



Call for Working Group Discussants
2016 NCPH Annual Meeting
Baltimore, Maryland
March 16-19, 2016

Working groups, involving facilitators and up to twelve discussants, allow conferees to explore in depth a subject of shared concern before and during the Annual Meeting. In these seminar-like conversations, participants have a chance to discuss questions raised by specific programs, problems, or initiatives in their own public history practice with peers grappling with similar issues. Working groups articulate a purpose they are working toward or a problem they are actively trying to solve and aim to create an end product(s), such as a report, article, website, or exhibition. For 2016, eight working groups are assembling:

1. [Making Public History Accessible: Exploring Best Practices for Disability Access](#)
2. [Museums and Public Discourse: Past, Present, & Emerging Futures](#)
3. [Building Capacity to Challenge the Exclusive Past](#)
4. [Interpreting the History of Race Riots and Racialized Mass Violence in the Context of “Black Lives Matter”](#)
5. [Standing Up for History in the War on the Humanities](#)
6. [Campus History as Public History](#)
7. [Public History and the Potential of Sports History Museums](#)
8. [Contemporary Collecting to Correct the Exclusive Past](#)

To join a working group, please submit a one-paragraph email message describing the issues you wish to raise with your peers, together with a one-page resume, c.v., or biographical statement by October 15. We welcome submissions from individuals across a range of professions and career stages. Please see the specific working group descriptions below. Individuals who are selected will be listed as working group discussants in the conference *Program* and will participate in the working group session at the annual meeting.

This winter the group facilitators will ask participants to contribute a case statement of no more than 500-1,000 words for discussion. The case statement will describe a participant’s particular experience, define the issues it raises, and suggests strategies and/or goals for resolution. Case statements will be circulated among participants by email and posted in the *History@Work* blog on the Public History Commons, or in PDF format on the NCPH website. Discussants are expected to read and comment briefly by email on one another’s case statements well before the conference date. Some working groups may also have additional shared background reading materials identified by their facilitators.

To apply, please send your paragraph and one-page resume/c.v./biographical statement by October 15 to ncph@iupui.edu with the specific working group title in the subject line of your email. (You may apply to participate in a working group whether or not you have submitted another presentation or session proposal. You may apply for only one working group.) All presenters, attendees, and other participants are expected to register for the Annual Meeting. More information about working groups is available at <http://ncph.org/cms/conferences/working-groups/>.

1. Making Public History Accessible: Exploring Best Practices for Disability Access

Facilitators: Nicole Orphanides, American University
Heather Heckler, Independent Historian

It has been twenty-five years since the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. People with disabilities in the United States have fought for over half a century for equal access to programs and services. Many of our museums and historic sites still exclude persons with disabilities, whether through physical barriers, communication barriers, or the omission of disability from the historical narrative. Public historians have an important role to play in providing an inclusive experience within their programs and institutions. In conjunction with the 25th year of the Americans with Disabilities Act, this working group will discuss and begin to address the challenges public historians face in creating fully inclusive sites and programs for people with all types of disabilities.

The working group will bring together a diverse group of public history practitioners who have an interest in developing a more inclusive public history landscape in the twenty-first century. The group will prioritize three or four issues to discuss in-depth; brainstorm solutions; and discuss strategies for implementing best practices into our professional work.

Questions for discussion may include:

- What does it mean to make historic sites and programs accessible for people with disabilities? What challenges do smaller sites face in becoming fully accessible?
- What accessibility standards do practitioners currently use?
- How should staff and volunteers be trained to incorporate accessibility standards into their practices?
- How can we best incorporate disability cultural competency into our training of staff and volunteers?
- How can public historians incorporate Universal Design Learning standards when developing interpretation plans and programming?
- In what ways can new technologies assist public historians in making their sites and interpretation more accessible? What new challenges do these technologies pose?
- How can we involve people with disabilities in improving accessibility and inclusivity in our historic sites?
- How can we increase the number of visitors with disabilities to our sites?
- How are sites and programs evaluated to ensure they meet ADA standards?

Ultimately, we want to provide public historians with the tools they need to incorporate accessibility into their planning from the outset of a project and to foster recognition that we must change to meet

the needs of our audience, not vice versa. The goal of the working group is to review and establish best practices for accessibility and to produce a guide for public historians who are committed to making their sites and programming accessible to all visitors.

