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Sophie Mousseau is identified simply as “Arapaho” on one version of the photo and “Dakota” on another. National Anthropological Archives / Smithsonian Institution

When a Historian Saw This Haunting Photograph of a Nameless Native Girl, She Decided She Had to Identify Her

In 1868, Sophie Mousseau was photographed at Fort Laramie alongside six white Army officers. But her identity—and her life story—remained unknown for more than a century

Martha A. Sandweiss, [Zócalo Public Square](#) April 29, 2025

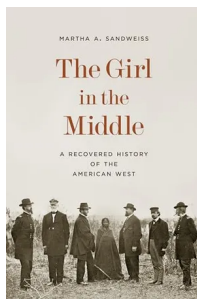
As a [scholar](#) of 19th-century American photography, I've looked at countless old photographs: the carefully labeled portraits of the powerful (always the most likely to be photographed) and the many pictures of women and children, enslaved workers and Native families, rural laborers and urban bystanders that include no identifications at all.

Some years ago, I began to wonder whether I could identify some of the unnamed people in [old photographs](#). Might I be able to name that gold miner, that railroad worker, that soldier lying dead on the battlefield at [Antietam](#)? Would my understanding of history shift if I knew who these people were?

My attention focused on [a photograph](#) by the celebrated Civil War photographer [Alexander Gardner](#). Taken at [Fort Laramie](#), in what is now Wyoming, in spring 1868, it depicts six white men standing in an oddly formal arc around a young Native girl. The men, all fresh from Civil War duty, are members of a federal peace commission sent west to this fort along the Oregon Trail to [persuade the Lakota](#) to move to a newly created reservation.

The handwritten labels on the extant copies of the photograph carefully identify these men: General Alfred Howe Terry, General William S. Harney, General [William Tecumseh Sherman](#), General John B. Sanborn, Colonel Samuel F. Tappan and General Christopher C. Augur. The girl is never named. She is simply “Arapaho” on one version of the photo, “Dakota” on another. She looks straight at the camera and begs us to stare back.

Who is she?



[The Girl in the Middle: A Recovered History of the American West](#)

Spinning a spellbinding historical tale from a single enigmatic image, “The Girl in the Middle” reveals how the American nation grappled with what kind of country it would be as it expanded westward in the aftermath of the Civil War.

I looked for her in other pictures made at the fort. She's not there. I searched through the personal papers of the [commissioners](#) and the government records of the [treaty negotiations](#). Nothing. Finally, in the archives of the [Fort Laramie National Historic Site](#), I found a small notecard left by a visitor in 1978. He'd seen a copy of the photograph on display; the blanket-wrapped girl was his grandmother, [Sophie Mousseau](#). The name connects an unidentified child to the historical records; it lets us [find her story](#).

Sophie proves easier to track than most girls born on the Northern Plains during the years of the [Indian Wars](#). Traces of her [Oglala Lakota mother](#) survive in the spare federal records that track reservation residents. Curious writers recorded her French Canadian father's memories of the "old days." Since Sophie's father turned litigious, and her [first husband](#) became a murderer, bureaucratic records also preserve imprints of her life, even as descendants' memories grow increasingly faint.

Sophie's life leads us into a sprawling Western world. Born in the Dakota Territory shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War, she died on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, one of the very [poorest parts](#) of a Great Depression-riddled nation, in 1936. Her first husband, a white Civil War veteran, effectively kidnapped their five children after he fell in love with another woman. He married her and banished Sophie to the newly created Great Sioux Reservation.

Sophie was working as a laundress at a federal boarding school in Pine Ridge when federal troops massacred some 250 Native people at nearby [Wounded Knee](#) in 1890. She later married a mixed-race Lakota who gave up his career as a circus juggler to become a much-valued translator for some of the country's leading anthropologists. With him, Sophie had another eight children, for a total of 13.

Sophie experienced domestic violence, observed the consequences of military violence, and saw firsthand the consequences of the political and legal violence that denied rights to people like her.

