



# Call for Working Group Discussants

## NCPH 2023 Annual Meeting

### April 12-15, 2023 | Atlanta, Georgia

#### What are NCPH Working Groups?

Working groups, involving up to five 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. They aim to create an end product, such as a report, article, website, or exhibition. In addition to virtual work between November 2022 and April 2023, our working groups will meet in-person in Atlanta during the conference on April 12-15 to present their work to attendees. In Atlanta, working groups will be a major component of the breakout schedule. If you plan to attend the conference, we encourage you to consider joining a working group to get the most out of your conference experience.

Your working group discussant application is due Friday, October 28, 2022.

#### 2023 Working Groups

For 2023, the following twelve groups are seeking discussants:

1. American Girl Dolls and Public History
2. Decolonizing through Public History: An International Discussion
3. Developing Partnerships and Teaching Cultural Heritage and Heritage Tourism in the University Classroom
4. Empowering the Public History Workplace: Information, Advocacy, and Collective Power
5. Facilitating Difficult Conversations in an Age of Political Polarization
6. Five Year Combined BA/MA in Public History
7. Lincoln Reimagined
8. Processing, Interpreting, and Healing from Historical Trauma
9. Rethinking Black Museums in the Era of Black Lives Matter
10. Toward a Statement of Principles for Activist Public History
11. Uniting Public History and End of Life Care
12. World War II Home Front NPS Working Group, Part 2

To apply to join one of these working groups, please [fill out the form](#) describing the issues you wish to raise with your peers, together with a one-page resume, CV, or biographical statement, by October 28, 2022. 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.

## Expectations

This fall the group facilitators will ask discussants to contribute a 500-1,000-word case statement. The case statement will describe a discussant's particular experience with the topic of the working group, define the issues this experience raises, and suggest strategies and/or goals for resolution. Case statements will be circulated among group participants and posted to the NCPH website. Discussants are expected to read and provide written comments 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 or may choose to open up case statements for wider public input. Discussants for working groups should plan to meet in person next April at the National Council on Public History's annual meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.

## To apply

Please fill out the [discussant application form](#), making sure to select which working group you are applying to join. (You may apply to participate in a working group whether or not you are participating in another presentation or session. You may apply for only one working group.) All working group discussants are expected to register and pay for the annual meeting within six weeks of acceptance.

**Apply at <http://ncph.org/conference/working-group-discussant-application/>**

## About the 2023 Working Groups

### 1. American Girl Dolls and Public History

**Facilitators:** Holly Genovese, University of Texas at Austin  
Rebecca Brenner Graham, The Madeira School  
KC Hysmith, UNC Chapel Hill  
Vanessa Salo, Alexandria Library  
Emily Wells, William & Mary

For nearly four decades, American Girl has played a powerful role in the realm of public history. Interactions with the company's twenty-two historical dolls prompt children and adults alike to forge intellectual, emotional, and sensory connections with the past. However, the company has dealt with a number of critiques, ranging from concerns about representation (such as the lack of diverse characters and their approach to the issues of slavery and colonization) to matters of accessibility (most notably the high price-point of American Girl dolls and their accessories). This working group will examine American Girl dolls and books as public history, both in the context of individual households and public institutions. We also aim to expand our understanding of what public history means in the context of American Girl, turning to the resurgent popularity of these dolls in online spaces, from podcasts to queer meme accounts.

We seek any and all discussants interested in American Girl Dolls as public history broadly. We are interested in discussants who work as professional public historians, who work in academia but also teachers, librarians, doll collectors, content creators, journalists, and writers. Importantly, we hope to include discussants who are interested in the intersection of American Girl Dolls with race, queer studies,

and disability studies. If possible, we would love discussants with access to bring their doll, books, or accessories.

