As I listen to The West Wing Weekly while working on my thesis, I've been toying with Jed Bartlet’s favorite question: what’s next? Since spring break, I've been spending basically every waking moment either working or thinking about this monster of a paper I've almost completed. And while I still have a few weeks to go, I'm almost sad to finish it. I mean, I'm excited to move onto other projects, but this one has meant a lot to me. I'm told the official handing-in process (AKA putting your manuscript in a box) isn't a satisfying conclusion. It sort of just...ends.

The thing is, the honors thesis (or any project you do) shouldn’t be an end of something. Yes, it’s a culmination of the honors curriculum and a natural progression of the academic career. But I've invested so much time and energy into this work. This should be a beginning - a stepping stone for new opportunities that combine passions and research for something greater.

Spending three years researching a place twenty minutes from my hometown was not what I expected from college. But it's been an interesting way to investigate an area I didn't know much about and gain a great research skillset. Moving forward, I’d love to present my research for the New Bedford community. I also built the draft of a multimedia project, something I'd like to tinker with a bit more before handing it over to New Bedford for exhibition purposes. And as it turns out, research like mine is exactly what the National Park Service in New Bedford has been looking for. Understanding the role of the Ladies’ Branch allows historians to analyze contemporary views of the waterfront. So this thesis isn't just a big deal for my honors curriculum - it could mean a lot for other historians and researchers!

So, what comes next? More work, probably. I definitely want to step away from whaling for a little bit. But my thesis won't just sit in the Library waiting for some undergrad to skim through someday - it's a real piece of scholarship that I can share with the world.

P.S. Obligatory Hamilton reference.