

## Jason Folkman

### 1. The initial HISTORICAL TOPIC I wanted to explore early in the course was . . .

I was interested in exploring a theme of antebellum slavery through the lens of environmental history. To me, this meant researching and writing on a topic that included the landscape as an active character, addressed the changing health of ecosystems, and incorporated how individuals through history interpreted the landscapes around them. This approach was extremely broad and undefined, though a review of literature concerned with antebellum slavery and environmental history led me to be interested in the connections between rice cultivation in the antebellum South and the cultural and agricultural practices of West African slave women.

### 2. I narrowed down by topic — and made the project more manageable -- by deciding to focus on . . .

As I investigated this initial topic, I found myself overwhelmed by the difficulty in finding primary sources. In response to this difficulty, I began using academic search engines to further explore different environments and ecosystems connected to antebellum slavery and eventually stumbled on an article concerned with antebellum turpentine production. This presented a specific ecosystem – the Longleaf Pines of the southeast United States – and a particular aspect of antebellum slavery – the use of regimented slave labor to gather raw tar, pitch, and turpentine in an isolated forest setting. I investigated the topic more fully by contacting organizations that held primary documents concerned with turpentine production, including the Forest History Society, the Wilson Library special collection at the University of North Carolina, and the Library of Congress: Federal Writers Project.

### 3. I developed a sound *interpretive* approach to the topic by analyzing the subject from a particular perspective — which was. . .

In reading the limited literature available on turpentine production, I found that there was a, largely, unaddressed continuation of labor patterns across the ante- and post-bellum periods. My perspective was to bridge this chronological gap and examine the similarities of ante- post-bellum labor conditions in a forest setting. The theme of isolation was also critical to forming my perspective, as both ante- and post-bellum slaves and convicts were subject to the multifaceted isolation of working in a forest setting. Antebellum traveling accounts, collected oral histories, ante- and post-bellum scientific and agricultural journals, photographs, work songs, and newspaper articles were all important in informing my perspective.

#### 4. The final THESIS presented in my paper argues that . . .

My thesis made three key contributions to the literature on this topic by arguing that:

1. Turpentine slaves were subjected to conditions that were, in some ways, worse than those experienced by agricultural slaves.
2. Labor conditions in turpentine production were marked by considerable continuity across the ante- and post-bellum periods – questioning the idea that social, political, and economic conditions within periods or eras in historical discourse are self-contained and non-continuing.
3. People living in, or traveling through, the longleaf pine areas of the South were witness to the ecological consequences of migratory turpentine production, developed a level of environmental awareness regarding the rapid transformation of Longleaf pine landscape, and that, just as slaves and laborers were exploited for their labor and degraded in their condition, so too were the forests in which they worked.