Our largest goal is to develop an anthology or edited collection focusing on American Girl dolls and their significance to public history, material culture, K-12 education, and to gender and history. We would also be interested in developing a series of shorter articles for *History@Work* or another appropriate online venue. Finally, we are interested in creating and disseminating a survey focused on the correlation between childhood interest in American Girl and future careers in public history, libraries, and education.

## 2. Decolonizing through Public History: An International Discussion

**Facilitators:** Juniele Almeida, Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF - Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Thomas Cauvin, University of Luxembourg

Noor Nieftagodien, University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa)

Krista McCracken, Algoma University, Canada

Based on participatory framework and shared authority, public history, both locally and internationally, has the potential to challenge Western and colonial practices and understandings of the past. How inclusive are public history projects and are they reproducing dominant narratives? Inspired by discussions on cultural institutions (museums and archives), public space (colonial monuments), and power, the participants of the working group explore the needs, the meanings, and the different practices to decolonizing through public history. Topics include debates on who can interpret the past, where public history is performed and practiced, and how it can be mobilized for/by under-represented communities. In line with the increased internationalization of public history, we propose a working group composed of participants coming from different parts of the world and from different backgrounds (university, archives, museums, and community groups) to explore how public history can contribute to decolonizing minds, practices, and systems of interpretation. With case studies from different parts of the world, the group wants to explore how public history can contribute to decolonizing minds, practices, and systems of interpretation.

- Topics

What and how to decolonize minds and practices has different meanings around the world. We therefore propose to tackle three main issues. First, we intend to discuss Western colonial approaches in international public history. Often considered as being born in the United States, public history developed through Western – and often English-speaking – networks (North America, Western Europe, Australia). Led by Noor Nieftagodien, the group aims at opening up international public history to the Global South. With participants from Latin America, Africa, and Asia, we want to explore how different understandings of public history could enrich, decenter, and decolonize international public history. This invites a reconsideration of the Western focus on universities as privileged sites of production (especially in countries where universities are either scarce and/or associated with colonial powers). Based on several case studies, the second issue of the working group questions how participatory public history can contribute to more broadly decolonizing historical practices. Led by Krista McCracken, the group will discuss specific practices in archives and museums and how they could be applied more generally to the field. Does decolonizing through public history imply reconsidering what is considered a source (oral

traditions and visual arts) and whose groups the sources are coming from? Finally, inspired by Juniele Rabêlo de Almeida and the Brazilian context, the working group will question how public history can generate decolonizing actions to challenge political and social colonial structures. Practicing public history can be an activist process to fight authoritarian colonial oppression.

- Tasks

We consider this working group a multiple-step contribution to the long and ongoing decolonization of the public history process. Pending approbation from the additional participants who will join, we propose three outputs.

- First, the working group will be the preliminary step in the creation of an international network of practitioners who aim at decolonizing public history.
- Second, each participant will write a report that presents their approach as well as one case study to decolonize public history. Those (up to 12) reports will be accessible online by the time the working group takes place in April 2023.
- The third output will be an open peer-reviewed list of international good practices to decolonize the field. Elaborated by the working group, this document will be accessible for comment online after the group meets in Atlanta.

Finally, we intend to submit for publication a special issue on Decolonizing Public History in an academic journal (either *The Public Historian* or *International Public History*).

- Additional participants

Facilitated by Thomas Cauvin (Luxembourg), the working group is looking for additional participants. We are especially eager to enlarge our group to community practitioners who challenge colonial narratives and/or structures in North America and additional international participants from Asia and Africa to discuss the challenges of decolonizing public history.

### 3. Developing Partnerships and Teaching Cultural Heritage and Heritage Tourism in the University Classroom

**Facilitators:** Sandra I. Enríquez, University of Missouri--Kansas City  
Shannon Murray, Calgary Stampede  
Katrina Phillips, Macalester College, St. Paul, MN  
Lindsey Wieck, St. Mary's University

In this working group, participants will consider how public history (PH) pedagogy is changing in the 2020s. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we stretched our bounds as we adopted more flexible ways of teaching, facilitating community partnerships, and organizing internships. In this working group, we'll discuss topics including:

- How do we form meaningful relationships with organizations?
- How do we adapt partnerships with organizations that faced dramatic cutbacks during the pandemic?
- How do we provide opportunities for students to get experience (particularly in the Heritage Tourism sector)?