2. Museums and Civic Discourse: Past, Present, & Emerging Futures

Facilitators: Elena Gonzales, Independent scholar/curator
Jennifer Scott, Jane Addams - Hull House Museum
Nicole Ivy, American Alliance of Museums
Clarissa Ceglio, University of Connecticut

From racial injustice to climate change, our communities face a range of complex, divisive issues. Voices within public history, museums, and allied fields are renewing calls for our institutions to foster civic dialogue and action. At the same time, social media conversations such as #MuseumsRespondtoFerguson and #MuseumWorkersSpeak challenge us to “turn the social justice lens inward.” So, in addition to asking, “What roles have—and can—museums play in developing strategies and solutions,” we must also address institutional inequities in hiring, governance, and other operational functions that limit museums’ ability to serve as participants in change.

In considering these and related questions (<http://bit.ly/1iAebJU>), the working group collaborators will bring historical perspective and critical interdisciplinary edge to museums’ important but often ahistorical efforts to promote civic discourse. Looking back, the vision and practices of museums as civic agents have long stood in tension with their limitations as democratic institutions. In the late 1930s museums grappled with how to become social instruments for civic good. The ‘60s and ‘70s brought calls to raze “the temple” and build “the forum.” The turn of the 21st century brought the American Alliance of Museums’ Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums and kindred efforts. Participants will discuss key issues related to this change over time: What do these moments teach us? How can understanding past initiatives, barriers, and contexts help point the way forward?

Inspired by digital-first publication models, the working group will develop the framework for a collaborative, open-access volume on Museums and Civic Discourse. A Zotero library will serve as the larger project’s literature survey and as a ready reference tool for members of the NCPH, AAM, and allied fields to consult when working on programs and/or grant proposals. Lastly, to promote NCPH and AAM member collaboration, we plan to extend work begun in Baltimore at the AAM’s May 2016 meeting.

3. Building Capacity to Challenge the Exclusive Past

Facilitators: Joseph Cialdella, Michigan Humanities Council
Briann Greenfield, New Jersey Council for the Humanities
Jesse Johnston, National Endowment for the Humanities
Samip Mallik, South Asian American Digital Archive

Granting organizations and professional associations that support public history projects are in a unique position to make the field more inclusive by directing resources and initiatives toward these efforts. Museums, historical societies, libraries, and other public history and public humanities organizations often want to work with grassroots populations and tell narratives from the perspective of workers, the poor, racial minorities, and other marginalized peoples, but are often stymied by their own lack of outreach or fears of repercussions from funders. For their part, even when grant makers and capacity-building organizations are excited by such work, they are uncertain how to seed success. How can

organizations that support the public preservation, interpretation, and telling of history best assist communities assert their right to tell their own histories?

In this working group, we aim to bring together practitioners, grantees, staff of state humanities councils, the NEH, other granting organizations, and professional associations or capacity-builders to reflect on the successes, challenges, and future of democratizing historical narratives in response to pressing social issues on the ground. In preparation for our in-person meeting at the NCPH meeting, the working group will engage with several themes and questions/problems:

- What are strategies for effective outreach and communication to draw new project ideas, communities, and voices into the field?
- How can larger organizations be responsive to the needs and capacities of individuals and communities on the ground while still aligning projects with guidelines and standards in the field?
- What might a framework of equity and inclusion look like for organizations supporting public history work?
- How can public historians best use our resources to partner with new audiences to shape a deeper understanding of history from multiple perspectives?
- In cultivating historical inquiry at a community level, how can larger organizations with resources respond to needs “on the ground” and share authority while also shaping their own programs and requirements?

The anticipated result of this dialogue will be a “best practices” document that public historians can use to guide collaborations and model effective partnerships with grassroots groups and community organizations.

4. Interpreting the History of Race Riots and Racialized Mass Violence in the Context of “Black Lives Matter”

Facilitators: Devin Hunter, University of Illinois at Springfield
Aleia Brown, Middle Tennessee State University/Michigan State University Museum
Sara Haviland, St. Francis College
Michael Brown, Rochester Institute of Technology
Brooke Neely, Center of the American West, University of Colorado at Boulder
Elizabeth Catte, Middle Tennessee State University

The rise of the “Black Lives Matter” movement created new contexts for the public history of race riots and racialized mass violence of the past. This working group brings together practitioners involved in interpreting this historical theme. Our general goal is to explore the impact of these new contemporary contexts through a sustained dialogue between public historians, community members, and activists.

