

## TERM PAPER INSTRUCTIONS

**Objective:** In your Third Analytical Paper, you examined journalism as the “first draft of history,” analyzing how a major American speech was interpreted in contemporary media coverage and developing your own interpretation based on primary evidence. In this final project, you will refine and expand your interpretation of the speech, examine how historians and other scholars have interpreted its significance, and situate it alongside other texts in the American political tradition. What problem in American political life does your speech reveal, and what does the historical evidence suggest about how we should understand that problem today? Your goal is to develop a deeper argument about what the speech reveals about American political life and how its central problem continues to shape our public conversation today.

**Due:** In class on Wednesday, May 6th, 2026, and electronically by midnight that night for anonymous UNM Gen Ed assessment. I can offer extensions but we must agree ahead of time on when you will submit your project.

**Length:** AT LEAST 8-12 full pages of text, double spaced, following MLA format precisely, plus an **accurate** Works Cited page. A template is still available at <http://citizen.obenauf.net>. You will not be permitted to rewrite or resubmit an essay that fails to meet these basic expectations because this core writing class emphasizes form as much as content. See the syllabus for more information.

**Notes:** Revision means more than simply correcting typos; it means taking a new look at your work and making sure everything fits together tightly. You should consult my **Guide to Writing**, my comments on your first three papers, and your **MLA Handbook** for advice on how to approach high-level writing; you should also allot time to use my **Revision Triage Checklist** to make sure every element of your paper is impeccable. Aim to produce a masterpiece of publishable quality as the culmination of your semester’s learning in this course—you’ve been preparing for this all spring!

By the end of this project, you should be able to explain not only what your speech meant in its own time, but also what studying it has taught you about the larger American conversation we have been examining throughout the semester. Because many of the issues raised by these speeches remain politically charged today, it is especially important to approach the evidence with intellectual discipline. As we discussed earlier in the semester, strong historical writing tests assumptions against the evidence rather than beginning with conclusions we hope to prove. Your task in this paper is not to confirm your prior beliefs, but to examine how the historical evidence complicates, challenges, or refines them. The goal of this paper is not to produce a manifesto or policy recommendation, but to demonstrate the habits of mind we have practiced throughout the semester: careful reading, historical interpretation, engagement with scholarly debate, and honest reflection on what the evidence reveals.

You are no longer required to use the ten constructions from the Third Analytical Paper (additionally, furthermore, moreover, etc.) but you are encouraged to deploy such formulas to help guide your reader.

## Sample Outline and Clarification of Expectations

**1. Introduction.** Open by discussing a significant work written before 1900 (for example, Washington’s “Farewell Address,” “Federalist No. 10,” Lincoln’s writings, or another text from the Heffner anthology) to frame the larger ideas at stake in your paper. Then, quickly introduce the twentieth-century speech that forms the central focus of your essay—who delivered the speech, when and where it was given, and what circumstances prompted it. Your introduction should move efficiently from context to argument, culminating in a clear thesis that reflects your analysis of the evidence. As in your earlier papers, your thesis should emerge from your engagement with the sources rather than from a preconceived position.

**2. Revised Analysis of the Speech and its Contemporary Reception.** This is the meat of your paper. This section should remain grounded in a close reading of the speech and its initial newspaper coverage. Revision here means more than polishing your earlier draft: your goal is to present a more focused, coherent, and persuasive account of the speech, one that reflects both your original analysis and your deeper engagement with the material over the course of the semester.

**3. Historiography.** You should examine how historians, political scientists, and other scholars have interpreted the speech and its significance. Your goal is not merely to summarize their arguments, but to evaluate how their interpretations compare with your own reading of the evidence. To do this effectively, you will need to engage with multiple scholarly perspectives—**no fewer than three substantial secondary sources such as books and peer-reviewed journal articles**—chosen for their rigor and relevance, regardless of when they were published. It is not enough simply to summarize other scholars’ positions. You must explain their arguments in your own words and then evaluate them, with quotations, using the same standard we have used throughout the semester: what do they get right, and where do you disagree, and why? If something doesn’t pass the smell test, say so—then show why you disagree based on the evidence. Database searches will get you started, but some of the most useful sources are often found by accident—while browsing the stacks, following citations, or opening a book you didn’t know you needed.

**4. Continuing the Conversation.** Reflect on how the problem raised by your speech fits within the broader American conversation about democracy, citizenship, liberty, political conflict, or national purpose. You may bring your speech into conversation with another text from our course readings as you consider what this historical episode suggests about American political life. This final section of your essay should reflect on what your research ultimately suggests about the issue raised by your speech. You have become an expert in the speech itself, its initial reception, and the interpretations offered by historians and other scholars—now consider what conclusions or uncertainties the evidence you’ve examined leaves you with. Some students may wish to articulate how their thinking about the issue has developed through the research process; others may prefer to emphasize the complexity or unresolved nature of the problem. Your goal is not to advocate for a predetermined position, but to account for what the historical evidence suggests to you, as an articulate citizen.

**As a reminder, the use of AI tools (including ChatGPT, Grammarly, and citation generators) is prohibited. Ask yourself this question: “Did I do this work myself?”**