

Faces of the Frontier:
Photographic Portraits from the American West, 1845–1924
Compiled by the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Target Grade Level: 5–12 in United States history classes

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be better able to:

- Identify and analyze key components of a portrait and relate visual elements to relevant historical context and significance.
- Analyze the roles that various individuals played in the West between 1845 and 1924 and organize the individuals into categories according to their roles.
- Create a collage that reflects their understanding of these categories and individuals.

Portraits:

[Winfield Scott by the Mathew Brady Studio](#), c. 1861
[Andrés Pico by an unidentified artist](#), c. 1850
[Henry Villard by Frank Jay Haynes](#), 1883
[John Muir by William Dasonville](#), c. 1910
[Thomas Moran by William Edwin Gledhill](#), c.1922
[Eadweard Muybridge, self-portrait](#), 1872
[John C. Frémont by Mathew Brady](#), c. 1856
[Clarence King and the Field Party of 1864 by Silas Selleck](#), 1864
[Alice Fletcher by Marcus Ormsbee](#), 1868
[Ouray and the Ute delegation by the Mathew Brady Studio](#), 1868
[Winema by Charles Milton Bell](#), c. 1875
[George A. Custer by an unidentified artist](#), c. 1860
[Geronimo by A. Frank Randall](#), c. 1887
[Sitting Bull by Bailey, Dix, and Mead](#), 1882
[Brigham Young, attributed to Marsena Cannon](#), c. 1850
[Seated Man with Chinese Servant, by an unidentified artist](#), c. 1855
[Jesse James by an unidentified artist](#), 1882
[Plenty Coups by Willem Wildschut](#), c. 1921
[Jeannette Rankin by L. Chase](#), c. 1917
[“Buffalo Bill” Cody by an unidentified artist](#), 1887

Please visit “Faces of the Frontier: Photographic Portraits from the American West, 1845–1924” at <http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/frontier>

Materials

- NPG “Faces of the Frontier: Photographic Portraits from the American West, 1845–1924” exhibition images and label information (found in [online exhibition](#))
- Faces of the Frontier worksheet
- ***Supply students with paper and art materials when necessary.**

Background Information for Teachers

The American West was dramatically reconstructed during the eighty years between the Mexican War and the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924. Although the history of the trans-Mississippi West is many centuries old, the period beginning with the annexation of Texas and the outbreak of war with Mexico in 1845 was witness to an ever-increasing number of encounters between people of different cultural traditions and fields of endeavor. The completion of the transcontinental railroad, the emergence of the national parks movement, the admittance into the Union of nineteen new states west of the Mississippi River, and the ongoing conflicts between Native Americans and non-Natives were just some of the factors that drew men and women to the West in this period. Under the auspices of larger political and corporate entities, these individuals explored, fought over, developed, and represented this vast territory. Through their words and deeds, they contributed to the wholesale transformation of this region and its identity.

Coinciding with these changes was the popularization of photography, a new visual technology that was first introduced in 1839 and proved influential in reshaping how Americans and others came to understand the West. More than any literary or artistic medium, photography made visible the region's great ecological and human diversity. Yet until the early twentieth century, Native Americans did not take up photography, and thus the portraits explored in this lesson represent the work of those who were new to the West. Although photography reinforced preconceived notions at times, it also gave rise to fresh ideas about the West—and in the process about America itself.

Category Definitions

Acquisition: the act of gaining possession or control of something

Development: the act of bringing to a more advanced state; the act of causing to grow or expand

Resistance: the act of opposing or trying to stop something

Conservation: the act of preserving, guarding, or protecting; the act of trying to keep something in its natural state

Opportunity: a situation or condition favorable for the attainment of a goal; a good position, chance, or prospect for advancement or success

Documentation: the act of representing or portraying; the act of gathering evidence or supporting with evidence

Possibilities for Categories:

**Note: the following are suggestions for assigning individuals to categories. Students may place people in any category, but must be able to explain and defend their choices.*

Acquisition: James K. Polk, Andrés Pico, John C. Frémont, George A. Custer, Brigham Young, Jesse James

Development: Andrés Pico, Leland Stanford, John C. Frémont, Clarence King, Brigham Young

Resistance: Andrés Pico, Alice Fletcher, Ouray, Winema, Chief Joseph, Sitting Bull, Benjamin Singleton, Jesse James, Plenty Coups

Conservation: John Muir, Thomas Moran, Alice Fletcher, Ouray, Chief Joseph, Plenty Coups

