

HISTORY 374
HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WEST
Professor Martha Sandweiss

Assignment 2. Five pages, plus a bibliography and a photocopy of the image that is the subject of your paper.

Historians use visual evidence as well as literary documents. This assignment requires you to think about the special challenges of visual evidence as you try to make sense of **a photograph from the twentieth-century American West**. Do not choose a nineteenth-century image!

To make the task easier, I've broken it down into its component parts.

1. **SELECT YOUR IMAGE.** You may select an image from the digitized collections of photographs from the Princeton Western Americana website (<http://pudl.princeton.edu/collections/pudl0017>), the Farm Security Administration Project (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/>), or any other source. I'm even willing to accept a family snapshot if you can put it in historical perspective.

If you select a photograph from the Princeton Western Americana collection you will be able to go see it in Special Collections, requesting it with the call number that you'll find on the website. If you select an image from another source, including any online source, you must figure out a way to describe it as a physical object, even if you are not able to see it in person.

2. **FIGURE OUT WHAT YOUR IMAGE IS.** To do an effective job, you will need to know who made your photograph, why they made it, who their audience was. If you can't figure this out, you can address how and why it is that you do not know. You should also figure out what sort of photograph this is. Was it made for private use, for publication, or for a discernable didactic purpose?

3. **THINK ABOUT HOW YOUR IMAGE CAN TELL A LARGE STORY ABOUT WESTERN AMERICAN HISTORY.** You need to find your story. Does your picture let you write about a person or family? A place? An historical movement? A particular event?

4. **ASSEMBLE YOUR BIBLIOGRAPHY.** Using the library book catalogue, as well as online databases like JSTOR, put together a bibliography that will help you put your photograph in a broader historical context.

5. **WRITE YOUR PAPER.** Your paper should make use of your particular photograph to tell a larger story about some aspect of history in the American West during the 20th century. It can go in any number of directions. *But you must consider the photograph as a material artifact.* That is, while you will certainly want to address the content of the picture, you must also think about it as a piece of evidence created by a particular person at a particular historical moment. The photograph may even have a history of its own that is germane to your paper.

Be creative! But don't forget to footnote. Historical research sometimes leads you to dead-ends, and if that proves to be the case with some of your research here, I am willing to accept an account of that as a part of your paper.