

Instagram Project

Intro

People typically have a limited engagement with history, often in a museum or a textbook or some public television documentary airing at 2 in the morning. These are all great ways to interact with history—but the widespread belief that those are the *only* proper ways to do so have led to many misconceptions about what history is, how we can talk about it to the public, and what uses we can make of it in our daily lives. For this project, we will confront and address such misconceptions by collaboratively creating a group history-centered Instagram account.

Goals

Through this project, I hope we can develop and sharpen several research, writing, and critical thinking skills essential for success in most careers. Instagram is a useful medium for learning how to construct tight, effective prose: you only have space for a couple hundred words or so, which means every idea must be conveyed as clearly, forcefully, and briefly as possible. Further, the current version of Instagram allows for posts with up to 10 photographs; this will allow you to focus on building a narrative using both image and text, using one to fill in gaps for the other. Building effective posts will also make you a keener researcher in your quest to source the best images and sharpest details.

Components

We will be working on this project throughout the course, both inside and outside of class. Each week, there will be some component that we will complete. There will also be segments within class time during which we work through other project components. During our first class—that is, today—we will determine group assignments. Everyone will be placed in a team of 3-4 people. What I want to stress is that, although you will be in a team for this project, your assignments are always ultimately individually assessed. Your team should be seen as people who will ultimately know your work better than anyone besides yourself, and who can help you make the best possible research and writing choices through their insights, suggestions, and feedback.

Feedback

Because this is also a new project, I'm looking for your feedback throughout the term. Quite frankly, the success of this project—both this term and in the future—depends upon your willingness to share your thoughts on which components of this project you find useful, which ones you think could be modified or improved, and which ones could be tossed out wholesale. As such, rather than bombard you with all of this project's assignments at once, we're going to take it week by week. This will make it easier for us to focus on specific concepts and methods, as well as amend any forthcoming components before I assign them.

Week One—Foundations

Discussion—July 6

To begin this project, I'd like us to spend some time during our first class discussing several key ideas. Coming to some consensus on these topics will make it easier for us to work on this project over the following five or so weeks:

- We should spend some time thinking about what it means to do history publicly. What do historians even do? How do they interact with the public—how *can* they interact with the public? What limitations do they have? What are prevailing attitudes toward history?
- We should also spend some time discussing social media. What makes a social media account successful? What are the limitations of different social media platforms? How is storytelling—historical, fictional, or otherwise—influenced by social media platforms and their unique cultures?
- Finally, we should talk about effective communication. What makes good writing good—and what makes bad writing bad? Is communication just about words? What else goes into conveying thoughts? What makes an argument ethical, solid, and persuasive?

Analysis—due July 13

Based on our discussion, I'd like you to find examples of historically oriented social media accounts. I'd like you to begin your search on Instagram, because that is where our class term project will ultimately take place—but Twitter also has many great examples that you may find useful. (A good place to start may be one of the accounts that comes up in our discussion!) Take some time to observe how the account has been built—its approach, its style, its interactions, its communication, its point of view.

Pick one account that you found did a particularly good job. I'd like you to write, oh, let's say a full page, about why and how that account successfully engaged with history. Your response should address the following questions:

- What was the historical focus of this account? Discuss the scope and scale.
- How did this account write about their historical topic? Describe the writing style.
- What kinds of images did this account use—and what was the relationship between words and text?
- How has the account seemed to change over time? (As in, take time to go through the account's posts! Don't just look at the three most recent entries.)
- Does the account ever engage with its readers? How?
- Which entries did you find most effective, and why? How will that influence the way you build your historical Instagram?

Turn in a physical copy of your response to me at the beginning of class on July 13. You will be graded on the unsatisfactory / satisfactory / outstanding model detailed in the syllabus.