Opportunity: Leland Stanford, Eadweard Muybridge, John C. Frémont, Alice Fletcher, Brigham Young, Benjamin Singleton, Jesse James, Jeanette Rankin, William Cody

Documentation: John Muir, Thomas Moran, Eadweard Muybridge, Clarence King, Alice Fletcher, William Cody

Lesson Procedures

Portrait Reading Formula for Students:

1. Look at the portrait. Analyze the portrait by answering the [*Reading Portraiture Guide for Educators*](#).
2. Gather biographical facts from the portrait's symbols and construct the context of the sitter's life.
3. Use web resources and books available to research the sitter's life and historical contributions.
4. Share and compare the facts gathered from the portrait with the researched facts.

Each of these steps could be done as a class, in small groups, or individually.

Collage Activity

1. Divide students into at least six groups. Give each group the packet of images and information about the sitters.
2. Assign each group one of the following categories: **Acquisition, Development, Resistance, Conservation, Opportunity, Documentation**
3. Have students, working in groups, read the packet of materials. They should then use the worksheet to analyze the portraits and decide which sitters fit into their assigned categories and how those sitters connect to the West. If necessary, students can conduct additional research about the individuals. (See the end of lesson for suggested web resources.)
4. Once students have decided who fits into their assigned category, each group will use portraits, paper, and art materials to create a collage that visually represents their assigned category. As they create the collage they should consider the following questions:
 - What is the overall point about your category that you are trying to make in your collage?
 - Which images (from the portraits provided) will you put in your collage? Which will you leave out?
 - Of the images that you will include, how will you place them? Which will be front and center? Which will be in the background? Which will be higher? Lower?
 - How will you connect the various images to each other? What organizing principle(s) will you use to group them together or to keep them separate in your collage?
 - What additional symbols, images, illustrations, or words will you add to your collage?

Students should be prepared to explain and defend the choices they have made in their collages.

5. When students have completed their collages, each group will share and explain its collage. If possible, display all the collages on the board or classroom wall so that students can see them side by side.
6. As a class, discuss the collages. Use the following questions as the basis for the discussion:
 - How do the various individuals relate to each other and to the West?
 - Which sitters appear in multiple collages? Why?

- What other categories could be used to organize these sitters?
- If you were to put all of these sitters into one collage, who would be in the center? Who would be on the periphery? Why?
- Looking at all of the collages together, what major themes or ideas emerge about the West between 1845 and 1924?

National Standards in History for Grades 5-12

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801–1861)

Standard 1: United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans

Standard 2: How the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions

Era 6: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870–1900)

Standard 2: Massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts, and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity

Standard 4: Federal Indian policy and United States foreign policy after the Civil War

Key Terms

Annexation: the act of attaching, adding, or appending; the act of connecting; union; for example, the annexation of Texas to the United States in 1845

Anthropology: the science that deals with the origins, physical and cultural development, biological characteristics, and social customs and beliefs of humankind

Battle of the Little Bighorn (1876): also known as Custer’s Last Stand, an armed engagement between a Lakota–Northern Cheyenne combined force and the Seventh Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army. The battle was the most famous action of the Great Sioux War of 1876–77. The Lakota and Northern Cheyenne forces, led by Sitting Bull and numbering in the thousands, inflicted a crushing defeat on the U.S. troops; a column of approximately 260 men led by George Armstrong Custer was completely annihilated.

Bureau of Indian Affairs: a division of the Department of the Interior that administers federal programs relating to Native American peoples

Daguerreotype: an early type of photograph produced on a silver or copper plate that is covered with silver and rendered sensitive by the action of iodine, or iodine and bromine. After exposure in the camera, the latent image on the plate is developed by the vapor of mercury.

Dawes Severalty Act (1887): hoping to turn Indians into farmers and assimilate them into American society, the federal government redistributed tribal lands to heads of families in 160-acre allotments. Unclaimed or “surplus” land was sold and the proceeds used to establish Indian schools where Native American children learned reading, writing, and the domestic and social systems of white America. By 1932, the sale of both unclaimed land and allotted acreage resulted in the loss of two-thirds of the 138 million acres that Native Americans had held prior to the passage of the Dawes Act.

Exoduster: when the last federal troops left the South in 1877 and Reconstruction gave way to renewed racial oppression, a former slave named Benjamin “Pap” Singleton began urging blacks to form their own independent communities in the West. Those who followed his advice called themselves “Exodusters” because they believed the West would prove to be their promised land.

