Millennials as Change Makers – Case Statements

Olivia Brown

As millennials, we often consider ourselves more culturally aware and inclusive than others of older generations. This shouldn't come as a surprise when the daily news cycle is constantly covering the debate over Confederate monuments, the growth of minority/gender equality groups and organizations, and the push for more inclusive legislation and representation in our federal government, all causes often led by twenty-somethings with a fire lit under them. I'm not here to say whether millennials can successfully make the claims of being more "woke" than our Gen X, Gen Y, or baby boomer counterparts; however, I think in the field of public history and through the work of museums and historic sites, this cultural awareness has been brought to the fore as today's young adults enter the workforce.

After graduating from the University of Virginia with my Bachelor's in 2015, I spent a year working as a tour guide at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's Historic Home. As we've seen in the past year, Charlottesville, Virginia has become a both a hotbed and a powder keg in the debates (and unnecessary violence) over Confederate monuments, renaming, and racial equality.

So how does this fit into my early career as a museum professional? Monticello is owned and operated by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, a private non-profit. I'd like to share a few of the conclusions I've come to when thinking about the advantages and challenges of the non-profit world. Though the local, state, or federal government is not dictating what is said, presented, or learned at Monticello, there is still the omnipresent voices (and checkbooks) of the Board of Trustees and, sometimes more importantly, the institution's insanely rich donors. Thomas Jefferson—third president of the United States, governor of the state of Virginia, founder of the University of Virginia, etc. etc. etc.—is one of many founding fathers undergoing excessive and *important* scrutiny, which could potentially influence Board members or donors depending on their personal ideals.

For nearly 20 years, Monticello has been telling the story of Sally Hemmings, an enslaved seamstress working in Jefferson's household, and the six children she bore by him. Today, guides are required to acknowledge three things while on tour: Jefferson's contributions to the country and his public offices, the stewardship of the Levy family that saved the home, and the relationship between Jefferson, Hemmings, and her children. I was fortunate enough to be an employee at Monticello at a time when many things were changing within the organization. "Slavery at Monticello" tours were being offered more frequently and with more extensive research to bolster them, the large-scale restoration and preservation of Mulberry Row was underway, and the administration/staff was making a conscious effort to give voices to those who have been voiceless for so long.

What I really want to draw attention to, however, is how these changes affected the staff, especially those whose responsibility it was to interpret this difficult history, and, in turn how the staff also affected these changes. The three things listed above are the only things guides are *required* to include in their tours; the rest is up to their own judgment, interests, and choices. Given, most rooms have objects that you need to include because if you don't, someone will undoubtedly ask you about them anyway, but everything else was in the tour script was determined by each individual guide. This allowed for the freedom to be as inclusive (or exclusive) as one wanted. I found myself employed among guides of all ages, but tended to notice often that more progressive takes on the history of the early Republic, the founding era, and the horrors of slavery were coming from those more similar to my age. While many guides acknowledged Sally Hemmings and her children, that was sometimes where the discussion of slavery started and ended. The generational difference could often be sensed in whose tours were more open, realistic, and factual about Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, and the issue of slavery.

I occupied an interesting space at Monticello. I was often far younger than the people to whom I was giving my tour, and this sometimes took away from any authority or expertise I might have had on these subjects. Due to my liberal upbringing and progressive awareness of the world, I included a fact about slavery, enslaved people, etc. in every room on the tour because I felt that it was particularly important for people to be thinking of racial inequality in the space. This was not something every guest wanted to hear, however, and I was confronted more than once by someone in my tour group on the Sally Hemmings matter. I have found that these experiences make me realize now more than ever the importance of minority and gender inclusion in our institutions. Revisionist history only erases the voices of the powerless, and by being a young adult understanding these consequences, I can bring something unique to the table. We have reached a point, I think, when museums need to embrace shared authority and diversity/inclusion, or risk perishing from exclusionary actions.

How do we convince fellow staff members that our paths toward change are not only necessary, but a *good* thing? What happens when our visitors don't like the choices we're making? How can we better represent the stakeholders who put their trust in us as an institution without compromising our ideals?

