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## **Introduction to Public History**

### **History 749**

What is Heritage? What is Culture? How do we preserve it? Whose job is it and how do they do it? How *should* they do it? And why? This colloquium-format class helps you to understand these questions and provides you with the knowledge to develop your own answers.

Here you will learn how professional historians think about and do public history. The evolution of the discipline is presented in the context of the wider development of cultural history. You will learn public history's methodologies, its ethnical quagmires, its "biggest names," and its best incarnations. The course begins with a survey of the discipline and concludes with discussion of its future. Students will gain a new appreciation for the interconnectedness between "history" and "public history."

This class offers a mixed bag of experiences. Students will learn of the paradoxical role of public history within the academy and see how public history can be used in traditional and non-traditional educational settings. Students will also hone hands-on skills such as label writing, object handling, and oral history transcriptions. Students will engage in discussions with practicing public historians to better understand the career options available.

The course concludes with a capstone project in the last four weeks of the semester. More information on this will be presented as the details are finalized.

Some words to the wise: This is a graduate-level course in a colloquium format. That means two things: 1) Each week has a theme that will serve as the basis for discussion. I will begin with a brief overview of the topic but students are responsible for engaging with the material; 2) You must come prepared for class and ready to discuss. Stay on top of the reading as the week progresses. **Last-minute reading (and paper writing!) is the professor's pet peeve.**

### **Learning Outcomes**

The study of public history raises key questions about the goals and obligations of all historians. In recent decades, historians have found themselves implicated in very public debates about the role of history in American culture and life. From the Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian to the History Standards debacle, public history plays a key role in contemporary cultural and political debates. All graduate students should understand these debates and how they impact our profession regardless of your personal career goals.

## Graded Assignments:

1. **Book Reviews**—Over the first month of the semester, you will write three book reviews, each being 10% of your grade: one on Highbrow/Lowbrow, one on In Small Things Forgotten OR Like a Family, and one on a book of your choice. These are the “standard length” 700-word book reviews. (Not sure what these should look like? Check any recent issue of the *Journal of American History* and follow their style and format). Be prepared to distribute a copy of the review of the book of your choice and be prepared to make a short presentation on that review and its associated literature. (30%)
2. **Reflection Journal Entries**—Weeks 7 & 9 you will turn in a 5-page Reflection Journal that engages class experiences, each worth 10% of your grade. A detailed rubric and example will be distributed and discussed in class on Week 5. (20%)
3. **Other Assignments**— A short paper on the history of your selected object (Week 4) and the presentation on a public history/new media website (Week 9) will each account for 5% of your grade. (10%)
4. **Class Project**—In the final weeks of the course you will work on a collaborative project that is currently being developed by the Public History program. Your involvement with this project will be graded on an individual basis. (20%)
5. **Participation**—Class discussions will weigh heavily toward final course grade. If you must miss class, please let me know in advance. (20%)

## Required Books:

James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, *Public History: Essays from the Field*  
Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*  
James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*  
J.Dowd Hall, *Like a Family: The Makings of a Southern Cotton Mill World*

There will be weekly specific thematic reading assignments. These will be available through WebCampus.

You must master the required readings and come to class prepared for focused discussion. You will be called on to make comments to the class each week and I expect everyone to actively participate in the class. The word colloquium means discussion. This is not a lecture course.

NOTE: If you have a laptop, please bring it to class. We will use laptops for on-site research and in-class exercises.

## **Course Schedule:**

**Class 1/September 2:** Introduction, outline of the course, and discussion of topic, “But what *IS* Public History?: My Dad Wants to Know”

**In Class Exercise:** How to Write a Book Review

**Discussion:** Readings on public history

**Readings Due:** Gardner & LaPaglia, *Public History*, Part I, Part II; Ronald J. Grele, “Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?,” *The Public Historian* 5 (Winter 1981), 40-48; Theodore Karamanski, “Making History Whole: Public Service, Public History, and the Profession,” *The Public Historian* 12 (Summer 1990), 91-101; Edward Linenthal, “Committing History in Public,” *Journal of American History* 81 (December 1994), 98-991; Alan Brinkley, “Historians and Their Publics,” *Journal of American History* 81 (December 1994), 1027-1030.

**Class 2/September 9: Topic:** Who Makes Culture? I will present and we will discuss theories of culture. How do different academic disciplines approach culture? How does this inform their approach? In particular, this class considers how historians have used culture to interpret the past.

**In Class Exercise:** Read, summarize and present different definitions of culture and discuss Highbrow/Lowbrow

**Assignment Due:** Highbrow/Lowbrow

**Class 3/September 16: Topic:** Public Presentations of Culture—Part One. This class considers museums and archives. What is their history and why do we have them? What kinds of careers are there in these institutions? On a “bigger” level, what does it mean to display?

**In Class Exercise:** Visit to the Barrack Museum

**Assignment Due:** Highbrow/Lowbrow book review due.

Reading due: Chapter 8 of Destination Culture by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett talks about the role of taste in what and how to display. In “The Gloom of the Museum” (1917), John Cotton Dana challenges the idea of the museum as an elite institution. “The Use of Objects in Historical Research” by John T. Schlebecker details how and why historians should use artifacts to advance their research agendas. James Deetz’s In Small Things Forgotten considers objects in archeological settings.

**Class 4/September 23:** Topic: “Get Your Museum Skillz On” is a hands-on class to get you comfortable handling, analyzing, and writing about objects. We will Skype

museum professionals to join the discussion and offer insiders' tips. PLEASE BRING AN OBJECT FOR SHOW AND TELL.

