

Public History
(History 397Z)

“The history that lies inert in unread books does no work in the world.”
-- Carl Becker

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Spring 2008
Hasbrouck Lab Add room 109
TR, 11:15-12:30

What is Public History?

What is Public History? As an identifiable discipline in the Humanities, Public History emerged in the 1970s. Since that time, public historians have been the national and global vanguard of history professionals seeking to keep history relevant—in the public sphere to be sure, as well as the more personal spheres of family and community life. Public historians—whether they work in museums, archives, historic sites, federal agencies or any of a number of other possibilities—aim to take the insights of the discipline cultivated in traditional academic arenas and apply them in a wide range of public settings. Public historians, first and foremost, are well-trained social, cultural and political historians who are often conversant in related humanities fields and highly skilled in research methodology; they are capable of collegial interdisciplinary work with anthropologists, archaeologists, librarians, advertising and marketing specialists, and computer scientists. A public historian must also be a diplomat and fundraiser, capable of putting people at ease, diffusing tense conversations over differing interpretation of the past, and enticing funds from politicians and corporate leaders.

Public historians are constantly grappling with difficult issues. Whose history do we document and preserve? Should the source of funding influence the content of an exhibit? Should we talk about potentially controversial topics in history, and if so, how? How do we make history exciting and meaningful to the many Americans who have been taught to believe that history is simply a compilation of very dry and boring facts? These are questions public historians strive to answer every day.

While I have training and interests and curiosities that have led me to become a historian, I became a public historian when I began actively to look for ways to be of service, to listen and learn about the precise needs of a given community, and to gently challenge a community to push its own sense of boundaries and exclusiveness.

Denise D. Meringolo
Assistant Professor of History
University of Maryland

This course will introduce students to the theory and practice of public history through the exploration of five core themes: the tension between history and memory, the nature and limits of shared authority, the interplay of agendas and audiences for historical work, the ethical concerns that shape public history practice, and the role of entrepreneurship.

Course objectives: The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the world of public history – both the ideas and questions that make it tick, and the practical, on-the-ground concerns that confront public historians in a variety of professional settings. The course will turn on five key concept areas that inform the

world of public history: History and Memory; Shared Authority and/or Inquiry; Agendas and Audiences; Ethics; and Economics and Entrepreneurship. By the end of the semester, you will have read some of the most significant past and contemporary literature in the field of public history, and, through discussions in and beyond the classroom, have formed your own understanding of what constitutes public history. Through our shared readings, forays into the community, conversations with guest speakers, and through your own public history fieldwork, you will also have a clearer idea of what it means to work in a variety of public history settings in terms of both theory and practice.

This Course: offers students three critical experiences

- 1) Expansion of Professional Knowledge and Skills: the readings, class activities, and guest lectures will expand, broaden, and deepen, your knowledge of how training in historical methods is used in a variety of professions; in particular you will learn specific occupational terminology that more traditionally trained historians do not learn until *after* entering a public history profession.
- 2) Experiential Learning: Both individually and in groups, you will apply what you are learning *as you learn*. Before the class ends you will have not only studied public history: you will have practiced public history.
- 3) Career Exploration You will discover the different professional fields, collectively referred to as public history that are open to students of history and related humanities fields.

Public history is...

- a set of theories, methods, assumptions, and practices guiding the identification, preservation, interpretation, and presentation of historical artifacts, texts, structures, and landscapes in conjunction with and for the public.
- an interactive process between the historian, the public, and the historical object.
- the belief that history and historical-cultural memory matter in the way people go about their

Class Etiquette: Because Public History is by definition History that happens *beyond* the classroom, we necessarily welcome a number of guest speakers to discuss their experiences. These visitors are integral to the class and you're required to attend, and to take notes, just as you would on any other class day. But please do more than merely this: preparing thoroughly for class and listening intently to the presentation may serve you well individually (should you in the future want to seek an internship or even employment with the speaker), but also reflects on your school as a whole. For some speakers, their encounter with you will form the whole of their opinion of UMass and the students here. Be attentive, be polite, ask good questions and leave them with the impression that they will be glad to meet more UMass students in the future.

Readings:

There are two books to purchase at the **Jeffrey Amherst Bookstore**:

Richard White, *Remembering Abangran*

Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City*

Most of the articles assigned during the semester (those marked with a ✓) can be found in a coursepack available at CopyCat copies. Some additional reading materials will be found on J-Stor, through the library website.

Assignments:

Short: There will be several short assignments during the semester that are each designed to give you a chance to get hands-on experience with public history practice.

