(Re)Making American History: Creative Group Project

This semester, we’re exploring Post-Civil Rights (re)makings of American history, studying works by writers and artists who participate in the urgent project of producing alternative and corrective versions and visions of the United States’ past. Through grappling with the possibilities and perils of historiography, all the materials that we’re studying in this course suggest that remaking the past and rethinking the ways that we define, record, and relate ‘American history’ has the potential to change how we think about being/becoming American in the present and the future.

What unites all our texts and materials is a commitment to experimentation. Every material that we’ve studied suggests that it’s not only what we accept as history that matters; how we tell or (re)construct American history is just as important. Drawing our attention to this problem, many of our materials invest in undercutting more traditional, official, or ‘objective’ modes of representing history. But what alternatives and possibilities have we encountered in our class this semester? As we’re seeing, (re)making history in the Post-Civil Rights U.S. involves—but necessarily goes beyond—attempts to be more inclusive, accessible, or complete; it demands experimentation. But what can and could this look like?

♦ Our 60AC Creative Group Project assignment asks you to experiment actively with (re)making history yourselves.

Note that, as specified in our syllabus, the Creative Project is a required assignment and worth 20% of your final grade for our course. Every component outlined below counts toward the 20%, and group members’ grades for the overall project may vary, depending on their level of personal participation. (For example, a student who doesn’t submit a thoughtful reflection paper cannot receive the same project grade as other group members who do.)

The Project Planning Stage

♦ Form groups of 5 to 7 with colleagues from your discussion section, and plan the role/s each group member will play in producing the project.

Do you enjoy visual design or audio recording? Do you make comics or graphic novels, know computer coding, or like researching new topics? We believe that everyone contributes differently and that teams work best when each member brings their skills and strengths, whatever those may be.

♦ Choose at least one of the following course materials as inspiration:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storyteller, Leslie Marmon Silko</th>
<th>A Most Imperfect Union, Stavans &amp; Alcaraz</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Hampton Project, Carrie Mae Weems</td>
<td>There There, Tommy Orange</td>
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<td>Reel Injun, Dir. Neil Diamond</td>
<td>I Am Not Your Negro, Dir. Raoul Peck</td>
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<td>“What You Pawn I Will Redeem,” Sherman Alexie</td>
<td>Kindred, Octavia Butler</td>
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Thinking about the American histories that your ‘inspiration text’ explores, choose a ‘lost’ or marginalized piece of American history to remake.

What—and who—would you include and why? Together with your group, choose a piece of U.S. history that relates to your inspiration text and one that you think deserves to be recognized and represented differently, or one that’s been depicted in conflicting ways and whose legacy continues to be in dispute.

Choose a topic that interests your group, and think of this project as an opportunity to complicate and expand upon the alternative, ‘small,’ and ‘subaltern’ histories that we’ve discussed in class. Keep in mind that the materials we’ve studied have many layers worth exploring further, and don’t be afraid to consider how our course materials may connect with our own local experiences of living in the state of California and studying at UC Berkeley.

Be Creative! Examples of Creative Project starting-points inspired by 60AC course materials:
(Note: These are just possibilities.)

- Science-fiction-inflected slave narrative, inspired by Kindred
- Comic-book national history, inspired by A Most Imperfect Union
- Alternative ‘Founding Father Narrative,’ inspired by Hamilton
- Study of Carlisle Indian School, inspired by Leslie Marmon Silko’s Storyteller, or Hampton Institute, inspired by Carrie Mae Weems’ The Hampton Project
- Study of the UC Berkeley Hearst Museum, inspired by The Hampton Project
- Study of Ishi, a UC Berkeley icon and “the last wild Indian in North America, a man of Stone Age culture” (as described by Theodora Kroeber) inspired by “What You Pawn I Will Redeem”
- Study of 1969 Native American Occupation of nearby Alcatraz Island inspired by There There
- Collection of oral histories with an introduction, inspired by There There

Identify the key concepts or theories that inform your group’s project.

What problems of representation and historiography will shape your project? How do you see your project intersecting with the themes and problems we’ve been studying this semester, but also potentially raising new questions or demanding that you create new modes, language, or categories?

Example concepts, key words, and theories we’ve explored:
(Note: These are just possibilities.)

- Locating subaltern histories
- Crafting “recombinant” narratives
- Alternatives to ‘speaking for’ or ‘giving voice’
- Representing impossible/unknown/knowable histories
- Resisting ‘redemptive’ histories
- Historiography outside/without alphabetic writing
- Co-constructing (auto)biographies and national narratives
- Resisting the museumification of marginalized cultures
- Writing ‘history from below’
- Counter-reading official history
- Examining history’s role in constructing the U.S. as “imagined community” or ______________ (Name an approach or theory yourselves)
Choose the medium or media you’ll use to share your project. Be sure to consider your group members’ skills and interests while also staying open to new learning opportunities.