In the spring of 1879, word spread that the federal government had set all of Kansas aside for former slaves. The rumor was false, but it sparked a genuine exodus that brought more than 15,000 African Americans into Kansas within the next year.

Expedition: an excursion, journey, or voyage made for some specific purpose, as in exploration

Frontier: the land or territory that forms the furthest extent of a country's settled or inhabited regions

Gold rush: a large-scale and hasty movement of people to a region where gold has been discovered, as to California in 1849

Homestead Act (1862): an act passed by Congress promising ownership of a 160-acre tract of public land to a citizen or head of a family who had resided on and cultivated the land for five years after the initial claim

Indian Citizenship Act (1924): also known as the Snyder Act, this law granted full U.S. citizenship to all Native Americans born within the territorial limits of the country. The right to vote, however, was governed by state law, and some states denied the right to vote to Native Americans until the 1950s.

Indian reservation: an area of land managed by a Native American tribe under the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs. Because Native American tribes have limited national sovereignty, laws on tribal lands vary from those of the surrounding area.

Land grants: a tract of land given by the federal government, often for colleges or railroads

Land surveying: determining the exact form, boundaries, extent of a tract of land or section of a country, often by linear and angular measurements and the application of the principles of geometry and trigonometry

Manifest Destiny: the belief or doctrine, held chiefly in the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century, that it was the destiny of the United States to expand its territory over the whole of North America and to extend and enhance its political, social, and economic influences

Mexican War (1846–48): a war between the United States and Mexico, provoked by hostilities over the annexation of Texas and other border disputes. The war resulted in the cession by Mexico of lands now constituting all or most of the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado.

Naturalist: a person who studies or is an expert in natural history, especially a zoologist or botanist

Territory: a region or district of the United States not admitted to the Union as a state but having its own legislature, with a governor and other officers appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate

Transcontinental railroad: the first train route across the United States, finished in 1869. It was the project of two railroad companies: the Union Pacific, which built from the east, and the Central Pacific, which built from the west. The two lines met in Utah. The Central Pacific laborers were predominantly Chinese, and the Union Pacific laborers predominantly Irish. Both groups often worked under harsh conditions.

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: the treaty that ended the Mexican War on February 2, 1848. Its provisions called for Mexico to cede 55 percent of its territory (present-day Arizona, California, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah) in exchange for fifteen million dollars as compensation for war-related damages to Mexican property.

Women's suffrage movement: the movement aimed at securing the right to vote for women. This goal was ultimately achieved in the United States by the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, but suffrage associations at the state level had enfranchised women in Idaho, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming by the end of the nineteenth century.

Web Resources

New Perspectives on the West: <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/>

A companion to the PBS series; contains timelines, primary sources, teacher resources, biographies, and many other helpful features.

WestWeb: <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/westweb/>

A topically organized website about the study of the American West, including primary and secondary documents and biographical resources, created and maintained by the Department of History, College of Staten Island, City University of New York.

Declarations of Independence: *Exploring American Indian Rights to Self-Governance*

<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20021125monday.html>

In this lesson from the *New York Times* and Bank Street College, students examine what they know about American Indians past and present, then research key issues facing American Indian tribes today.

Explorations in American Environmental History:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/98/enviro/intro.html>

These lessons from the Library of Congress introduce students to historical perspectives of nature and the environment, drawing on the American Memory collections, other digital resources, readings, and writing exercises. Students examine materials in a variety of formats to understand the contexts of America's concern for the environment.

The Gold Rush: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/goldrush/>

A supplement to the PBS American Experience episode about the California Gold Rush.

The Iron Road: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/iron/>

A supplement to the PBS American Experience episode about the building of the transcontinental railroad.

The Mexican War: http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/index_flash.html

Part of PBS Online, this bilingual (Spanish-English) site examines the Mexican War and includes a timeline, dialogues (essays), teaching resources, and more.

Map of U.S. Expansion: <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~stephan/48states.html>

This animated map of U.S. expansion is based on the United States Geological Survey Bulletin 1212.

WORKSHEET: FACES OF THE FRONTIER

CATEGORY: _____

Using the materials provided, decide which sitters fit into your assigned category and use the worksheet below to gather information about them.

Sitter, artist, and date	In what way(s) does the sitter connect to the West?	What symbols in the portrait reflect the sitter's role?	How does the sitter fit into your assigned category?

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