

A More Perfect Union



"Fifty years from Bloody Sunday, our march is not yet finished, but we're getting closer. Two hundred and thirty-nine years after this nation's founding our union is not yet perfect, but we are getting closer. Our job's easier because somebody already got us through that first mile. Somebody already got us over that bridge. When it feels the road is too hard, when the torch we've been passed feels too heavy, we will remember these early travelers, and draw strength from their example...We honor those who walked so we could run. We must run so our children soar. And we will not grow weary. For we believe in the power of an awesome God, and we believe in this country's sacred promise." - *President Barack Obama, on the 50th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama*

Project Overview

My bias with this project is that the most authentic way to learn about politics and government is to try to accomplish something meaningful in the *polis*, or the public realm. For this project, we will choose an issue upon which to focus as a class. We will research the issue; debate, discuss, and determine goals that we believe in; decide on strategies to achieve these goals and implement our stated strategies to create change.

My **primary goal** with this project is for you to gain clarity on how you want to make a contribution to your local community and the nation as a whole. Your contribution could be to be an awesome parent, write a manifesto (or a poem), run for office, or be a farmer. I want you to consider and define a public purpose for your life.

With this in mind, there are three components to the overall project:

1) Group Project - We will decide and shape this project as a class. I will provide support and guidance but the decision on what to do will be yours as a class. The only parameter I will give you is that I want the group project to have a positive impact on the lives of young people (ages 16-30) in Durango and the larger Four Corners region. You will need to work together as a class to determine who will play what role as the project moves forward. My expectation is that when over twenty people focus their attention and intentions powerful and positive things will happen.

2) Term Paper - You will use the academic content from the project that is most meaningful to you to develop and refine a college-level essay. I will present options for how to structure the essay. You'll have choices and conference with me to develop your topic and argument. You won't need to do outside research. You can, but you don't have to. You will need to use some of the articles, chapters, films, and documents that we'll review over the next several weeks as evidence. The paper should be 6-10 pages double-spaced.

3) Digital Story - You will condense your deeper learning on this project into a 3-4 minute digital story that conveys how you will contribute to making America a more perfect union. You will record yourself reading a script and then mix this voiceover with photos, video clips, text, music, and/or sound recordings and then post your story on your DP.

We'll divide class time consistently between these different pieces and you should expect keeping each of these threads alive for the duration of the project.

What's up with **exhibition**? That, I don't know. It depends on what project you choose and what you think will showcase the results of all your work and learning, result in an authentic dialogue with an audience, and have a positive community impact. We'll figure it out together.

Outcomes & Rationale

Essential Question: How do you see yourself helping to make America a more perfect union?

Outcomes: Completing this project will increase students'...

- ability to apply the philosophical and rhetorical skills developed in 11th grade
- awareness of the avenues available to them to have an impact on society
- ability to connect ongoing political debates to American history
- skill at making a difference on important issues

Government happens when people get together to accomplish something. You will learn about government by practicing it, within our classroom. To get the most out of this project, you will

need to pay attention to **how** we get things done, **how** you feel about it, and **how** you make sense of these feelings and the overall experience.

This project is all about decision-making, as is all politics and government. Our constitution is a document that describes how we as a nation will make decisions. Political campaigns are contests over who gets to make decisions and what gets decided. With this in mind, I will be throwing a lot of decisions at you over the next several weeks. Embrace each choice as an opportunity to be as President George W. Bush would say, "a decider."

Because the essential question is about how you want to make a contribution to the public realm, I will consistently present examples of individuals who have made contributions in different ways. Perhaps some of these individuals will become role models. At the very least, my hope is that they'll move you to consider, "Could I be that person? Would I enjoy doing what that person did?"

Calendar

The needs of the Group Project will drive how we spend our time. What's set are the steps that we need to go through to accomplish an action project. We could race through the steps and finish quickly. We could get stuck on one part. The whole thing could fall apart--just being honest. I will not jump in to "save" the group project. But I will push you to learn from whatever happens.

So, what are the steps?

- 1) Decide on an issue
- 2) Research and understand the issue
- 3) Decide on goals
- 4) Decide on solution strategies
- 5) Implement our solution
- 6) Reflect on the experience
- 7) Tell the story of the experience to others (exhibition)

If we finish this project in ten weeks, we'll have enough time to move on to the Local Economies Project. If we need more time, we'll take it and do something different to introduce you to economics. We will start working on senior project full-time in February. But even here, if you want, you can continue working on the issue by making it a centerpiece of your senior project experience. So, be open. Dream big. Make it real.

Speaking of Senior Project...Just about everything we do for this project will set you up for a successful senior project. The work you do on your term paper will make doing well on the Senior Project paper must less daunting. The Group Project will give you skills for the action piece of your Senior Project. The digital story will give you experience finding and

communicating the essential truths of an experience, a skill that will be essential to your Senior Project presentation.

Grading and Evaluation

Your grade will be some combination of your work on the group project, your term paper, and the digital story that you put together. The exact division and weighting of these three elements is something I want to discuss with you.

There will be interim assignments leading up to these final products. All of these assignments are important, but some will count more than others. I will do my best to articulate "why" we are doing these assignments and how I see them as helping you create beautiful work for each of the three main assignments.

Finally...

Our founders enshrined the phrase "a more perfect union" in the preamble of our Constitution. It challenges each generation to take the democratic reins and, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would say, work to bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice. I know you'll rise to this challenge.

Questions and Notes

What questions or concerns do you have about what you've just read? What are you excited about? Jot down some thoughts in the space below.