Kim Campbell
Advocacy - I work in Macon, Georgia, which like most places in the southeast, has two Confederate monuments in downtown. Our downtown has be undergoing a great renaissance in recent years, but these two monuments have mostly been ignored. After the events in Charlottesville in August 2017, we began looking at these monuments much more closely. Historic Macon Foundation, where I work, is a local preservation non-profit. (We were formed in 2003 by the merger of a local bricks-and-mortar preservation organization and the local historical society.) We are still a membership based organization, and our members are predominately white, affluent, and 50 to 60+. As many of you can probably imagine, my opinions on Confederate monuments (based on years of research into Confederate memory) are very different from the ideas our core membership holds. Many of our members want the monuments to stay without any change, whereas I feel an absolute minimum is reinterpretation.

Our Board of Trustees has a retreat in late August 2017, and one of the decisions they made was our stance on Confederate monuments. Our Board is slightly more diverse than our membership as a whole, and I know of some members who are strongly opposed to everything the Confederate monuments stand for. However, the Board voted that Historic Macon Foundation as an organization should research the monuments, have a stance on them, but **not** publicize our stance unless asked directly.

As the only public historian on the staff in August, I was asked to research the monuments. Per usual, I haven't had time to complete the task (a constant problem at any small non-profit); however, I did fully research one of the monuments. Finished in 1912, the monument to the Women of the Confederacy on Poplar Street in downtown Macon is the epitome of monumental art put up to support a white patriarchal society. (I am happy to discuss everything I found at length, but will spare y'all that here.) Now, I have primary source proof of what this monument stands for, not to mention supporting secondary research, but am forbidden by our Board from sharing this information. Because our community is relatively small, I cannot even speak out personally outside of very close friends, because it could be connected back to Historic Macon. I struggle with what I feel ethically and morally bound to say, and not disobey a directive from our Board. One tactic I've taken is quietly sharing some of the research I've found with some professors at Mercer University, a local college, and hoping they will pass the information along. I'm interested in learning what others are doing to address this issue.

Work/Life Balance - As is typical with pretty much any non-profit, we're constantly under-funded and under-staffed. In the past few years, we've dramatically increased the number of events we're doing. More events with the same number of staff members means there's a lot more time spent outside of regular office hours working. We do not have overtime pay in our budget, though we do have a comp time policy. Our comp time policy is based on a 40 hour work week, but we only work 9 to 5 and are allowed an hour for lunch. In other words, we are supposed to receive comp time if we work more than 40 hours, but generally the system should work in our favor by requiring less than 40 hours a week. The issue comes in that our institutional culture frowns on staff members using their whole lunch hour. Additionally, when we work major fundraisers over the course of a whole weekend, we are usually given only a day of comp time. Our director feels this is alright, since "we don't work 40 hours every week."

As I mentioned in my bio, I have dogs, and I live on my own. When we work several events a week and receive no comp time, it is incredibly difficult to me to look after the dogs, finish basic errands/chores, etc. Every time we bring up comp time with our director, our concerns are not noted or addressed. Since I'm now in a full-time supervisory position, I'm trying to change this culture for the staff member who answers to me at least. I encourage her to take a full lunch break, leave at 5:00, etc. However, I cannot give her comp time or stop the director from making her work overtime. What are ways y'all are working to adapt culture in institutions? This issue is certainly not exclusive to a particular generation, but I think the "selfish millennial stereotype" certainly plays a role in my concerns about work/life balance being ignored.

Alyssa Constad
Currently I hold the position of Women's History and Resource Manager for the General Federation of Club Women (GFWC). GFWC is the most influential organization that you've never heard anything about. We were formed in 1890, at the height of the women's club movement, and sought to unite individual women's clubs and professional organizations under one federated umbrella. In its first fifty years GFWC was incredibly influential in a myriad of policy and legislative issues. We were hugely prominent in the settlement house movement, in passing legislation like the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Organic Act, pushing for consumer protections, establishing public libraries, and making seatbelts in cars a law, among a long list of other achievements.

When more women began to enter the workplace in the 1970s the influence of women's clubs started to wane. We have had a slow drop in membership ever since. Currently, our core group of members is women who joined in the 1950s-70s. Most of these women used their local clubs as an outlet to get out of their homes and impact their communities at a time when a fruitful career was not an option for them. While their participation (and continued enthusiasm) is commendable, many of these women are not interested in change, and cling to rules and structures their clubs established fifty years ago. Moreover, our Executive Committee (equivalent to a museum Board) still follows the same structure and rules that we did in the 19th and 20th centuries. The impact of an outdated club structure effects the organization as a whole, but has multiple implications for the Women's History and Resource Center.

