## HIST 381-003: Issues in Public History (Colloquium in U.S. History)

Tuesday, 12 to 3 p.m., Center on Main (1012 Main Street, Boise)

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Course website: http://publichistory.doinghistory.com

### Introduction

What is public history, and in what ways does it differ from academic history? Should “the public” be the audience for, participants in, or creators of programs and projects that fall under the banner of “public history”? What role should—and do—professional historians take in public history?

These are but a few of the questions we will address in this course.

This is a course about methods, controversies, ideas and ideologies, and the ways history gets deployed in everyday life in the United States. We’ll learn from changing cultural landscapes, consider what everyday objects can tell us about an historical moment, and reflect on the challenges “identity” (e.g., race, gender, class) presents in public history. Along the way, we will meet practicing historians and think through what it means to practice and preserve history in an increasingly digital world.

*Photo of tourists and reenactor at Colonial Williamsburg by Humberto Moreno, and used under a Creative Commons license. http://www.flickr.com/photos/azuquin/3205771178/*

### Contemporary concerns in public history

In large part because of digital technologies, but also because of the shifting American political landscape, public historians are focusing on some additional areas of study and practice. This table represents a few of those shifts, and this course tends to focus (though not exclusively) on the contemporary concerns in the right column rather than the traditional ones in the left.

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| *Traditional (and to some extent ongoing) concerns* | *Contemporary concerns* |
| Preserving architecture | Explaining cultural landscapes |
| Conserving museum collections | Access: Digital databases, storage crisis |
| Organizing archives, taxonomies | Access: Digitizing ephemera, “born digital” materials, folksonomies |
| Creating museum exhibitions | Websites, blogs, social media |
| Cataloging (often rare) objects | Material culture analysis of everyday objects |
| K-12 textbooks: assimilation/national narratives | K-12 textbooks: activism and local politics |
| TV documentaries | Webisodes and YouTube; “Drunk History” |
| Professional historians and documentarians, extensive sourcing: Ken Burns and David McCullough | Popular history, credulous publics: Glenn Beck and Tea Party narratives; Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert |
| Living history/historical reenactment | Identity politics and representation at historic sites |
| Shared heritage | Multiple narratives about the past |
| Individual genealogical research in libraries and archives; family trees | Ancestry.com and networked connections via social media |
| Scrapbooks | Scrapbooking |
| Doing history for the public | How the public does history |

### Learning goals

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

* articulate the importance of “stuff” to understanding history
* consider the value of cultural landscapes as palimpsests
* identify significant contemporary projects in public history practice
* address the necessity of considering identity politics in public history
* identify some key tools for pursuing digital history projects
* make an argument about the place of “the public” in public history

Course materials (available at the campus bookstore)

* *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture* by Prown and Haltman (eds)
* *The Participatory Museum* by Simon
* *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You* by Kyvig and Marty
* *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after J. B. Jackson* by Wilson and Groth (eds)
* *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* by Horton and Horton (eds)

### Participation

The day-to-day requirements of this class are simple: do the required reading, reflect on it, and come to class prepared to engage in thoughtful discussion. (I promise to do the same.)

Your presence in class is very important. Participation in course discussions constitutes a significant portion of your grade (10%). To receive an A for your participation, you must participate meaningfully in class just about every day. Merely attending class will earn you a C- for participation.

A note about digital devices: If you see me outside class, chances are I’ll be sitting in front of a laptop, browsing the Internet (for research and teaching, of course!) or with my eyes glued to my iPhone. Although I was born a bit too late to be a “digital native,” I’m every bit as ~~addicted to~~ dependent on these devices as students are. That said, such technologies do tend to divide our attention in a classroom, so I’d appreciate your turning them off during class, unless I specifically ask you to bring them out for a project. (Should you need a laptop or other digital device as an accommodation for a disability, I’m happy to let you use it—just come see me to discuss your needs.)

### Writing

The quality of your writing—both its clarity and the depth of thought expressed in it—contributes significantly to your final grade in this course. It is imperative, then, that you schedule sufficient time to conduct the research required for each paper, write a solid first draft, and conduct several revisions. I recommend you form a writing group with two or three other students to swap papers at least a few days before they are due.