- What are the challenges of teaching cultural heritage and heritage tourism in the classroom?
- How is this teaching changing as we transition out of phases of pandemic lockdown?
- What ethical concerns do you have teaching students and preparing them for a field in which jobs are limited?
- How are the ethics of the tourist experience changing in the post-pandemic world? Are concepts of voice and “authenticity” also evolving? How does this impact partnerships between tourism entities and universities?
- As our world maintains virtual and hybrid options (both in the classroom and the cultural heritage/heritage tourism sectors), how does that change how we create these opportunities for students to get experience in this field?

Not only is the environment of interactions changing, but so too is the employment market. The pandemic contracted the PH world. Museums, in particular, shrank and recent surveys show that they won't be hiring back for a few years. Given the already competitive market for PH grads, Heritage/Cultural Tourism is a sector that could be incorporated more into student training. Studies show that post-pandemic, pent up demand for tourism will reignite the tourism industry from its 16-month+ dormancy. How do we prepare students to participate in this sector growth? This working group will aim to build and strengthen partnerships between universities and heritage/cultural tourism organizations, building on the opportunities available as sites reopen.

In this working group, we seek discussants who teach public history in university settings, as well as those working in heritage and cultural tourism industries. More specifically, we hope to engage:

- Professors looking to better understand how to create and grow partnerships with cultural/heritage tourism organizations and sites, especially in this changing landscape of the 2020s.
- Those in heritage/cultural tourism who have created successful partnerships or who want to work on creating partnerships with university partners, especially those that want to reflect on how transitions between virtual/hybrid/in-person interactions are shifting these relationships.

#### 4. Empowering the Public History Workplace: Information, Advocacy, and Collective Power

**Facilitators:** Alena Pirok, Georgia Southern University  
Andrew Urban, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

Considering the wave of COVID-19 layoffs and the growing effort among art museum employees through efforts like Art/Museums Salary Transparency 2019 to speak honestly and openly about pay and other workplace issues, this working group seeks to provide the public history community with the tools they need to discuss, understand, and organize for workplace improvements.

This group will examine reports and surveys that address pay and working conditions at public history sites, discuss ways to circulate this data more easily, explore ways public history workers can share organizing strategies, and build coalitions across workplaces.

We hope this group serves as a launching pad for online forums, Slack groups, and future conferences, where workers from a range of history museums and historic sites, as well as faculty and students, can

converge to discuss organizing tactics, collective bargaining strategies, and ideas about how workers at different institutions might join together as allies.

We would like to recruit museum and historic site professionals who have successfully participated in unionization efforts, and those who are in the process of working toward this goal, to join the working group. The conference meeting will bring these experienced professionals and interested participants together to discuss, and practice through role play activities, how to raise the issue of pay in interviews and conversations with colleagues, learn how to access resources and legal protections in instances where working conditions prove dangerous or substandard, and help faculty members explore how to be allies to these and other causes.

Our goals for this working group are to create easily accessible resources for the public history community, and to use the conference to empower public history practitioners to successfully advocate for themselves and their colleagues to bring about desired changes in pay, safety, workplace culture, and beyond. We hope that the working group will help public history practitioners more confidently advocate for themselves and their colleagues, aid faculty teaching courses in public history more easily engage, on an empirical basis, with the political economy of the industry that they are training students to join, and illustrate to grant funding agencies, governing boards, and management the value and potential of their public history employees.

Finally, the facilitators of this working group anticipate that the conversations that occur, and the relationships formed between participants, will provide a foundation for eventually guest editing a special issue of *The Public Historian* on work and public history.