GFWC was formed as a bipartisan, non-denomination woman's club. This is a fact which members are proud of, and leadership has clung too. However, in our current political climate it is almost impossible to remain neutral. In an effort to avoid controversy, our EC has taken a position of silence on many issues, and has become increasingly more conservative. This has posed a huge problem for me, as I have been restricted to telling only an extremely sanitized version of our history.

The clearest example was a blog I attempted to publish on Margaret Sanger. In 1934 GFWC endorsed the use of birth control- a radical and progressive position for the time. On Sanger's birthday, I wrote a blog about our stance on birth control and women's health issues. Sanger had written a few articles for the GFWC magazine in the 1930s and also been invited to speak to clubwomen. I spoke about these in the blog, but did not mention abortion or anything that could be construed as politically precarious. Despite our positive position on birth control (and Margaret Sanger) 83 years ago, my blog was considered "too charged of an issue" to post in 2017.

Despite my own personal frustrations, I feel our leadership's traditional attitudes pose a detriment to scholars and students who seek to use our archives and learn our history. GFWC is a largely untapped treasure trove of women's history and the history of philanthropy. However, if I, and those who proceed me, are not permitted to paint a clear and honest picture of our history, how are we to continue making an impact? If the only history I am asked to present to clubwomen is one while glorifies our past achievements and overlooks our flaws, how are we or our clubwomen, to progress?

Kate Crosby

ADA compliance and advocacy - (Staff debate re: accessible labels and panels; staff debate re: door signage on the only ADA compliant door, making a transcript for a video in an exhibition) I like to think that I'm an advocate for complying to the spirit, not just the letter, of ADA compliance, but how hard is too hard to push entrenched staff? Within the first few weeks on the job, I was helping to install an exhibit designed by a colleague and a grad student. The layout involved putting a large object on a pedestal in front of a panel. Anyone who has delved deeply into the Smithsonian's ADA guide will know that ADA best practices would be making sure that the visitor had an unobstructed ability to get within 3" of labels and panels in order to be able to read them. These guidelines are particularly important with respect to individuals with low vision, as they can read the panels and labels if they are given the ability to get close enough to them. The problem with the layout as it was designed was that it obstructed the visitor's ability to get within 3" of the panel, and presented a trip hazard for visitors attempting to do so. While I was able to get the other staff member to agree to changes elsewhere in the exhibition for the sake of accessibility and safety (putting a stanchion up to prevent tripping on a platform, etc.), I was unable to persuade the staff member to agree with me on this point, and ultimately I felt I had to either back down or start a serious confrontation about the issue. I felt too new to the position at that point to be confident in having that kind of confrontation, and decided to back down.

In a different moment of accessibility issues, I had the opposite experience. We have a shared building, and one of the other departments had placed a sign on the building's only ADA accessible door stating that it was a staff entrance only, and that visitors had to use the front door. While helping transport objects one day, I watched as an elderly visitor with a walker walked up to the door, read the sign aloud, and started to turn toward the front door, which has substantial stairs and is not very accessibility-friendly. I urged the visitor to use the accessible door, and told him that he was allowed to use it. He remarked that he hadn't thought that he was, but I assured him as a staff member that he was allowed to use the door. I researched the issue and called our diversity officer, who assured me that the signage was not ADA compliant and gave me some samples of more accessibility-friendly text to propose to the other department. This department has a new head, who is also a millennial, and knowing that, I approached her with the strategy of wanting to ensure that our visitors were safe and knew that if they needed to use that door, they could do so. I shared the proposed changes with her, and with her permission, I took down the sign on the door. As of today, this department is working on more friendly signage that will still encourage most visitors to use the other door, but will allow those who need the ADA compliant door to know that they can do so.

