

Where Do We Draw the Line?

How The Triumph of District-Based Representative Government  
Devolved Into a Tragic Distortion of American Democratic Ideals

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Individual Website

Student Composed Website: 1,182 words

Process Paper: 458 words

Gerrymandering -- the deliberate manipulation of electoral district lines for political gain -- has been a challenge for American representative government since the early days of our republic. I first learned about this topic as a sophomore in my AP Seminar research course. I found it fascinating that something as important as our vote, the primary tool for citizens to exert their influence in a democracy, could be so easily undermined without the public's awareness. Given the tragic consequences of a representative democracy that isn't truly representative, I thought this year's "Triumph and Tragedy" theme would be a perfect avenue for me to pursue further research into this topic.

I started my research using online databases to gather preliminary information on the presence, origin and historical context of abusive redistricting in America. Once I had defined my research topic, I sketched an outline of the content sections that would ultimately form my project's website. In an effort to find more primary sources, I spoke to the staff of the Simsbury Historical Society, where I have volunteered for the past three years. While the Historical Society's archives focus primarily around local history, my mentors there were able to help me find more primary sources using subscription databases to which they had access.

To develop my website content, I conducted more in-depth research by studying historical documents, reviewing academic books/journals, and conducting interviews. I also searched for photographs and video that would help make browsing the website a more immersive experience, ultimately drawing this multimedia from sources such as the Library of Congress, National Archives Digital Collection, and U.S. Supreme Court's digital records.

When planning my project, I gravitated to the website category as I felt that was the optimal medium for explaining the complex topic of gerrymandering (by using graphics, video

and easy-to-read content blocks). I created the project website through Weebly using a design template that would convey information in a clear, visually appealing way. I also spent time learning the basics of HTML/CSS coding, as that was necessary in order to perfect the display of some of the website elements.

My project relates to this year's NHD theme because it shows that triumph and tragedy are inextricably linked. Most people think of triumph as *following* tragedy -- and it often does, when individuals throughout history have overcome adversity. However, my project demonstrates that the reverse is also true -- tragedy can *follow* triumph. I discovered this in my research when it became apparent that some of the greatest successes in the design of our democracy also (inadvertently) led to the electoral district manipulation that we struggle with today. This is what I found most interesting about my topic, and I hope my website visitors will be equally intrigued.