Group Session #1

For today, your group should focus on laying the groundwork for your project so you have a clear direction and research plan going forward. By the end of your session today, you should complete three things:

1. Understand the basic facts of your case and locate the essential original documents. For those focusing on a Supreme Court case, that means you need to locate the lower court and Supreme Court decisions and the dissents. These documents will help you identify the prosecution, the defense, the question(s) before the Court (i.e. what constitutional issues are in question?), the verdict (decision and dissent), and the implementation of the decision.

For those focusing on the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Unfunded Mandate Reform Act of 1995, that means you should locate the 1996 and 1995 acts with their key congressional reports, and the similarly-named laws which preceded them. These documents will help you identify why the law was needed or desired, who supported it, who opposed it, which legislators took up the mantle of the law, how they convinced others to support it (or failing that, how they got the votes to enact it despite them), how the executive branch was involved in crafting, opposing, or supporting the law, and how the law was implemented.

2. Make a preliminary timeline. This won’t be complete because your research will uncover more details as you go along, but you will be more effective in your research if you have a basic timeline of your project to work with as you learn more.

3. Develop search terms for your research. This is a part of the process that gets overlooked too often in projects like these, so don’t make the same mistake! The terms you use to search the CAC archives database, Lexis Nexis, ProQuest, and other sources will determine what information you uncover. Make sure to think through how you will conduct your search to ensure that you don’t miss crucial evidence that could help you.

Remember: your goal is to create a digital exhibit that tells the story of your topic through primary and secondary sources, including document analysis, data-mapping, geocoding, etc. In order to decide how to move forward with your project planning, you need to have a thorough understanding of your topic and come up with a plan for how you will use the sources you find and information you gather through archives analysis to tell that story.