Within my own work areas, it has been much easier to implement changes I want to see. In one of our current exhibitions, we have a video that does not have subtitles, and also does not have a transcript. I assigned a student to create a transcript for the video, and have tried to ensure that the print is large enough to read, that it is formatted appropriately, etc. It's now hung up in the gallery next to the video, and I feel a real sense of accomplishment in getting that transcript prepared. In all of my discussions with the staff on the subject, I have never had any pushback about the idea of a transcript. In this case, I think it's much more accurate to say that they had never thought of it, than that they were deliberately ignoring it. I think it points to the changes in public history education that have taken place over the last 30 years, as accessibility is a critical part of design, above and beyond ensuring the 36" of clearance for wheelchairs.

Toeing the line - How to handle overcommitment, side hustles, and feelings of inadequacy. Trying to finish a dissertation while working full time, using a side gig in a related field (which presents some ethical quandries), and feeling like I'm failing at all of it.

When I graduated from high school in 2007, the conventional wisdom of the time for college-bound students was that student loans were a necessary evil, but not one about which one had to worry for long. At the time, salaries were higher, and the prevailing message was that it didn't matter how much you took out in student loans, because with a bachelor's degree you should be able to pay it back. I deeply regret listening to that wisdom, and I imagine that many of my fellow millennials are in the same boat. As a result of the crushing student loan debt that I took on to pursue a BA, MA, and PhD, I've vastly overcommitted myself. Instead of staying in school and taking a teaching fellowship to finish my last year of my PhD, I've taken a full time job (which I love) so I can pay my student loans and use the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (for as long as it exists, at any rate). I'm still trying to finish my PhD, however, so when I'm not working at work, I should be working on my dissertation. I also have a part time job on top of all of this: I work about one to two weekends a month at a local non-profit for extra cash so I can pay the bills, because my full-time salary is not high enough for me to meet my monthly costs for basic needs. The main thrust of all of this is that I have extended myself far beyond what is sustainable long-term, and while hopefully some of this will be alleviated by defending my dissertation in August or December, I'm still left with a substantial amount of stress on my plate, and feeling like my work-life imbalance is negatively impacting my life. What are the possible solutions to this issue though? I attempted to negotiate my salary when I was hired, to no avail, so I know that I didn't leave money on the negotiating table. How do millennials find better work-life balance in a field where salaries seem to be trending downward and "side-hustles" are increasingly normalized and considered necessary? What are the ethical issues of having these "side-hustles" in related fields ("moonlighting," as it were) when we are not paid sufficiently in the first place?

Drew Robarge

Technology is an important tool that we use as public historians. Whether it be using an e-mail client, creating an interactive for our exhibitions, or digitizing our collections, we use technology on a daily basis so we should be comfortable with it. However, our comfort level might depend on when a person was born. One of the stereotypes is that millennials are more comfortable with technology having had computers as a core part of their lives. This comfort level with technology is usually not the case for older generations and are stereotypically considered less comfortable with technology and/or interested in exploring its potential. Based on personal experience, I see this technological gap inhibiting my and others' work as public historians.

When I first started as an intern years ago, my museum was switching from Office 2003 to Office 2007. The new version transformed the traditional tab/shortcut button user interface to the ribbon user interface still in use in current versions. A curator asked me for help finding how to do things she used to do on the old software as I was the only millennial in the division that spring. What I learned was not the fact that the curator needed help but she did not have the comfort or the skills to independently seek for answers, explore the software, or play around to imagine possibilities. Similar scenes and questions have occurred up to this day. Suggestions for improving existing software or new ideas of technology on the floor did not go anywhere. I took a training course for a software that our institution used, and after a few hours, I knew it would never get any traction among my peers despite its potential.

As a result, the technology is not utilized to its maximum potential, it is used in traditional ways, or it does not get used at all. Any system used in an office, a team, or an institution ends up adapting to the least proficient user. This is true in many areas of the institution such as collections management, collaborative work, project management, exhibitions, and other aspects of public history. That is not to say that these individuals do not embrace or see the value in these technologies, but they do not understand how they could be doing the work more efficiently or more collaboratively. So how do we push the usage of technology to transform our work, our collections and the institution?

Getting everyone on the same page by showing the benefit and making them feel comfortable is the biggest hurdle to overcome. Regular mandatory training would help to show the benefits, let people be comfortable by avoid singling out individuals, and demonstrate that everyone including proficient users can learn something new from each other. By making it mandatory and regular, it reinforces the notion that technology is a part of our work and that keeping current in technology is an important part of the skill sets that we need to effectively do our work. Starting with a software that everyone already uses at the institution such as Microsoft Word or an e-mail client is a good way to start as everyone should have some level of comfort and there is potential for everyone to learn something new.