Because of the number of students in my courses, I can’t review entire drafts of your papers. That said, I’m happy to look over your proposed thesis statement, an outline for your paper, and a paragraph or two that you’re finding troublesome. Please do come see me for help with your papers, as there won’t be opportunities to rewrite them for better grades.

### Late paper policy

In the historical professions, deadlines matter. Exhibitions must open on time. Grant proposal deadlines aren’t negotiable. Collaborative public history endeavors—like building digital tools and organizing festivals—require everyone to contribute in a timely manner so that work may proceed on schedule. The same holds true for this class. **Assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due.** Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (e.g. a B becomes a B-) after the beginning of class, and I will deduct an additional 1/3 grade for each 24 hours that pass before you turn in the paper.

That said, I’m not heartless. If you have an emergency or anticipate not being able to turn in your paper on time, come see me and we’ll see if we can work something out.

Please note: **Technological failure does not constitute an emergency.** Hard drives fail, servers go down, file transfers time out, and files get corrupted. You must plan for such contingencies: keep backups of your files, have extra ink cartridges handy, know where the local wifi hotspots are in case your home internet connection goes down. Technological issues are not excuses for late work. Please protect yourself (and your grades) by managing your time and backing up your work.

### Grade distribution

* Class participation: 10%
* Comparative public history projects paper: 20%
* Material culture analysis paper: 20%
* Boise Wiki entries: 25%
* Creative research project: 25%

### Plagiarism

A student commits plagiarism not only if she turns in someone else’s work as her own, but also if she borrows others’ ideas or phrases without giving them credit. We can discuss this in class if anyone has any questions. Any student who plagiarizes or cheats on any assignment may receive an F on the assignment or in the course and may be subject to academic discipline by the university.

I am interested in *your* thoughts and *your* creative and analytical work. Please share them with me!

### Accommodations

I need to hear from anyone who has a disability that may require some modification of seating, assignments, or other class requirements so that appropriate arrangements may be made. Please see me after class or during my office hours.

### Talk to me

I will be available during my office hours to address your concerns with the class and assignments. I encourage you to come see me if you feel you have not been offered a chance to participate in class discussion, you are troubled by a particular assignment, you would like to talk more with me about an issue raised in class, or you have concerns about your performance in the course.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

*Please complete each set of readings before class on the date shown.*

### Introduction and Overview

Aug. 23: Introductions. “What is Public History?” and Stanton, “‘What is Public History?’ Redux” from the National Council on Public History: http://ncph.org/cms/what-is-public-history/

**Material Culture**

Aug. 30: Readings from *American Artifacts*:

Prown, “Preface” and “The Truth of Material culture: History or Fiction?” (ix - 27).

Holstein, “Sewing and Sowing: Cultural Continuity in an Amish Quilt” (93-108)

Miller, “The Many Figures of Eve: Styles of Womanhood Embodied in a Late-Nineteenth-Century Corset,” *American Artifacts* (129-147)

Pfister, “A Garden in the Machine: Reading a Mid-Nineteenth-Century, Two-Cylinder Parlor Stove as a Cultural Text” (149-166) or Werbel, “The Foley Food Mill” (229-241).

Sept. 6: Rotella, “Industry, Nature, and Identity in an Iron Footbridge,” *American Artifacts* (191- 211). **Comparative public history projects paper due.**

**Cultural Landscapes, Local History, and the Power of Place**

Sept. 13: *Nearby History*, chapters 1-4 (1-89). Explore the Davis Wiki (http://daviswiki.org) sufficiently to get a sense of what it is and does. *First papers returned.*

Sept. 20: *Nearby History*, chapters 5-7 (91-157) and chapters 11-12 (211-256). **Material culture analysis paper due.**

Sept. 27: Readings from *Everyday America*:

Henderson, “What (Else) We Talk About When We Talk About Landscape: For a Return to the Social Imagination” (178-198)

Lewis, “The Monument and the Bungalow: The Intellectual Legacy of J. B. Jackson” (85-108)

Clay, “Crossing the American Grain with Vesalius, Geddes, and Jackson: The Cross Section as a Learning Tool” (109-129)

Davis, “Looking Down the Road: J. B. Jackson and the American Highway Landscape” (62-80)