Major: Over the course of the semester you will engage in a team effort to research and interpret a pressing issue in one arena of public history practice: 1) historic preservation; 2) museums; 3) archives; 4) new media; or 5) documentary film. This will necessarily be in part a “state of the field” presentation—that is, an overview—and in part a deep exploration of issue or event that is challenging public historians in that arena at the turn of the 21st century. I will solicit your preferences early in the semester, and assign you to teams. Each team will, in an end-of-semester essay presentation, teach the class about a topic in contemporary public history practice in that field; your aim will be to make your classmates conversant in a burning issue in that field. In the final week of the semester each team will present its findings to the class; your grade will be based half on the overall group presentation, and half on the quality of a short (3-4 page) paper summarizing your insights.

Grading

% of Grade	
20% (10+10)	Group Project
30%	Class Participation
10%	Museum Exhibit Review
10%	Website Review
30%	Take-Home Final

Course Schedule

TUES JAN 29 Introduction: What is Public History?

THURS JAN 31: Discussion:

Reading: Edward T. Linenthal, "Committing History in Public," *Journal of American History* 81

(December 1994), 986-991. J-STOR

Browse website www.publichistory.org

HISTORY AND MEMORY

TUES FEB 5: Lecture: The History of History

Preferences for team assignment will be collected today

THURS FEB 7: Discussion: Public History and the Study of Memory

GUEST LECTURE: David Glassberg

√Reading: David Glassberg, "Public History and the Study of Memory," from Glassberg, *Sense of History* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2001). RESERVE

Teams will be assigned today

TUES FEB 12: Discussion: When History and Memory compete; who wins?

Reading: Richard White, *Remembering Abanagran: Storytelling in a Family's Past*

THURS FEB 14. Discussion: Why, when and how do people care about the past?

Readings:

√Roy Rozenzweig and David Thelen, *Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia, 1998), 1-13; 15-36; 88-114. RESERVE

√Cameron and Gatewood, "Excursions into the Unremembered Past: What People Want from Visits to Historic Sites," *The Public Historian* 22 (Summer 2000), 107-127. COURSEPACK

Teams should meet this week to make a plan to begin browsing your field's publications looking for issues to present. Teams should be browsing the *New York Times* and *Boston Globe* as well as the websites, journals and newsletters of their respective professional associations (AAM, SAA,

TUES FEB 19: NO CLASS; MONDAY SCHEDULE

NEW AGENDAS AND AUDIENCES

THURS FEB 21 Lecture/Discussion: The History of History Museums: Is there such a thing as revisionist history?

Reading: Patricia West, *Domesticating History* (Intro + chapter on Mount Vernon)
This book is available in RESERVE

✓Reading: Henry Flynt, introduction, *Frontier of Freedom* (Hastings House, 1952) (1 page)
COURSEPACK

✓Miller and Lanning, "Common Parlors: Women and the Creation of Community Identity
in
Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1870-1920," *Gender and History* Vol 6 No 3 (November
1994): 435-55. RESERVE

MUSEUM REVIEW DUE

TUES FEB 26 The Politics of Museum Interpretation:

Field trip to Historic Deerfield.
MEET AT THE FLYNT CENTER

Teams should meet this week to compare what you've each discovered while browsing, and make a final decision about what issues/events you will research further for your end-of-semester presentations, and

THURS FEB 28: Lecture: The National Park Service

the
Press,
✓Reading: Anne Mitchell Whisnant, "Remembering the Peaks of Otter: Telling History on
Parkway Landscape," from Whisnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway* (Chapel Hill: UNC
2006). RESERVE

Browse websites: <http://www.nps.gov/> AND
National Park Service Civic Engagement Initiative (<http://www.nps.gov/civic/>)

TUES MARCH 4: Lecture and Discussion: Museums in the Next Century: Where are we going from here?

Browse websites:
"Great Places, Great Debates; Opening Historic Sites to Civic Engagement"
<http://www.nps.gov/nero/greatplaces/indexgreatplaces.htm>

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum
<http://www.tenement.org/>

International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience
(<http://www.sitesofconscience.org/>) including 2003 Conference Report

✓Ruth Abrams, "Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum," *The Public Historian* Vol 28 No (Winter 2007), 59-76

- √ Stephen E. Weil, "From Being *about* Something to being *for* Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum," *Daedalus* (Summer 1999), 109-129. 229-258. RESERVE

THURS MARCH 6: Lecture & Discussion: Digital History

Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide*

On-line book: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/>

NOTE: This is indeed a book, and is **book-length**. Budget adequate time.

TUES MARCH 11: New Media

***GUEST LECTURE:** Dave Hart, UMass Center for Educational Software Development

Browse Dan Cohen's Digital Humanities blog at
<http://www.dancohen.org/>

Browse the Tools and Projects sections of the

- Center for History and New Media:
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/>
- The American Association for History and Computing
(<http://www.theaahc.org/cfp.htm>)
- Maine Memory Network <http://www.mainememory.net/>
- Many Stories of 1704 (<http://www.1704.deerfield.history.museum/>)
- Do History (www.dohistory.org)

Teams should meet this week to make sure that everyone is making progress toward the "state-of-the-field" aspects of your

WEBSITE REVIEW DUE

THURS MARCH 13: NO CLASS MEETING.

