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Cherstin Lyon TSSA Fall 16

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Cherstin M. Lyon, Teaching Study Skills Award (TSSA)
Dissemination and Final Report

Western Historical Association, ST. PAUL, MN | OCT. 20-23, 2016

Teaching Strategies Studied:

I learned about public history and community outreach through the community tour of Little Africa in St. Paul, Minnesota. The Little Africa Business and Cultural District of St. Paul, Minnesota has been connecting immigrant African business owners with artists to engage in "place-making" and economic development. Through arts projects such as murals, the main street has an identity easily visible to tourists that connects the immigrants' businesses with a deliberate identity that promotes intercultural pride and that welcomes visitors. We took a tour of the area visiting the center of some arts projects, touring different types of murals and public arts projects, visiting the beauty shop owned by an entrepreneur who has also become one of the major landlords on the street supporting African immigrant business owners, and we finished with lunch at a restaurant and an Ethiopian coffee ceremony at Sabrina Coffee. We learned about the history of the community and how the intentional place-making approach has promoted business success, community pride, and economic development.

The associated strategy for my public history classes was to teach students community outreach techniques through not just history, but also through arts, business, and community identity.

Impact on/How Applied to Current Teaching:

I wrote a service-learning grant to incorporate my students of public history into a history and relevancy project at Citrus State Historic Park in Riverside. We used what I learned in Little Africa to teach students the importance of community outreach that supports identity, economic development, and engages the public through the arts. The students then volunteered for a community festival day at Citrus State Historic Park. They ran the different booths inviting the public to engage in citrus crate label making, a citrus crate packing competition, basket weaving, book making, and citrus tastings.

There is much more to learn from the impact that touring this community of businesses and artists. It reinforces the importance of field trips for students and for me as a conference attendee. I am more committed than ever to participate in community-based field trips whenever I attend a conference. I also would like to explore further how students can work with communities to help them see how they can incorporate "place-making" into their own efforts to reinforce identity and build their businesses.