

*I am the West: Documenting Community and Identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

**History 2020 Photo Exhibition at the Autry Museum**

**Opening Day is January 24<sup>th</sup>**

Fall 2018

Prompt:

The West is not a “time period” that begins and ends at a specific point in history; rather the West is a place in which Americans disrupted indigenous time and space through industrialization and war to establish towns and cities thousands of miles away from the federal government. Yet, following the Civil War, historians have noted that Americans continued to move out West with the assistance of the federal government, finalizing the decimation of many indigenous communities and landscapes, to establish cities. Buffalo Bill’s minstrel performances portrayed the West as a wild, untamed place, while others, like Gloria Anzaldúa have proven that the West is a contested border; and yet the West is a place in constant movement, changing and expanding to reflect the experiences of diverse people that formed distinct communities and identity. As historian Patricia Limerick suggests, the West is an urban space, an idea that challenges our understanding that this landscape was only farming, ranching and cowboys. Romanticized accounts of the West have dominated the cinema, and has created assumptions and stereotypes about the indigenous, Black, Chinese, European immigrant, and Latino communities in the West.

Working in collaboration, students (groups of five) will become urban historians, and photograph people, landmarks, parks, streets, religious space, and buildings that represent community and identity. Students will answer the larger question of **how do images shape the understanding of communities in the West?**

In order to gain free admission to the Autry, students will need to email Dr. Erik Greenberg at [egreenberg@theautry.org](mailto:egreenberg@theautry.org). In the email, include the following: course information, name, and date of visit.

**Exhibit Plan**

**Step #1: Week Three September 4<sup>th</sup> Defining community and identity. (25 points)**

- Why did people move out West?
- Students will read short articles about the ideas of community and identity in history.

**Step #2: Beginning Week Four September 11<sup>th</sup> Photographing My Community (25 points)**

1) *La Raza Exhibit*. Students (individual or in groups) will visit the Autry museum by week four. Instructions for the Autry visit are posted on Moodle. Please download/print before visit.

2) Using camera phones, each student will take three photos of their community, in which they live, work, play, or attend school. Each student group will have a total of fifteen images, and groups will select the top five based upon set criteria provided by the instructor. Students will print all photos and submit to instructor. (Students can place photos in a PowerPoint template, and print out)

**Step #3: Week Seven October 4<sup>th</sup> Collaborative “Midterm” Essay Due (100 points)**

Students will select five images per group (for exhibit submission), and answer the following questions about their photos to provide historical context.

1) Image(s):

- a. What were the determining factors in the selection of this image?
- b. Did the group alter the image(s)? Please explain why.
- c. As images can be as powerful as text, what is the meaning or significance of this image?
- d. Location, Time, and Date of Image

2) Message/Theme:

- a. What is the message/vision/theme of this photo?
- b. Who is the photographer?
- c. Is the message clear to someone who is not familiar with American history?
- d. How does this image invoke historical thinking?

3) Historical Context

- a. Provide historical context for the photo by addressing the economic, social, and political dynamics of the historical era or period.
- b. What are the major historical events for the historical era or period?
- c. How does this photo engage with past and/or the current dynamics of this nation and world community?
- d. In what way does this photo address the intersectional themes of gender, class, and race in history?

**Step #4 Week Nine October 16<sup>th</sup> Interpretation and Arrangement of Photos (25 points)**

Student groups will collaborate during class to begin the interpretation and arrangement of photos. Instructor will provide information about exhibit space, and create a mock-up of exhibit for students to use. **Selected Photos will be sent to the Autry for mounting.**

1. When looking at the images, what specific themes emerge?
2. What is the exhibit space?
3. How do we get visitors to experience our stories?
4. What will our completed exhibit look like?

**Step #5: Week Ten October 23<sup>rd</sup> Writing for an Audience (25 points)**

Students will write the item labels for their objects. Item labels fall into two categories: those that simply identify the item and those that identify the item and expound on it. For this exhibit, students will identify the item and provide a brief historical background to item. The item labels should be 200 words or less. Each group will submit a total of five descriptive labels. Instructor will provide label format to student groups.

**Step #6: Week Thirteen November 13<sup>th</sup> Final Arrangement of Exhibit**

Working in collaboration, students will finalize all details of exhibit: content (grammar and spelling), arrangement and placement of photos in exhibit space. Students will visit the Autry this week.

**Exhibit opens on January 24<sup>th</sup>.**

**Step #7: Reflection Essay Due December 11<sup>th</sup>. (100 points)**

Students will write a reflection essay that answers the following questions:

1. How can the completed exhibit be used as a teaching tool?
2. How does the exhibition contribute to the study of history?
3. What is the connection between interpretation and presentation of history to the public?
4. How did we engage visitors with our exhibit?
5. What are some of the challenges faced with curating an exhibit?
6. What did we learn?