Indeed, she was born of violence. Thirteen years before the photograph was made, Harney, the general who stands with Sophie in the photograph, attacked a Lakota village at a place called [Blue Water Creek](#) in western Nebraska. His men wounded a young mother named Yellow Woman and used her infant for target practice. Then they rounded her up and marched her to Fort Laramie. At the same time, Harney ordered all the traders in the area into the fort. There, Yellow Woman met the trader Magloire Alexis Mousseau, who later went by the name M.A. They married, became Sophie's parents and stayed married for over half a century. The general was an accidental matchmaker.



When Sophie's parents ushered her into Gardner's photograph, they saw two men they knew: Harney, whom they'd met more than a decade earlier, and Sanborn, whom they'd just hired as their attorney. Sophie and her family had their place in a West that was both a big place and a small world.

Neither the photographer nor government officials saw fit to record Sophie's name 157 years ago. But Sophie's name transforms a banal photograph into a picture that leads us into a world of families and the complicated racial politics of the 19th-century West. Her story transforms a

picture ostensibly about men negotiating a peace treaty into a meditation on the endemic violence that shaped so many American lives. When we know who Sophie *is*, the photograph becomes a different kind of evidence altogether.

Names tether people to historical records. Names are what let us trace people through old newspapers and books, census records and legal documents, family memories, and community gossip. Names are what transform the anonymous people in old photographs into particular individuals with complicated stories of their own.

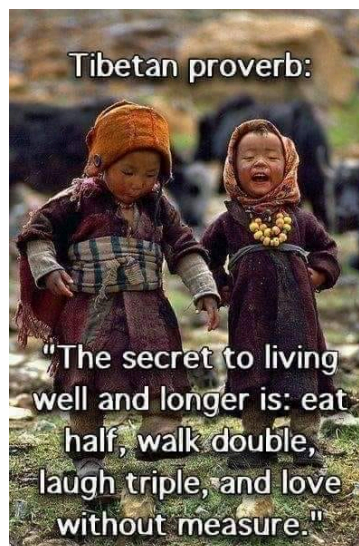
In recent weeks, as part of a broader assault on historical records, exhibitions and books, government functionaries have scrubbed countless [government websites](#) of historical names: civil rights activist [Medgar Evers](#), Medal of Honor recipient [Charles C. Rogers](#) and baseball star [Jackie Robinson](#), among others. Amid fierce public pushback, some of the sites [have now been restored](#). Critics [insisted](#) those [names mattered](#), not only because they honor individual accomplishments, but because they denote bigger stories about combating racial segregation or fighting for civil rights. Individual stories make the abstract more concrete, the past more complex.

When [Ira Hayes](#), the Pima Indian present in the [famous image](#) of the flag raising at Iwo Jima, loses his clear tribal affiliation in an [article headline](#), we lose something. It's no accident that most of the names and stories scrubbed from the record are those of people of color.

American history needs more names, not fewer. It needs the names of the famous and the names of those who, like Sophie, have remained unidentified in personal and institutional archives. Take that shoe box out of your closet and label your family photos. Everyone's story matters.

Martha A. Sandweiss, an emeritus historian at Princeton University, is the author of [The Girl in the Middle: A Recovered History of the American West](#). This article was written for [Zócalo Public Square](#).

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# A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center

## [About the Museum](#)

### **Mission and Vision**

Established by a small group of Zuni tribal members in 1992, the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center is a Pueblo of Zuni Tribal Program dedicated to **serving the Zuni community with programs and exhibitions that help us reflect on our past and are relevant to our current and future interests.** As a tribal museum and heritage center for the Zuni people and by the Zuni people, we work to provide learning experiences that emphasize A:shiwi ways of knowing, as well as exploring modern concepts of knowledge and the transfer of knowledge. We define our institution as an ecomuseum: in harmony with Zuni's environmental values and dedicated to honoring, cultivating, and nurturing dynamic Zuni culture.

***As a tribal museum and heritage center – for the Zuni people and by the Zuni people – we work to provide learning experiences that emphasize A:shiwi ways of knowing as well as exploring modern concepts of knowledge and the transfer of knowledge.***

As part of its vision, the AAMHC promotes, facilitates and conducts collaborative initiatives with several museums and collecting institutions located both in the United States and abroad. One of the main purposes of these collaborations is to “set the record straight”: to correct inadequate, inaccurate and/or wrong representations of our collections housed at satellite museums and archives. Museum collaborations enable us to negotiate access to our own cultural patrimony and work towards regaining control over the circulation of our objects and knowledge associated with those objects, thereby reconciling historical asymmetries of power between source communities and holding institutions.

