**United States History**

**Mrs. Stafstrom**

**Selecting a Topic/Developing a Research Question**

**Topic**

Remember that a **topic** is what a research paper is about. It provides a focus for the writing.

Stick with one major topic in your paper.

Choose a topic that is of interest to you. The topic **must** deal with American history from about 1900 up to 2000 – social, political, economic, religious, military, diplomatic, etc. Use your family history to help you, and consider whether you are interested in people, events, ideas, or places. This process can help narrow the possibilities.

The topic **must** do one of the following:

* explore a thought provoking and controversial question
* compare two events or people in history
* evaluate an event or person

Topics that are **unacceptable**:

* Conspiracy theories – Who shot Kennedy?
* Statements of fact – America is the only country to have landed a man on the moon.
* Straight biography – You may choose a topic dealing with one person but not in biography

format. Ask a question like “In what ways did Cesar Chavez help or hurt the farm worker

movement?” You thus will spend very little of the paper discussing his early life.

**Research Question**

A **research question** allows you to look at a topic from a certain perspective and draw a conclusion from your research. Your research and the arguments in your paper answer the research question. While *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Harriet Beecher Stowe are topics, asking the question “What effect did *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* have on American’s attitudes towards slavery?” allows you to make a point and draw a conclusion.

Choose a question that is not too broad or too narrow. If you want to write about Ronald Reagan, you might ask these questions:

1. Who was Ronald Reagan?

2. How did Reagan affect American History?

3. What effect did the Reagan’s views on the Soviet Union have on the end of the Cold War?

Question “1” is too narrow. It can be answered in one sentence. Question “2” is too broad

because you might have to explore several topics from his upbringing to his contributions to the Cold War and you might lose focus. Question “3” is focused enough to stick on one topic, yet broad enough to research in some depth.

**U.S. History Research Paper Topic**

**Review your textbook and other available sources to identify at least three possible research topics in U.S. History from the end of the Civil War until about 2000.**

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Remember your topic must do one of the following:

􀀹 Explore a thought provoking and or controversial question

􀀹 Compare two events or people in history

􀀹 Evaluate an event or person

**Topic 1:** The primary topic I want to research is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Specific questions I expect to explore on the above topic include:

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**Topic 2:** The primary topic I want to research is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**Topic 3:** The primary topic I want to research is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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