Group Curator Project

In *Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts*, Dr. Rebecca Hall tells us about her struggle to find archival sources on women’s involvement in slave revolts, either because she was not granted access to the archives or because details of women’s lives were simply not recorded. Len Garrison, Co-founder of Black Cultural Archives, argues that Black communities need their own archives so that “important acts and achievements of the past, which are now scattered or pushed into the margins of European history can be assembled; where facts now presented as negative, can be re-presented from our point of view, as positive factors in our liberation.” Answering Garrison’s call, this group projects asks you to curate your own digital archival exhibition using materials from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division.

An ***archival collection*** is created by or for a person, family, group, or subject, and an ***archive***is the place in which these materials are preserved for the purposes of historical, informational, legal, or evidential record. Researchers can locate many unique primary and secondary materials in archival collections. For instance, many archives preserve and make accessible diaries, letters, photographs, newspapers, pamphlets, and other primary source documents.

A ***digital archive***is similar in purpose to a physical archive, but the historical documents and objects that provide evidence of the past have been digitized (often by scanning or photography, unless a document was created digitally in the first place) and made available online. Digitized objects (e.g., a digitized print photograph, or a digitized print news article) are called **surrogates** because technically they are not the original items but substitutes.

Museums and galleries typically employ numbers of **curators** whose role it is to **acquire, care for and develop a collection**. They will also arrange displays of collections and loaned works and interpret the collections in order to inform, educate and inspire the public.

There will be several stages to this project.

**Step 1:** You will be organized into groups based on different categories in the Schomburg Center’s digital archival collections. Submit the Google form to tell me your top **two** choices from the list of categories below:

* Demonstrations
* Slavery
* Occupations
* Harlem (Austin Hansen Collection)
* Living Conditions (Farm Security Administration Collection)

**Step 2:**

In your group, look through your assigned collection of images and choose 5-6 (depending on how many people are in your group) images for your collection. As we have seen, exhibitions of archival sources select items that stand alone but also connect to the rest of the collection through a subject or theme. In order to find a sub-topic or theme for your exhibition, you will need to look at the entire collection and conduct some research on the images that stand out to you. I will guide you through the research process in class and show you how to use Guttman’s databases to find information and secondary sources on your topic.

**Step 3:**

Each member of the group will be responsible for writing a text panel for one photograph in your exhibition. You will find instructions for this assignment on the next page in this packet

**Step 4:**

As a group, you will write an introduction to your exhibition. You will find instructions for this assignment on page 3 of this packet.

**Step 5:**

Your exhibition will be displayed on our CUNY Commons Group Curator Project site. I will show you how to do this in class.

**Step 6:**

You will give the class a tour of your digital exhibition in a group presentation. You will find instructions for this assignment on page 4 of this packet.

Text Panel

Each member of your curatorial team will write a text panel for one image in your exhibition. Your text panel should include the following:

1. **Identify the Image**  
   Does the image have a title? Can you find any information about the creator? When and where was it created? Who was it created for?
2. **Place the Image in Context**  
   As we have seen, writers or artists respond to their situation or surroundings. What is the historical and social situation surrounding your image?
3. **Analyze the Image**  
   Once you can place the image in its original context, you can start analyzing it. What important elements or details do you see in the image?
4. **Assess the Perspective**  
   What in the image tells us about the creator’s perspective on the subject? Can you detect any ideology or particular bias? Is the creator attempting to persuade or convince their audience to believe or do something?
5. **Make Connections**

How does this image connect to the other images in your exhibition?

1. **Cite Your Sources**

Provide a citation for your image and for any secondary sources you use.

Your text panel should be at least 250 words. It is worth 10% of your final grade.

Exhibition Introduction

As a group, you will write an introduction to your exhibition. Consider the following prompts as you work on your introduction.

1. What is the name of your exhibition? What is the main goal of the exhibition?
2. What is the thesis statement for your exhibition?

Remember that a basic thesis statement has two main parts:

1. **Topic:** What your exhibition is about
2. **Angle:** What your main idea is about that topic

For example, if I were curating an exhibition of images documenting a political demonstration, my thesis might make a claim about the significance of this event:

My sample thesis: The images in this collection document Civil Rights protests of the 1960s and depict Black resistance as a peaceful yet powerful force.

1. Briefly discuss how each image in the exhibition supports your thesis
2. Bring in at least two secondary sources to support the thesis of your exhibition. For example, to support my thesis I might quote from a newspaper or website article that discusses Civil Rights protests.

Your introduction should be at least 500 words. I will give you feedback on the first draft. The final draft is worth 10% of your final grade.

Group Presentation

You will give the class a 5-10-minute tour of your digital exhibition to the class. In your presentation, you will need to:

1. Present your exhibition to the class
2. Choose one member of the group to introduce your exhibition
3. Introduce each image in your exhibition
4. Moderate a short Q&A session on your exhibition

Your presentation is worth 10% of your final grade.