These are interesting times for the interpretation of race riots and racialized mass violence. In addition to Black Lives Matter, anniversaries for events in Watts (1965), Chicago (1966), Newark (1967), and East Saint Louis (1917) guarantee visibility for interpretative efforts. Recent developments related to race riot history also ensure renewed interest, such as the discovery of an archaeological site from the Springfield Race Riot (1908) and the development of an Oprah Winfrey Network docudrama based on the Tulsa Race Riot (1921). In these and other examples, publics challenge the exclusive past by seeking to re-take control of the meaning of these events and how they should be remembered. This working group will consider:

- What is ‘new’ about the public history of race riots and racialized mass violence?
- How are approaches to the past impacted by current events; or, how are approaches to current events impacted by history?
- Have current events influenced debates about naming and reframing past events—‘riots,’ ‘uprisings,’ ‘rebellions?’
- Are there limitations of public history in understanding or facilitating today’s social movements?
- Furthermore, to what extent can current events allow historians to “challenge the exclusive past?”

The group’s first order of business is to create a website, where we will present case studies and general discussion on our theme before the conference. In Baltimore, we will move towards a plan of action that will connect with community members and activists. Although the form of this project is yet to be decided, our criteria is that it be sustainable, innovative, and collaborative.

5. Standing up for History in the War on the Humanities

Facilitators: Ashley Whitehead Luskey, West Virginia University
Timothy Grove, National Air and Space Museum

In the past several years, historic sites and history departments at all levels of education have suffered crippling budget and staffing cuts as part of a larger assault on the humanities. Deemed archaic, irrelevant, and not useful in today’s technologically focused society, education and employment in the field of history have assumed a back seat to STEM education and employment.

Meanwhile, administrators and policymakers looking to ease the financial burdens on their institutions and communities continue to slash the budgets of museums, historic sites, and university history departments in favor of more “useful” programs, and place restrictive training and research constraints on both academic and public historians, all the while demanding unrealistic production quotas from historians. However, never has our nation been more in need of the knowledge and skill sets—chief amongst which include the ability to think critically and engage in civil dialogue and debate—conveyed by both in-classroom and on-site history education than now.

This working group will bring together—and build off of—the recent work of the History Relevance Campaign and the History Communicators movement. It will discuss how we might reenergize both movements and further channel our collective frustrations, as historians and public historians, over the national devaluing of history into productive action to stop future budget and staffing cuts, to educate policymakers and the public about the value of history, and to promote historic sites, museums, and classrooms as democratic spaces for necessary civic dialogue about both the past and the present. The working group is seeking public historians, academic historians, historic site and university administrators, and policymakers to generate conversations, both prior to the conference and with session audience members about how to address the challenges confronting our profession in a positive and productive manner. Ultimately, after evaluating the pitfalls and success encountered by the History Relevance Campaign and History Communicators, the working group will produce a revised, written document outlining a reasonable and practical, long-range plan for how to promote history, museums, and historic sites across academia, the American public, and in the political arena; to create

generative dialogue between these disparate entities; and to forge stronger working relationships amongst the three, whether through lobbying, new social media, the use of “history emissaries,” literature, or other means.

6. Campus History as Public History

Facilitators: Monica Mercado, Bryn Mawr College
 Caitlin Starr Cohn, University of Minnesota
 LaQuanda Walters Cooper, University of Maryland Baltimore County
 Anne Mitchell Whisnant, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

As some of the most exclusive sites in our communities, educational institutions are increasingly called upon to confront and interpret their own histories in order to become more open, inclusive environments. Yet when treasured campus stories, landscapes, buildings, monuments, traditions, or celebrations carry the legacies of exclusion – legacies that some constituencies find offensive or discriminatory – conflict often emerges. Historians are called upon to help navigate competing demands and facilitate new research and dialogues.