**In Class Exercise:** During "Show and Tell," we will learn how to systematically analyze an object using the Fleming method. We will develop a storage plan for your object and write (and edit, and edit, and edit) several object labels.

**Assignment Due:** You will be responsible for bringing background research on your object. This will include: the provenance, when and where it was made, what it is made from, background on manufacturer, how/where it was marketed/sold, cultural context. Ask yourself: what makes this object unique and what does it say about American culture—both when it was made and now? This information should take the form of a 3-5 page paper, plus an additional page of photographs.

Articles due: E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model," *Winterthur Portfolio* (1974), 153-173; Unit 51, 52, 53 in Ambrose and Paine's *Museum Basics*, Routledge, 1993, 176-185; "Writing Text and Labels: A Review of the Literature," Australian Museum, 2010.

**Class 5/September 30: Topic:** Public Presentations of Culture—Part Two. This class considers historic and cultural site management. We will have a critical discussion of the various of disciplines involved in managing and maintaining these sites (anthropologists, government people, cultural theorists, historians), as well as a look at the history of this expanding field.

**In Class Exercise:** Discussion of historic site management ethics; case studies of sites are selected by groups of two and they research and identify the ethical/environmental/etc issues of that site.

Explanation of Reflection Journal

**Assignment Due:** In Small Things Forgotten book review due

Reading due: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museum, and Heritage*, Chapter 4, "Ellis Island"; John Bodnar, "Symbols and Servants: Immigrant America and the Limits of Public History", *Journal of American History* (June 1986); Chapter One ("Politics, Power, and Play: The Shifting Context of Cultural Tourism") in *Cultural Tourism in a Changing World* edited by Smith and Robinson; Miller, "Mapping the Boosterist Imaginary: Colonial Williamsburg, Historical Tourism, and the Construction of Managerial Memory," *The Public Historian* (Fall 2006); Glover, "Co-produced Histories: Mapping the Uses and Narratives of History in the Tourist Age," *The Public Historian* (Spring 2008).

**Class 6/October 7:** Cultural Heritage Field Trip

**Assignment Due:** Book review of a book of your choice is due. Readings for this class will be distributed as soon as trip is confirmed.

**Class 7/October 14: Topic:** “Things to Consider: Stuff Public Historians Use” considers various sources used by public historians. To do so, we will read and discuss stellar examples of academic articles that use non-document sources.

**In Class Exercise:** Visit to Special Collections and assignment carried out. Identify an oral history to be transcribed that is due on November 4.

**Assignment Due:** Reflection Journal assignment one due.

Articles due: White and White, *Stylin’ African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, Introduction and Chapter 8, “The Stroll”; Momen, “Remembering Laredo,” *Space and Culture* (2007); Lizabeth A. Cohen, Chapter 21 “Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915” in Schlereth’s *Material Culture Studies in America*; Bill Osgerby, “Bachelor Pad as Cultural Icon,” *Journal of Design History* (Spring, 2005); “An Indian Basket” and “An Unfinished Stocking” from The Age of Homespun by L.T. Ulrich; “Introduction,” “The Nature of Time,” “The Past,” “The Present,” “The Future” in The Culture of Time and Space by S. Kern.

**Class 8/October 21: Topic:** “Oral History: A Lot More than Talking” considers the practice, meanings, and uses of oral history. The readings we will discuss trace the evolution of the practice, offer a survey of the field, and provide examples of how historians use oral histories. A key part of this discussion will be how the construction of memory influences oral history and public history.

**In Class Exercise:** We will Skype oral historians involved in different kinds of projects to discuss successes and pitfalls of doing and using oral histories.

**Assignment Due:** If you select to review Like a Family, it is due.

Reading due: Jacquelyn Down Hall et al. Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World (Norton, 1987); Chapter One (“An Oral History of Our Time) in Richie’s Doing Oral History; Smith’s “Toward a Public Oral History” in Oxford Handbook of Oral History, Sharpless’ “The History of Oral History” in Handbook of Oral History.

**Class 9/November 4: Topic:** “Public History and New Media” will help students understand how technology facilitates the mission of public history. This discussion will survey the evolution of this field, identify key institutions in its development, and take a critical look at current projects.

**In Class Exercise:** Presentation of a new media website

**Assignment Due:** Identification and research on new media website. NOTE: This will likely involve contacting the historians who put the site together. Reflection Journal assignment two due. Transcription of oral history due.

Articles due: “Wikipedia: Can History be Open Source? In Rosenzweig’s *Clio Wired: The Future of the Past in the Digital Age*; “What is Digital History? Some Exemplary Projects”; Tim Grove, “Media and the Challenges of Public History,” *Perspectives* (May 2009). Carson, “The End of History Museums: What’s Plan B?” *The Public Historian* (Fall 2008).

**Class 10/November 18:** Project

**Class 11/December 2:** Project

**Class 12/December 9:** Project

**Academic Misconduct** – “Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV’s function as an educational institution.”

An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism: “Using the words or ideas of another, from the Internet or any source, without proper citation of the sources.” See the “Student Academic Misconduct Policy” (approved December 9, 2005) located at: <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/misconductPolicy.html>.

**As a former journalist, I take plagiarism very seriously. I will pursue cases to the full extent possible.**

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**A Personal Note:** I am a scholar, a parent, and a person with a very active life. I fully understand that each of you have outside responsibilities that can interfere with academic work. I appreciate being kept abreast of any developments that might impinge on your performance in this class.