We’ve already studied fiction, non-fiction, poetry, performance and installation art, musicals, documentary films, comics, and more this semester, so think of the possibilities!

You have the option of using an Adobe tool such as Spark, Rush, InDesign, etc. to create your (re)making or parts of it. Although some Adobe tools could be difficult to learn within a month, other tools are extremely accessible, to the point that you could shoot a documentary with your smart phone, compile short interviews, or build a Spark presentation with no prior experience and an open mind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Be Creative! Possible ways of presenting your project:</th>
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<td>(Note: These are just ideas.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rewriting of a text we’ve studied</td>
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<td>Photo album or montage</td>
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<td>Alternative ‘history’ book</td>
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<td>Comic/Graphic novel</td>
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<td>Audio Playlist</td>
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<td>Anthology of poems</td>
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<td>Installation art piece</td>
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<td>Collection of Oral Histories</td>
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<td>Podcast</td>
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<tr>
<td>Webpage</td>
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<td>Collage (narrative/visual)</td>
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<td>Collection of film clips</td>
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<td>Documentary mini-film</td>
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<td>Map or Infographic Poster</td>
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<td>Archive or exhibit</td>
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All UC Berkeley students have free access to Adobe tools, but our course is part of an American Cultures Center initiative to increase the accessibility of technical knowledge on our campus and foster student innovation. This means that you have free access to support, including access to Adobe specialists who can help you learn to use Adobe tools and troubleshoot should you run into problems. Check out the “Adobe Project” tab of our bCourses page for more information, an overview of possible Adobe tools to use for your Creative Project, and an interactive calendar that allows you to schedule one-on-one meetings with an Adobe student-support staff member on campus.

The (Re)Making Stage

Create a plan & submit a project proposal outlining how each member will participate. (One proposal per group. Due Thursday, April 4 by 8pm.)

Describe your group’s vision for the project, ensuring that everyone participates in planning the project and discussing how it relates to our course themes.

Proposals should include:

- Course text/materials that you’ve chosen as inspiration and why your group chose them
- Concepts, theory, or key words that you hope to engage
- Medium/media that you plan to use (and, if you plan to employ an Adobe tool, which one)
- List with the names of all your groupmates and a one-sentence statement of each person’s intended role/s in the project. (These role/s may or may not match up with the roles we frequently use in our Wheeler class meetings. Modify roles and responsibilities according to your project plans.) Please have each group member compose and contribute their own statement about how they plan to participate, keeping in mind that you may find it helpful to reflect on the group activities we’ve done this semester so far.
Create a sample/model of your project to workshop in discussion section (April 18 or 19).

Think of this like an opportunity to ‘draft’ a portion of your project that you’ll share in section, then build and refine based on the feedback that you receive from your instructors and classmates. If you’re making a film or documentary, present a storyboard. If you’re (re)writing a text, present a section that you’ve drafted and be ready to describe your goals and choices. If you’re planning an art installation, present a component of your installation and describe or display a sketch of the rest. Whatever you’re planning to make eventually, at this stage, produce a sample/model to share and discuss.

Note: All group members should be present in section on Creative Project workshop day (Thursday, April 18 or Friday, April 19, depending on your section meeting schedule).

Revise and expand your sample into a completed project to share in our Wheeler classroom on our last day of class (Thursday, May 2).

Our final class meeting in Wheeler 212 will be dedicated to sharing and reviewing Creative Group Projects. Every group will have the opportunity to present their project, as well as take comments and feedback from the class.

Submit your group project, along with a complete Works Cited, on bCourses by Friday, May 3. (One project submission and Works Cited per group.)

Note that all the materials—images, clips, texts, interview sources, etc—must be properly cited in a document that you submit alongside your Creative Project. As with our paper assignments, please follow MLA citation style. Thorough citation guidelines will be distributed in mid-April.

Submit individual reflection papers on bCourses by Monday, May 13. (One write-up per group member.)

These short write-ups will give each group member the chance to reflect on the (re)making process and their participation in the group project. Why did you choose this medium or mode to (re)make a piece of history? What kind of experience did you aim to produce for your audience, and what ethical quandaries did you face during the (re)making process? Detailed reflection paper guidelines will be distributed in mid-April.

Remember to be creative, embrace the process, and enjoy working together!

Creative Projects are experimental opportunities. Produce thoughtful work, but recognize that, as your instructors, we know that our class isn’t a trial period for Adobe professionals or designed to train future art professionals. We invite you to take an imaginative approach to our course materials and themes while also engaging in the kind of (re)making process that we’ve studied together this semester.