Similarly, art is an elemental part of our culture. Whether through performance, two-dimensional or three-dimensional works, the AAMHC strives to broaden the potential of artistic expression in our community. From our collection of ancient Zuni art, exhibitions of Zuni school art, to our A:shiwi Map Art collection, the AAMHC provides a venue and forum for local artists to study and reflect on the possibilities of art in our community.

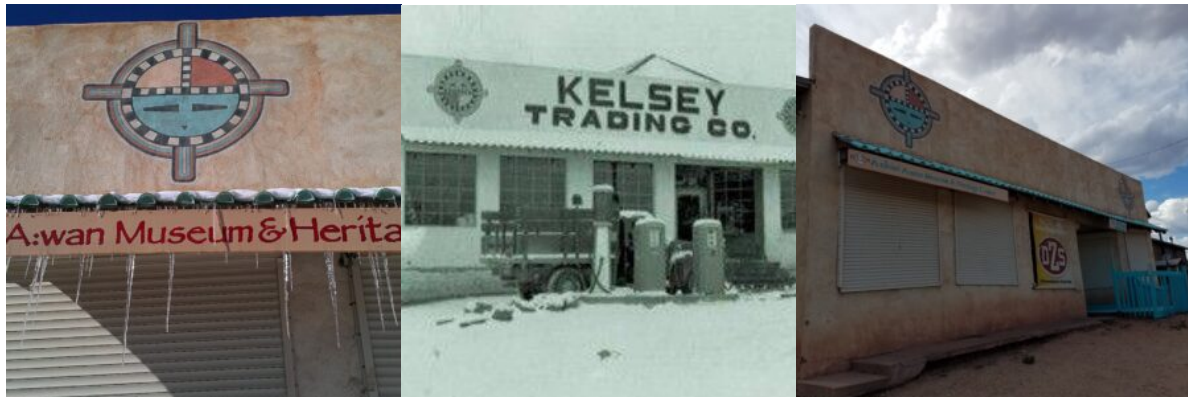


## History

The AAMHC developed from the idea that we can do it ourselves. In the 1970s and 80s, a Zuni museum had been proposed but fell short after architectural drawings were prepared but no funds were available to move forward with construction of a building. Also, it occurred to some that the plan to construct a building and later think about putting things in it and call it a “museum” was really like putting a cart in front of the horse. It also did not adequately consider the rationale and purpose for a Zuni museum. Consequently, a group of interested community members met several times over the course of a year to study the concept of a museum, what a museum means, the baggage and history of museums in general, and how might the group redefine what a museum could mean to Zuni. Ultimately, the group decided what Zuni really needs is a place for A:shiwi people to understand why we are the way we are. Soon afterwards, the group incorporated as a non-profit organization, and the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center was born. As of 2016, AAMHC is now a Pueblo of Zuni tribal museum.

## Building

The historic Hebadin’a building was a trading post on and off for many years. It was last used as a store in 1981 and later was used for storage until December of 2002, when it became the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center. Records are unclear, but it is thought the building was built around 1911. The original building included a full size storage basement with a hand-operated elevator. Between 1932 and 1935, office space was added to the south side of the building and the front was expanded about 1940 or 1941. The front addition was not perfectly constructed, and a difference in elevations between the original storefront and the addition is obvious as you walk in and see the sag in the floor marking the carpenter’s obvious error. About 1940, Zuni artist Teddy Weahkee painted two sun faces on the outside upper face of the building entrance.



[A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center 2019](#)

[Kelsey Trading Co. photograph](#)

[AAMHC outside of building](#)

## [Planet Money](#)

February 5, 2015

By Quoctrung Bui

*This decade-old article has an interactive map that would not copy but is available at the URL below. Think about the last ten years and what that has brought! Hope they do another soon.*

<https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2015/02/05/382664837/map-the-most-common-job-in-every-state>

\*We used data from the Census Bureau, which has two catch-all categories: "managers not elsewhere classified" and "salespersons not elsewhere classified." Because those categories are broad and vague to the point of meaninglessness, we excluded them from our map.

