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TSSA, Fall 2016, Final Report
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Conference: The Western Historical Association Meeting

Teaching Strategy: Collaboration and community partnerships

Impact on Teaching: The focus of the Western Historical Association 2016 meeting in St. Paul, Minnesota was public history. I presented on a panel that discussed collaborative projects in women's history. One of the presenters discussed her project on eugenics and the disproportionate rate at which Californians with Spanish surnames were sterilized in California. The subject of the research was fascinating, but the results of the research will be shared in a database that will provide researchers with access to medical records stripped of their personal identifiable information to make the data both accessible and ethical for research on such a sensitive topic. I will use this information in teaching California history and in advising students who research mental health history or who work at our local partner institution, Patton State Mental Hospital's museum. The teaching concept was based on collaborating with students as researchers.

The most important learning experience at the conference was the tour that was titled the "History of the Greenline." This was a tour of a neighborhood of Ethiopian immigrants. The tour started at the workshop of a local artist who had organized public arts projects for the community. These art projects helped the community beautify their neighborhood and give it a visible sense of identity. We visited the beauty shop of one woman who had started purchasing property on the street to redevelop and encourage local residents to build businesses that served the community and helped revitalize the neighborhood. We were hosted by the neighborhood Ethiopian restaurant for lunch and I ate a traditional Ethiopian meal for the first time. The injera was delicious as was all of the food I ate using the injera sourdough tortilla/crepe-like flat bread as the only utensil. We then went to the neighboring coffee shop for a coffee "ceremony" and more food, fresh roasted and brewed coffee and desert. We rode the light rail train back to the conference hotel enlightened and quite full.

What I learned was community-based art projects are fantastic ways neighborhoods can "brand" themselves and work together toward economic revitalization.¹ Community ownership of the projects is key to sustained success. Partnerships with universities are helpful, but community members should take the lead. I will use this in teaching public history and have already incorporated more public art into this class. I also got to meet a woman who has become a pillar in her community due to her success with her beauty salon and her dedication to improving the neighborhood. Women who own beauty salons have, in history, been very important leaders in diverse communities due to their economic independence. I have decided to use a related book in teaching civil rights history that focuses on women beauticians as central leaders in the voting registration and citizenship education classes in the southern United States during the civil rights movement of the 1960s.²

¹ <https://www.minnpost.com/arts-culture/2015/08/midway-murals-project-beautifying-busy-snelling-avenue-public-art>

² Tiffany Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (University of Illinois Press, 2010).

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African Economic Development Solutions (AEDS), Little Africa Arts Series: African Women Entrepreneurs & Artist Networking, <http://aeds-mn.org/blog/page/2>.