Once everyone becomes comfortable, we can begin to introduce underutilized or new software that can transform the way we work. In addition to a demonstration, official and unofficial documentation should be provided with what was demonstrated so that individuals can try the technology out on their own. After some time, people can come back and bring their questions, tips, and things they have found. The purpose is to instill a sense of independence that they can learn and explore to make it work for them better.

All this requires strong and accountable leadership to set the expectation of technological competency from everyone. It is also necessary to give time and support for people to experiment and learn. A system only works effectively if everyone buys into it. Some baseline competency requirements are needed to make sure that things go smoothly. While it can be difficult and challenging to develop technological competencies for some individuals, their attempt to do so will only bolster productivity and free up time to focus on other things.

The biggest challenge is being comfortable enough with technology. If individuals are not comfortable, it will either take more time or they will not make the time and they rationalize it away by saying they do not have the time. This is where pressure must come intrinsically and extrinsically. Individuals should ask themselves, "By taking the time to think about how we use technology to make ourselves more efficient, will we save ourselves time? If we take the time to learn about upcoming technology and use them, will we enhance our ability to impart knowledge and share history?" Managers should give the time and emphasize the importance. Once they become comfortable and see the benefits, momentum should kick in. Showing immediate personal benefits also helps with buy-in.

My examples involve mostly internal usage of software, but discomfort with technology affects all aspects of technology usage within an institution. When people become more comfortable independently testing and imagining possibilities that would affect them and their team directly, they can do the same for technological experiences for their visitors.

We also have to challenge ourselves not to become resistant to new ideas and forms of technology as we age. We might find ourselves becoming uncomfortable and might lose the desire and/or ability to explore with the latest technology. So recurring training for everyone is necessary to look at new and trending technology experiences. We should also ask our community and visitors what they use so we can attempt to meet them where they are. We might not always be the leaders, but even keeping pace in this fast changing world is a huge accomplishment in this field!

Have you experienced similar issues of resistance to technology in your institution? What are some tactics that you have used to help push innovative technological practices and equipment when your colleagues or supervisors are uncomfortable and risk-averse when it comes to technology? How have you maintained standard technological competency within your group?

Casey Lee
Digitization and Collaboration – I work at the Tennessee Historical Commission/Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). For the most part, my colleagues reside in two very different generational brackets: the millennials and the baby boomers. In the last few years, my institution has experienced a lot of change as employees who had been with the state for thirty or more years have retired. With these retirements, an influx of millennials has filled these positions. Digitization has become a focus as a result, and the culture in the office is becoming more collaborative, but not without its growing pains. My office is behind in the acquisition and digitization of information and in our mapping/GIS work. Even when compared to other SHPOs across the country, (who experience similar time and budgetary concerns) we are behind. And the files and information we actually do have are scattered and housed with different federal programs within our office. As a new employee, it was very confusing how I would access information needed in order to do my job. After bringing the issue up multiple times with our direct supervisor (who already supported this initiative), and after she figuratively “went to the mat” for the project, we were finally approved to begin a scanning project, to create an electronic submission system, and to update our current GIS system. This is great news, and everyone in the office is supportive and understands the value of these projects. The issue becomes *how* we do these projects.

There is definitely a divide in the office as to how we start these projects and what the end result should be. I, along with other newer employees in the office, wish to work collaboratively and create a system that houses all of our information files in one place while working with our GIS and submission systems so that finding information is more intuitive. Others in the office either are supportive of the projects but are not directly involved, or they have a very specific way they wish the project to move forward that maintains their control over their program area and thus keeps them as a sort of gatekeeper for the information. The latter attitude stems from the way the office seems to have operated for the last thirty and more years. The different federal programs within the office operated separately, only collaborating when needed. This led to our office having approximately six different filing systems with no real way of knowing what we actually have in all the separate files. Before, this was less of concern because of the strong institutional memory of the employees who had worked here for years. Asking a colleague could get you the information you needed. Since those with the institutional memory have started to retire, we newbies often have no idea if we have information that could help us with projects. Therefore, those of us newer to the job (all of us Millennials) wish to have a system that helps us with our jobs, helps consultants who use our files, and helps anyone else who wishes to use our files for research. I do not want to disregard anyone’s opinion in the office because others have experiences that I do not. However, it is frustrating when it seems that the main reason for the discord in how to move forward is because of the proprietary nature of some who have worked here longer than others. I am interested if others have had similar experiences? If so, has there been a beneficial strategy used to help? I do not want to discount the work they have done because it is really impressive what they were able to do with the resources they had, but now we have an opportunity to move forward and build on their work while making it extremely more accessible. Accessibility was a key component of my recent grad school training and a way of life as I grew up as a Millennial with loads of information at my fingertips, so making our information accessible is important to me.