**What's with all the truck drivers?** Truck drivers dominate the map for a few reasons.

- Driving a truck has been immune to two of the biggest trends affecting U.S. jobs: globalization and automation. A worker in China can't drive a truck in Ohio, and machines can't drive cars (yet).
- Regional specialization has declined. So jobs that are needed everywhere — like truck drivers and schoolteachers — have moved up the list of most-common jobs.
- The prominence of truck drivers is partly due to the way the government categorizes jobs. It lumps together all truck drivers and delivery people, creating a very large category. Other jobs are split more finely; for example, primary school teachers and secondary school teachers are in separate categories.

**The rise and fall of secretaries:** Through much of the '80s, as the U.S. economy shifted away from factories that make goods and toward offices that provide services, secretary became the most common job in more and more states. But a second shift — the rise of the personal computer — reversed this trend, as machines did more and more secretarial work.

**Manufacturing jobs disappeared:** This story we knew already. Machine operators and factory workers had a dominant presence in the Midwest and parts of the South through the late '70s. Then a combination of globalization and technological change made many of those jobs disappear.

**Fewer and fewer farmers:** Our map shows the tail end of a century-long trend. Farming technology (everything from tiny seeds to giant harvesters) keeps getting better, which means fewer and fewer people can grow more and more food.

**Government:** The most common job in D.C. is lawyer. Heh. On a related note, Northern Virginia is full of federal contractors — many of whom work as software developers

**Who knew Utah was a tech hub?** Over the past few years, [tech companies have rejuvenated Utah's labor market](#). It's home to an NSA supercomputing facility and a [growing number of tech firms](#).

## Navajo word for beautiful at center of controversy

Fashion designer's use of Navajo word 'nizhoni' and alleged use of artificial images of Native people has raised concerns about cultural appropriation and artificial intelligence

- [Kevin Abourezk](#) [Mar 28, 2024](#)

<https://ictnews.org/news/navajo-word-for-beautiful-at-center-of-controversy>

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“Sovereignty is not for sale. Sovereignty is loved and defended.”

President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico

On occasion of refusing permission for US troops to enter Mexico

Scholarships with June 30 Deadlines

\$2,000 No Essay CollegeVine Scholarship	\$2,000	June 30, 2025
Adventuresinlove4Andie VEDS Scholarship	\$750	June 30, 2025
AlaskaAdvantage Education Grant	\$4,000	June 30, 2025
Automotive Hall of Fame Scholarships	Varies	June 30, 2025
Berklee Merit-Based Scholarships	\$80,864	June 30, 2025
Beta Sigma Psi University of Missouri Rush Scholarship	\$1,000	June 30, 2025
BPW Virginia Ruff Scholarship for Continuing Education	\$1,000	June 30, 2025
California Law Enforcement Personnel Dependents Grant Program (LEPD)	\$15,400	June 30, 2025
Cavalier Trail Riding Club Scholarship	\$500	June 30, 2025
CFMA Portland Chapter Scholarship	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
College of the Marshall Islands MISGLB	\$500	June 30, 2025
Columbia University Aid for Part-Time Study	Varies	June 30, 2025
Columbia University New York State Tuition Assistance Program	\$5,665	June 30, 2025
Construction Roundtable of New Jersey	\$6,000	June 30, 2025
Daniel G Calugar Foundation Merit Scholarship Program	\$10,000	June 30, 2025
Drew Swan Sibling Scholarship	\$1,500	June 30, 2025
Epilepsy Reach Education Scholarship Program	\$1,000	June 30, 2025
Federal Pell Grant	\$7,395	June 30, 2025
Future Female Leaders Scholarship	\$1,000	June 30, 2025
Greensboro Community Swim Association Scholarship	Varies	June 30, 2025
Hearts for Community Service	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
HSVMA Compassionate Care Veterinary Student Scholarship	\$10,000	June 30, 2025
IAAI Scholarship Foundation Accounting Scholarships	\$1,000	June 30, 2025