Wed., Oct. 4: Readings from *Everyday America*:

Fiege, “Private Property and the Ecological Commons in the American West” (219-231)

Sewell, “Gender, Imagination, and Experience in the Early-Twentieth-Century American Downtown” (237-254)

Rojas, “The Enacted Environment: Examining the Streets and Yards of East Los Angeles” (275-292)

**Difficult Subjects in Public History (Slavery as Case Study)**

Wed., Oct. 11: Readings from *Slavery and Public History*:

Berlin, “Coming to Terms with Slavery in Twenty-First-Century America,” *Slavery and Public History* (1-17)

Blight, “If You Don’t Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought to Be,” *Slavery and Public History* (19-33).

Horton, “Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue,” *Slavery and Public History* (35-55)

Oct. 18: Readings from *Slavery and Public History*:

Nash, “For Whom Will the Liberty Bell Toll? From Controversy to Cooperation,” *Slavery and Public History* (75-101)

Horton, “Avoiding History: Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, and the Uncomfortable Public Conversation on Slavery,” *Slavery and Public History* (135-149)

Tyler-McGraw, “Southern Comfort Levels: Race, Heritage Tourism, and the Civil War in Richmond,” *Slavery and Public History* (151-167)

Levine, “In Search of a Usable Past: Neo-Confederates and Black Confederates,” *Slavery and Public History* (187-211)

**Digital Interlude**

Oct. 25: Digital history, part I: putting history online.

“But I Want You to Think!” http://clioweb.org/2009/06/08/but-i-want-you-to-think/

“Welcome to Play the Past” http://www.playthepast.org/?p=252

“7 Ways Mobile Apps are Enriching Historical Tourism” http://mashable.com/2010/09/26/mobile-apps-historical-tours/

“Haunts: Place, Play, and Trauma” http://www.samplereality.com/2010/06/01/haunts-place-play-and-trauma/

“Location-Based Gaming for Education: Try Gowalla” http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/location-based-gaming-for/26720

“Too Late to Apologize” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZfRaWAtBVg&feature=related

**Museums**

Nov. 1: *The Participatory Museum*, chapters 1-2 (1-84)

Nov. 8: *The Participatory Museum*, chapters 3-4 (85-180)

Nov. 15: *The Participatory Museum*, skim chapter 5 (pay special attention to pp.190-91), read *one* of chapters 6 - 9—whichever method of visitor engagement is most interesting to you—and skim the rest.

Nov. 22: Thanksgiving holiday. Class does not meet.

**Public History Medley**

Nov. 29: Digital history, part II: research methods, sharing. **Boise Wiki entries due.**

Explore The Spatial History Project at http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/index.php – especially *Shaping the West* at http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/project.php?id=997

“The Beginning of the Road” http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/artsandliving/magazine/features/2008/dc-1791-to-today/story.html

Explore the “Findings” column of “Mobile for Museums” at http://chnm.gmu.edu/labs/mobile-for-museums/

Explore the Center for History and New Media website: http://chnm.gmu.edu/

Dec. 6: Ethical dilemmas: deploying history for political (and other) ends

First, explore *The Last American Pirate* website: http://lastamericanpirate.net/ **but—IMPORTANT!—skip the first blog entry**; immediately scroll down and begin reading the rest.

Only **after** you have explored the site above (spoiler alert!), read http://edwired.org/2008/12/18/you-were-warned/

“They Have Blood on Their Hands” http://wearerespectablenegroes.blogspot.com/2010/11/they-have-blood-on-their-hands-sons-of.html

“Virginia 4th-grade textbook criticized over claims on black Confederate soldiers” http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/19/AR2010101907974.html

“Open Letter to the Curators of the Baron Von Munchausen House” http://northwesthistory.blogspot.com/2010/06/open-letter-to-curators-of-te-baron-von.html

“You as a Professor should stop bringing into the 21st century all this negativism” http://northwesthistory.blogspot.com/2010/09/baron-von-munchausen-strikes-back.html

# “Conservative class on Founding Fathers' answers to current woes gains popularity” http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/04/AR2010060404918.html?sub=AR

**Final exam:** Tuesday, Dec. 13, 1-3 p.m. **Creative research projects due.**