## 5. Facilitating Difficult Conversations In an Age of Political Polarization

**Facilitator:** Erin Battat, Wellesley College

Public historians play a crucial role in the ongoing reckoning with the legacies of slavery and colonialism in the United States. By confronting these troubling, often hidden, or obscured aspects of the past, communities can begin to recognize the roots of present-day inequities and forge a better future for everyone. But how do we engage our communities in difficult conversations about the past without falling prey to the political polarization that so often shuts these conversations down? This working group will develop a case-study handbook of best practices for facilitating dialogue that welcomes multiple viewpoints, resists cancel culture, and fosters learning and growth.

Over the past decade, the relentless onslaught of racialized police violence, hate crimes, gender-based violence, and other overt manifestations of white patriarchal supremacy have prompted a historical reckoning in the United States. Perhaps the most prominent of these initiatives is *The New York Times'* 1619 Project, which aims to place slavery and the freedom struggle of Black Americans at the center of the national narrative. While this extraordinary series of essays, podcasts, and curricular materials has transformed the historical understanding of many audiences, it has also sparked backlash that elucidates the challenges of public history in a moment of extreme political polarization. How can we as public historians facilitate conversations about the past that welcome multiple, often emotionally and politically charged, viewpoints? How do we encourage people to look at the darker sides of United States history in a way that prompts a sense of purpose rather than shame, defensiveness, and despair? How do we avoid doing harm to marginalized communities who may be re-traumatized or alienated by these

conversations? How do we create spaces where people aren't afraid of "saying the wrong thing?" How do we balance histories of violence and trauma with histories of joy and resilience?

These challenges of inclusive dialog are central to three intersecting goals in the field of public history: centering marginalized voices, cultivating an informed citizenry, and accessibility. As Phoebe Stein of the Federation of State Humanities Councils recently remarked, "democracy demands vision and wisdom in its citizens." These goals sometimes work in concert: As historical narratives expand to include the experiences of BIPOC communities and other marginalized groups, they shed light on present-day inequities and attract under-represented audiences. Yet these goals conflict when marginalized communities do not feel safe and when white audiences expect histories that are patriotic and self-affirming, especially when encountering public history in a recreational context. How do we cultivate "vision and wisdom" in our communities that are often deeply divided about the past? How do we draw people in, spark curiosity, and build on humans' love of play without replicating incomplete celebratory narratives?

This working group invites discussants who want to foster inclusive public dialog about contested histories. Projects do not need to be focused on histories of race and racism, but may include any topic that invites different or conflicting points of view. Discussants should be willing to share ethical or theoretical approaches, concrete strategies and case studies, and constructive feedback.

The goal of this working group is to develop a handbook of best practices for promoting inclusive public dialog on historical topics that tend to be controversial in this moment of political polarization. This handbook will include sections on ethical and theoretical approaches, practical strategies and activities, templates for evaluation, and a bibliography for further reading. It will be published as a website that can be updated, expanded, and shared.

## 6. Five Year Combined BA/MA in Public History

**Facilitators:** Andrea Burns, Appalachian State University  
Cheryl Dong, Bowling Green State University  
Rebecca Shrum, IUPUI  
Jessie Swigger, Western Carolina University

History departments at colleges and universities are beginning to consider whether a combined BA/MA in Public History might be a degree that would work well for their students and faculty. The combined BA/MA enables a student to graduate in 5 years. This working group will be led by faculty members whose departments have begun to offer this combined degree. We will explore how best to use this degree to train students in the field of public history. The working group is open to anyone whose college or university is already offering a combined BA/MA in public history or who is interested in pursuing the establishment of this degree at their own college or university.