<u>ISAC Monetary Award Program</u>	Varies	June 30, 2025
<u>Kantner Foundation Scholarship</u>	\$3,000	June 30, 2025
<u>Kentucky College Access Program Grant (CAP)</u>	\$5,300	June 30, 2025
<u>Kentucky Tuition Grant</u>	\$3,300	June 30, 2025
<u>Kids' Chance of Maine</u>	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
<u>KLM Foundation Community Champions Scholarship</u>	\$1,000	June 30, 2025
<u>L. Ron Hubbard Illustrators of The Future Contest</u>	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
<u>L. Ron Hubbard Writers of The Future Contest</u>	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
<u>Live Poets Society of New Jersey - National High School Poetry Contest</u>	\$500	June 30, 2025
<u>Mary Bowman Arts in Activism Award</u>	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
<u>Media Fellows Scholarship</u>	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
<u>NC Education Lottery Scholarship</u>	\$3,768	June 30, 2025
<u>New York State HESC Tuition Assistance Program</u>	\$5,665	June 30, 2025
<u>Noreen Ackerman '80 Scholarship</u>	\$1,379	June 30, 2025
<u>NSCCF Scholarships</u>	\$5,372	June 30, 2025
<u>NYS Memorial Scholarship</u>	\$24,880	June 30, 2025
<u>Ohio Safety Officers College Memorial Fund</u>	\$37,790	June 30, 2025
<u>Oklahoma Tuition Equalization Grant Program (OTEG)</u>	\$8,000	June 30, 2025
<u>Palmetto Fellows Scholarships</u>	\$40,000	June 30, 2025
<u>Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship</u>	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
<u>Power Life Sciences Scholarship</u>	\$2,000	June 30, 2025
<u>Regions Riding Forward Scholarship Contest</u>	\$8,000	June 30, 2025
<u>SCMA Scholarship</u>	\$2,500	June 30, 2025
<u>Sport Clips Scholarship</u>	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
<u>SW Neighborhood Assembly's Education & Scholarship Task Force</u>	\$1,500	June 30, 2025
<u>Tatiana McIntosh Memorial Scholarship</u>	\$1,000	June 30, 2025
<u>The Home Depot Foundation Path to Pro Scholarship</u>	\$2,500	June 30, 2025
<u>The Kyle Robinson Memorial Scholarship</u>	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
<u>The Woman's Century Club Scholarship</u>	\$2,500	June 30, 2025
<u>ULSCA Supply Chain Scholarship</u>	\$1,500	June 30, 2025
<u>University of Cincinnati Balanced Man Scholarship</u>	\$4,000	June 30, 2025
<u>Women in Public Finance Scholarship</u>	\$5,000	June 30, 2025
<u>Workamajig Generative AI + Human Design Scholarship</u>	\$5,000	June 30, 2025



Why are all of America's biggest cities sinking?

“Cities sit unmoving on the landscape — a sprawling collection of roads, sidewalks, and buildings designed to last for generations. But across the United States, urban areas are silently shifting: The land beneath them is sinking, a process known as subsidence, largely because people are using too much groundwater and [aquifers](#) are collapsing. The sheer weight of a metropolis, too, compacts the underlying soil. A new study published on Thursday in the journal *Nature* Cities mapped the scale of this slow-motion crisis across the country. Researchers used satellites to measure how the elevation has been changing in America's 28 most populous cities — including New York, Dallas, and Seattle — and found that in every one of them, at least 20 percent of the urban area is sinking. In 25 cities, two-thirds or more of the area is subsiding, with rates up to 0.4 inches each year. (In the maps below, red indicates areas where subsidence is fastest.) Groundwater withdrawal was responsible for 80 percent of total subsidence in the cities. ... ” [Read more from Grist](#).