Advocacy – As many of you probably already know, Tennessee, or more specifically Memphis, has been involved in the press recently for its Confederate statues. This issue has been ongoing since before I even started, but gained more momentum after the events in Charlottesville. In an unexpected turn of events, the City of Memphis sold the two city parks that were home to these statues to a nonprofit, and the statues were removed that same night. This has caused even more controversy within the state. I work for the Tennessee Historical Commission which also houses the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). We operate both state and federal programs, but I deal only with the federal side. During my time here, I have gotten numerous calls and emails regarding the statues as have all of my colleagues. They call us because in all press about the statues, the Tennessee Historical Commission is listed as the organization with the power to decide whether or not a monument/statue can be moved. What they always fail to mention, is that the actual Commission is a board comprised of twenty-four Governor appointed members and five ex officio members. No one in our office has the power to do anything. Also, the board has to follow the Tennessee Heritage Protection Act, a state law that prohibits the removal, relocation, or renaming of a memorial that is, or is located on, public property. For the last year, the Commission has been trying to figure out how to even go about hearing cases concerning monuments/memorials and has been voting on rules of procedure. Since no rulings were made on actual removal, the Tennessee Historical Commission was seen as doing nothing, which inundated us with even more calls and emails.

I have a particular opinion on this issue, which I feel is shared by many in our field. As a state employee, I cannot have an official opinion, so when speaking with members of the public I have to explain the procedure that I detailed above. As such, I have been called names from members of the public on both sides, and our office even had to temporarily stop our Facebook activity because of the comments people were making on our posts. It is frustrating for me because I strongly believe in advocacy and my recent grad school education even promoted advocacy. As a millennial, I feel like it is somewhat my duty to be an advocate and to be outspoken on issues of civil and human rights as advocacy is so prevalent throughout our generation. And as a public historian, I desperately wanted to speak out on this issue from a history perspective as well. I have tried to personally be more active in advocacy since I cannot have an official stance. My colleagues, for the most part, seem to have accepted that this is part of the job. Some of them (mostly millennial-aged) are members of advocacy organizations outside of work. There seemed to be a feeling of relief in the office during the statue controversy that at least we did not have to get in the middle of this mess since we are not the actual Commission. And I will admit to some relief as well as it would have been hard to maintain the necessary state stance and since people were so volatile about the issue (one of our Commission meetings during the height of the debate had armed security and an armored vehicle, just in case). I also know we are doing good work in other ways by promoting minority histories, getting minority sites listed on the National Register, and encouraging these sites to apply for our preservation grants. There are just some things we are not allowed to do as state employees and as a state institution. I was wondering if others had similar experiences with advocacy whether in state offices or at other institutions, and how you dealt with it professionally and/or personally?

Nicolette Rohr
I was born in 1988, making me a good fifty years younger than many of the volunteers I have worked with and coordinated in public history settings. The people I have met and the experience of working with them has given me a lot of insight into the institutions we serve and inspired me, here at the beginning of my career, with their commitment and service. Aside from the occasional student, most volunteers at one of our local museums are baby boomers or older, often retired, and often of relative means. In addition, they are almost exclusively women. Many are friends, and they have a lot of memories as part of the museum and have contributed a great deal of time, money, energy, and love into making it a vibrant part of our city. In short, they are a fairly specific demographic, they have a lot of history and tradition (which is great!), and they have a lot of ownership and interest, and rightly so, and want things to be just so. There are a lot of positives to this, and it's that appreciation for history that got me involved in the first place. At the same time, the relative insularity of the group makes it difficult to grow and, of course, the "that's the way we've always done it" mentality makes any change difficult.