SPRING BREAK MARCH 15-22

SHARED AUTHORITY, SHARED INQUIRY

TUES MARCH 25: Shared Authority

Reading:

√ Alistair Thomson, "Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History," *The Oral History Review*

Winter/Spring 2007, 34:1, 49-70 COURSEPACK

√ Alessandro Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event," in Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (1991), 1-26. RESERVE

***GUEST PRESENTATION:** Julia Sandy-Bailey and Jackie Castledine

You may also wish to examine the website for the New England Center for Oral History: <http://www.ucc.uconn.edu/~cohadm01/neaoh.html>

And

Judith Moyer's "Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History" at:
http://www.dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html

THURS March 27: Lecture: Contested Authority

Reading:

✓ Tom Englehardt and Edward T. Linenthal, "History Under Siege," "Anatomy of a Controversy" *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Metropolitan, 1996) RESERVE

Tues April 1: Discussion: What happened during the so-called "Culture Wars," and are they over yet?

Reading:

Michael Sherry, "Patriotic Orthodoxy," and

Thurs April 3: Public Policy:

GUEST LECTURE: Laura Lovett

Reading:

Victoria Hardin, "What Do Federal Historians Do?," Perspectives 1999
<http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/Issues/1999/9905/9905pub4.cfm>

Tues April 8: Public Policy: Foreign Policy and the Federal Government

GUEST LECTURE: Audrey Altstadt

Reading:

✓ Hugh Davis Graham, "The Stunted Career of Policy History," *Public Historian* v.15, no 2 (Spring 1993): 15-37.

Thurs April 10: NO CLASS. Smart teams will use today's class period to schedule a meeting to assess the progress of their group projects.

ETHICS

Tues April 15: Discussion: Who Controls the Past? Donors and the Ethics of Collecting

GUEST LECTURE Rob Cox, Director of UMass Special Collections and Archives

Reading:

✓ Randall C. Jimerson, "Ethical Concerns for Archivists," *The Public Historian* Vol 28 No

(Winter 2006), 87-92
Karen Benedict, *Ethics and the Archival Profession* (excerpts) HANDOUT
“A Code of Ethics for Archivists with Commentary,” SAA (find online)
“Guidelines for Museums on Developing and Managing Individual Donor Support”
(AAM) (find online)
International Council of Museums Code of Professional Ethics (ICOM (find online)
Browse website of the Society of American Archivists: www.archivists.org.

THURS APRIL 17: Discussion: More on Ethics.

Reading:

- √Rebecca Conard, Introduction, “Ethics in Practice,” *The Public Historian* Vol 28 No (Winter 2006), 75-79
- √Craig E. Colton, “The Historian’s Responsibility in Litigation Support,” *The Public Historian* Vol 28 No (Winter 2006), 75-79
- √Russell Lewis, “Judgments of Value, Judgments of Fact: The Ethical Dimension of Biohistorical Research,” *The Public Historian* Vol 28 No (Winter 2006), 93-99

TUES APRIL 22: Discussion: Show Me the Money: Integrity, Interpretation, and Cold Hard Cash

Reading:

- √Joe Pratt, “Warts and All?: An Elusive Balance in Contracted Corporate Histories about Energy and Environment,” *The Public Historian*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Winter 2004) 21-40
- √Alan S. Newell, “Personal and Professional Issues in Private Consulting,” *The Public Historian* Vol 28 No (Winter 2006)
- √Shelley Bookspan, “Something Ventured, Many Thanks Gained: Reflections on Being a Historian-Entrepreneur,” *The Public Historian* Vol 28 No (Winter 2006), 67-74

ECONOMICS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

THURS APRIL 24: NO CLASS. TEAMS USE TIME TO BEGIN PLANNING ACTUAL PRESENTATIONS.

TUES APRIL 29: Heritage Tourism

GUEST LECTURE: Cathy Stanton

Reading: *The Lowell Experiment*

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THURS MAY 1: History, Integrity, and Marketable Assets: Historic Preservation

GUEST LECTURE: Max Page

Readings:

Page and Mason, eds., *Giving Preservation a History* (RESERVE; selections)

See also:

Donovan D. Rypkema, *The Economics of Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide*
(RESERVE)

√ “Know-How #3: What You Need to Know About Listing on the National Register

”Preservation Through By-Laws and Ordinances” (MHC, 1999)

<http://commpres.env.state.ma.us/content/ptbo.asp>

RESERVE

TUES MAY 6 Presentations begin

TAKE-HOME FINAL DISTRIBUTED TODAY

THURS MAY 8 Presentations conclude

TUES MAY 13 LAST CLASS: Taking Stock: Public History in Contemporary American Culture