In line with the 2016 theme, "Challenging the Exclusive Past," this working group will explore the possibilities and perils of campus history projects at a wide range of public and private institutions: colleges, universities, and K-12 schools. Given that many campus histories are entangled with slavery, segregation, white supremacy, and other types of ethnic, class or gender privilege, our discussions will focus on a number of interrelated questions:

- How do campus activism and public history meet? Can such intersections lead to more inclusive histories?
- What public history approaches (preservation efforts, digital or physical exhibits, walking tours, oral history, civic engagement techniques, etc.) adapt well to campus settings?
- How might we connect these projects to our classrooms, or to those of our colleagues?
- How can robust public history initiatives support or work in tandem with other campus initiatives aimed at enhancing diversity and cross-cultural understanding?
- What are successful strategies for working with campus partners and stakeholders (administration, alumni, students, faculty, staff, trustees) in such efforts?
- Who should control such projects, and how can they be institutionalized?
- How might we make these projects accessible and relevant to off-campus communities?

Part of the aim of the working group is to generate a draft of best practices for our work; we also seek to develop a community of support for historians who may become part of such initiatives on their own campuses. We will document these ideas and our conversations before, during, and after the 2016 conference via group blog, creating a resource for future projects.

7. Public History and the Potential of Sports History Museums

Facilitators: Josh Howard, Middle Tennessee State University
 Kathy Shinnick, Kathy Shinnick Consulting

Sports history museums have the potential to explore the complicated intersections of race, class, and gender through the lens of recognizable and relatable athletes and their stories. We find that many sports history museums create their own exclusive pasts, forming a powerful barrier to more nuanced

and rich understandings of important moments in the history of sports such as the rise and fall of segregated sports teams. Often, sports history museums invest in a “hall of fame” interpretive model that consecrates athletes and their achievements and creates a past populated exclusively by exceptional individuals destined to overcome great odds. This working group will explore the role of sport history in museums of all types and seek to address challenges faced by sports museums, including:

- What are the best practices for interpreting sports history?
- Do sports museums function with fundamentally different goals and missions than traditional history museums? Are these differences reflected in the interpretive style?
- How are sports museums interpreting the marginalized past? Are they?
- Are there limits to interpreting the marginalized past in sports museums that are not present in other museums?
- Are sports museums “held back” by the hall of fame style of interpretation?
- How can sports museums tap into the great public interest in sports history, as seen through the popularity of ESPN’s *30 for 30* series?

We feel that sports history museums and collections are largely undiscussed in public history literature; for example, sports-related sessions have not appeared on the NCPH program for at least the past three years. This session will benefit by the addition of professional public historians who are presently or have previously worked in sports museums, sports history, or with sports collections. We propose that the working group curate a mini-exhibit and/or talk-back board in the NCPH exhibit hall. After the conference, we also propose that participants reflect upon sport and public history by contributing to *History@Work* and/or *Sport in American History*.

8. Contemporary Collecting to Correct the Exclusive Past

Facilitators: Joe Tropea, Maryland Historical Society
Michael Stone, University of Maryland Baltimore County

In the midst of uprisings responding to economic inequality, systemic racism, and police violence, what are the roles of public historians and archivists? Public history professionals and institutions occupy a space on the front lines of events that have recognizable historical significance. They also understand all too well—based on the gaps in their own material culture and archival collections—how the absence of evidence can erase voices and hide experiences that do not fit the dominant narrative. Rather than face a future in which historians must scour archives for traces of subaltern narratives, public historians have taken it upon themselves to preserve the voices of contemporary protest before they can be silenced. This project is challenging and imperfect. Public historians can encounter ethical and practical dilemmas that are hard to overcome, with little guidance through the moral terrain.

In particular, this working group is interested in the following questions:

- When is it ethical to begin collecting and interpreting sources and stories?
- What is the project’s responsibility to the causes of participants?
- What are the best practice guidelines for collecting materials relating to minors?
- Is it important to know who is served by the project before it begins?
- What does it look like to share authority in a project so embroiled in the passions and politics of the moment?

- Are all voices considered equal?
- How are contributed items preserved digitally?
- How do we ensure the project is sustainable?

This working group will begin to answer these questions surrounding the ethics and best practices of collecting contemporary history and histories of violence. We seek partners from projects that have begun collecting stories, photographs, and other primary sources while events are ongoing or shortly after they have passed. We will share our struggles, concerns, and successes in this largely uncharted territory, and we will produce a document to help guide our colleagues and peers in similar efforts.