This seems compounded by a large generation gap, which I've observed in many volunteer settings, where active membership jumps a generation, so there hasn't been steady growth and gradual change but instead long-term members and traditions, and then us (so to speak). For a number of reasons—perhaps investment in community, lack of full time employment, changing conceptions of work, interest in and openness to a range of experiences—millennials seem more eager and able to get involved in community work and advocacy in a range of ways than many of our parents, making this moment of passing the baton more exciting and more perilous (that may be over dramatic, but what I mean is that there's a risk of losing a lot of what's been built, including entire organizations). I sense that most volunteers are at once energized by me and my colleagues and eager for our generation to carry on their work, while also being apprehensive or simply unclear about the ways we are going about it. This can be a frustrating intersection at times, where although we have similar commitments, our approaches, objectives, and sometimes, basic methods are unfamiliar (more on that later). From what I have observed, most members are aware that there need to be changes made in order to grow and continue into the future, including bringing in young people and people who represent our community's diversity. But how, and who will do it? In many cases, there's both an eagerness for change and a reluctance to make any actual changes. For instance, there are some social functions that are a part of each year that are fun but seem to make newcomers feel less welcome, more imposter syndrome. These are sensitive discussions, so I'm interested in what conversations need to happen and how to move them forward respectfully and productively. I think this sensitivity is heightened for me because I've pursued graduate study and public history work in my hometown and worked professionally with people I know personally.

It occurs to me that there may be some wisdom in these conversations in that although it may not always seem like it, all organizations have undergone some changes in the past, and learning more about when and how might offer lessons moving forward. I'm interested in how we can harness this history and use the past as an entry point for conversations about the future.

Social media

I mentioned *how* organizations change and grow as an area that can have different approaches across generations, and use of social media is one that comes to mind. We know that people of all generations use social media, but how they use it varies a great deal. For the volunteer organization I discussed above, a new social media chair has recently been added to the board and posts actively with the goal of growing the group's presence. Most communications are sent via email, although some members still prefer paper. I've made suggestions about a designated email account for the group, which materials are mailed, and publicizing some of the advocacy the group does, but for the most part I meet the "that's the way we've always done it" mentality. Another museum where I worked in collections (not communications…), has a Facebook account, but nearly every post has some grammatical error, missing information, confusing messaging, references a photo that isn't there, or was even intended for a personal account and not the page – it seemed that no one could tell the volunteer who had taken it on that she couldn't be the admin anymore. In another institution (you may notice that I'll have some comments to add to the discussions of side hustles and being overextended!), there are regular conversations about advertisements in the paper, deadlines for the paper, etc. I still read print newspapers, and I love the paper, but I struggled to explain that this energy and expense was misplaced. Advertisements in the paper are expensive and might not reach those young families everyone hopes will come. There's an aura of disappointment when the event does not go as well as expected – why didn't more people show up? And there I am, chiming in, "I think if we reached out to…" (Thankfully, I was able to report that the people who attended for the first time found out about the event on social media). I've taken over admin duties for three local organizations, and I try to count my "baby steps" in growing and promoting them, and not be overwhelmed by everything I'd like to be different. Needless to say the types of situations I'm describing here involve a lot of volunteers and do not include coordinated media strategies, but they speak to differences across generations in different uses and conceptions of social media. We have had two social media trainings, but I'm not sure how effective they were, and now there seems to be different tiers of how people receive information and what information.

Savannah Rose
<u>Breaking Stereotypes and Pushing Boundaries</u>

When you Google the phrase: "Millennials are…" you get an array of suggested words and statements to finish the search including, but not limited to: "lazy," "idiots," and "have a bad work ethic." These are some of the stereotypes that face millennials in any and all work environments, but those in public history face them on a broader stage, attempting to present the nation's past to those who use those stereotypes against us. I have worked in some capacity at Gettysburg National Military Park for roughly four years, beginning as a volunteer while attending undergraduate studies at Gettysburg College before moving to the position of "intern" the summer before my senior year. I became a seasonal employee of the National Park Service in the summer between my undergraduate graduation and beginning graduate school, finally putting on the green and grey uniform before heading out to the field. However, I do not know which uniform subjected me to more millennial stereotype induced taunting and patronizing comments, the one designating me as an intern or as a park ranger.

