defined as social groups (e.g., African Americans, Latino/as, women, LGBTQ people, people

with AIDS), or geographical (e.g., a neighborhood, a hometown, a region) or any other community (e.g., school, sports, hip hop, church) you choose to write about.

2. Examine, analyze, and integrate into your paper at least one topic from the class texts, discussions, and projects that relate to you personally and the community you have chosen to describe. Examples of topics include Foner's discussion of freedom as an "essentially contested idea," the history of slavery in Brooklyn, Rediker's ideas of a "human history" and "the violence of abstraction," scientific racism, biological determinism, and definitions of "race."
3. In light of the topic(s) you discussed for #2, name and reflect on a problem that needs to be addressed. This problem will be the starting point for your research paper.