‘Another broken promise’: California environmental groups reel from EPA grant cancellations

“After weeks of speculation, the news came down with chilling formality: “Dear EPA Grant Recipient,” read the official government email. “Attached is your Termination of Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.” That’s how hundreds of organizations found out they had officially lost EPA grant funding as part of the many cutbacks to environmental programs demanded by the Trump administration. Among them was the Community Water Center, a nonprofit that works to provide safe, clean drinking water to rural communities in California. Their \$20-million award had been earmarked for a major project to consolidate water systems in the low-income Central Coast communities of Pajaro, Sunny Mesa and Springfield, which have long been reliant on domestic wells and small water systems that are riddled with contaminants above legal limits. The project was more than five years in the making, and now sits in limbo as President Trump and EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin slash funding for more than 780 grants geared toward environmental justice that were awarded under President Biden. ... ” [Read more from the LA Times](#).

L.A. fires expose long-standing local and national water infrastructure challenges

In this episode of *Metro Blueprint*, experts discuss how the catastrophic fires in Los Angeles exposed long-standing challenges in water utility systems in Southern California and beyond. Joe Kane, fellow at the Brookings Institution, and Greg Pierce, the research and co-executive director of UCLA’s Luskin Center for Innovation, explain how policymakers can improve these systems amid a more extreme and destructive climate. <https://youtu.be/gPyko3Qzuqs>

A dry winter on the Colorado River has big reservoirs on track for trouble

“If you took a look at a map of Rocky Mountain snow right now you would see a lot of red. The mountains that feed the Colorado River with snowmelt are strikingly dry, with many ranges

holding less than 50% of their average snow for this time of year. The low totals could spell trouble for the nation's largest reservoirs, but those dry conditions don't seem to be ringing alarm bells for Colorado River policymakers. Inflows to Lake Powell, the nation's second largest reservoir, are expected to be 55% of average this year, according to federal data released this week. If forecasts hold true, 2025 would see the third-lowest amount of water added to Lake Powell in the past decade. "It's looking like a pretty poor water supply and spring runoff season," said Cody Moser, a hydrologist with the Colorado River Basin Forecast Center. ... " [Read more from KUNC.](#)

Interior secures 18 short-term agreements to boost Colorado River conservation

"Today, the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Reclamation marked major progress for the continued short-term health of the Colorado River System. Eighteen short-term System Conservation Implementation agreements with water entitlement holders in Arizona and California have been negotiated to include additional conservation of Colorado River System water. Interior and Reclamation are committed to working intensely with representatives of the governors of all seven Colorado River Basin states and tribal nations within the basin to forge a sound water management plan for the river that will promote the prosperity of all 40 million people living in the Basin for generations to come. Extension of 18 short-term agreements with tribal, municipal and agricultural water users in the Lower Colorado River Basin will result in additional water savings through 2026, totaling approximately 321,000 acre-feet in Lake Mead storage, the equivalent of approximately five feet in reservoir elevation. ... " [Read more from the Department of Interior.](#)

Take a tour with SRP to see the reality of Arizona's water storage

"What if, despite what we often hear, Arizona is not in a water crisis? The more accurate term would be a persistent "water challenge." It's the desert. We go through droughts. We have for thousands of years. The key to ensuring our water supply is capturing as much water as we can during wet years, which are less frequent. Here in the Valley, we capture water exceptionally well. Come along as we take a tour of Arizona's lakes and dams with the Salt River Project (SRP). ... " [Read more from Fox 10.](#)

Another Lake Powell pipeline proposal — but for Arizona tribes

"There's another proposal on the table to build a pipeline from Lake Powell, but the water wouldn't go to St. George. Arizona lawmakers this month introduced legislation that would fund a pipeline to bring water from Lake Powell to three tribes with Colorado River rights. The \$5 billion deal — negotiated by the tribes, the federal government and the state of Arizona in May — includes \$1.75 billion for the pipeline, and now needs approval from Congress. The Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Act of 2024 is crucial to the many tribal communities in northeastern Arizona that lack access to drinking water, said Rep. Juan Ciscomani, an Arizona Republican who sponsored the bill in the U.S. House of Representatives. "Those of us in the West understand that water claims are inadequate without the infrastructure needed to move the water," Ciscomani told the House Natural Resources Committee on Tuesday. "Investing in our water infrastructure is more important now than ever with the persistent drought affecting the Colorado River and all communities that rely on it as well." ... " [Read more from KSL](#)