Since I was an intern, I have been giving an interpretive program at the Soldiers' National Cemetery, the final stop on the Gettysburg auto-tour. Many of the more established rangers speak to the valor of the men who died or the eloquence of President Abraham Lincoln's address given there, but I decided to take a new approach. My theme was of the price of freedom, how thousands of men died to end slavery and earn the freedom of millions of slaves. I began my program, not at the creation of the cemetery or even the Battle of Gettysburg like many others did, but instead at the Emancipation Proclamation. Unsurprisingly, I have faced backlash from many visitors who want to hear about the three days of Civil War combat or only wish to see the spot where Lincoln delivered the address. Many of these complaints have primarily come from older male visitors, who have a specific notion of what rangers should discuss.

"You're too young to be doing this." "History is a man's field, woman should work in the archives." "Why do you think I'd want to hear this progressive stuff? Tell me what I want to hear." I have heard all of these statements, and more, on my job as visitors look down upon me for being a young woman in the field of public history. While most of my visitors do not mind engaging with the tough questions behind the Civil War, there are some who do not wish to engage with them, either walking away or approaching me afterwards. While engaging in these encounters, more times than not the visitor will comment on my young age and gender, but I have continued to ask these questions of my visitors. Our interns do the same, refusing to shy away from asking these questions regardless of the pushback from some of the visitors they interact with. These are the types of tools millennials need to have in their arsenal in order to effectively work in public history.

It can be difficult to navigate through my career as a public historian at this age and sex as I try to break down the stereotypes that are attached to millennials. Working as a millennial in public history, I found that a lot of visitors look down upon me or question my authority as a park ranger and historian. I also have a problem establishing my authority as a historian and ranger among my co-workers, where I am the youngest and in many cases the interns are older than I am. This is a problem in public history, millennials trying to establish their authority and push against the stereotypes that are attached to our generation. We try to show visitor, coworkers, and superiors that we are not the "typical millennial" that they think of, but being a millennial is not bad for we are the next generation charged with interpreting our nation's history. An issue we face is establishing our authority in our profession against the stereotypes that plague us based on our age. My question is, what can we do to push the boundaries and break these stereotypes all the while establishing our authority as professional historians?

<u>Balancing the Present and the Future:</u>

I was inspired by some of the other posts by my peers and began to think about how I balance my life as a graduate student, graduate assistant, and a National Park Service Ranger. I take three classes for graduate school, which needs no explanation for its workload, and work twenty hours a week at my job at the university's archive. Aside from that, I balance my seasonal job as a park ranger, though most of the time these two aspects of my life do not intersect. My park job is mostly during the summer; however, many aspects do run through my academic year. I go through my life as a graduate student and think about why I came to graduate school to begin with. When I was nearing my graduation from Gettysburg College, I was thinking about either going to graduate school or entering the workforce as I was growing tired of the academic life

Many of my advisors and friends have told me that I needed to go to graduate school if I wanted any chance of getting a job. My senior year of undergraduate school was not the first time I had heard this. Whenever I visit family or friends back home in New Hampshire, people ask me my major and what I was doing at the time. My answer of "public history" never seemed to thrill them as they would always respond with: "Oh well, I hope you never want a job. That's more of a hobby." This all got my thinking about my future and the jobs that would be available to me by the time I got past graduation. My dream is to work for the National Park Service, which is very difficult to get in and find a full-time job, but people continue to tell me that it will be hard to find any job in history.

I fear trying to find a job, and attempt to balance my present to prepare for my future. I'm told that it will be difficult to find a job, and I don't doubt it. This is something I see many other millennials attempting to balance, working in the present for the future. We are told, even by our graduate professors, that jobs are scarce, especially for our generation. The future for millennials in public history seems bright, but the reality may prove more difficult as jobs are becoming harder to find. Many of my peers in my graduate program fear their post-graduation life, as they begin to worry about the lack of jobs there seems to be in the field of public history. There was a time when receiving a Bachelors was enough, but now many millennials are attending graduate school to get the jobs we want. We work and balance our lives in school, work, and more all in hopes that we will find a job that might not be there when we go looking. Of course, this issue plagues all generations, but millennials face an issue finding the jobs that we have prepared ourselves for. This will not stop us from working towards our goals and dreams, but I wonder how can we as millennials prepare ourselves for the job market?