This working group will dedicate itself to these core issues and questions:

1. What are the logistical considerations that need to be taken into account for departments considering offering the combined BA/MA in Public History? (e.g., coursework, internships, scaffolding of theories, skills, methodologies)



2. Are there ethical considerations that history departments need to consider before embarking on a combined BA/MA? (e.g., does the quality of training change? Does preparation for future jobs change? does it matter that a student will be trained for the BA and the MA at only one institution, instead of doing what many students do now which is to be trained for the BA at a different institution than for the MA?)
3. What is gained by condensing a 6-year degree into a 5-year degree? What is lost? For students? For faculty? For future employers?
4. Is a model emerging for both 3 +2 degrees and 4+ 1 degrees (3+2 = 3 years of BA/2 years of MA; 4+1 = 4 years of BA/1 year of MA), or are history departments choosing one over the other? If so, why? If both are being deployed, what are the core differences between these two different combined BA/MA paths?
5. What guidance could this working group develop (e.g., a white paper) for future public history faculty considering this for their own university or college?

## 7. Lincoln Reimagined

**Facilitators:** Devin Hunter, University of Illinois Springfield  
Timothy Townsend, Lincoln Home National Historic Site

This working group follows up a two-day Lincoln Home Symposium hosted by NCPH, University of Illinois Springfield, and the Lincoln Home National Historic Site in October 2022 (further details will become available after the Symposium concludes). That event focuses on the Lincoln Home National Historic site, using the space as a learning lab to think more broadly about interpretation, preservation, and community engagement at a changing urban National Historic Site that seeks to be relevant to its community. Moving forward the work done at the Symposium by presenters and attendees alike, this working group hopes to bring together public historians who work at sites or on projects related to Abraham Lincoln, his time, and his legacy. We focus on the need to re-evaluate and revise approaches to 'great man history' in light of contemporary issues of diversity, equity, and relevance.

In this working group, participants will consider:

- The importance of place to the presentation of the story
- How place and associated resources are preserved, restored, and presented
- How we reframe and expand traditional narratives to be more relevant to today's audiences

Participants will be invited to join periodic virtual conversations around these subjects. By April 2023 we hope to present and discuss preliminary findings, questions, challenges, and opportunities, and consider where this conversation should head next.

## 8. Processing, Interpreting, and Healing from Historical Trauma

**Facilitators:** Elijah Gaddis, Auburn University  
Keena Graham, Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument  
Anne Mitchell Whisnant, Duke University

This working group seeks to build upon recent trends within our field that see public history practitioners pushed further into ever more complex topics of history and more sensitive forms of interpretation.



Indeed, scholars have pointed to the emotional labor of front line practitioners, likening them to other service sector employees whose jobs require affective shifts to meet the demands of their visitors. We have in mind an even more demanding type of work, where public historians are often expected to act as educators around race, interlocutors for issues of racial and social justice, or even de-facto therapists for traumatized visitors. At sites like the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home in Jackson, MS, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, AL, the Flight 93 Memorial in Shanksville, PA, or the Little Bighorn National Monument in Crow Agency, MT, public historians are working with a great deal of knowledge and empathy, but without best practices for trauma-informed historical interpretation. Prior models of interpretive practice seem inadequate to the work of these sites.

The issue of interpreting and accounting for historical trauma is a broad one that ultimately will require significant shifts in training and support. This working group will convene with the intention of establishing an initial body of questions, collection of resources, and preliminary repository of resources. These initial guidelines will, we hope, aid both professionals and visitors dealing with the traumas of the past right now. This work also necessarily builds upon an important, ongoing commitment for these sites of trauma to remediate the effects of institutionalized racism, imperialism, and colonization. We feel that this work is particularly vital within a changing profession. As we seek to do more and tell fuller stories of the past, we have also to equip ourselves with an ethic of care that will help us process the traumas of history.

Because of the broad nature of historical trauma and its manifestations in historic places, we will structure our activities around several organizing questions.

- How can we recognize and respond to signs of trauma among co-workers, visitors, vendors, neighbors or others who encounter our sites?
- How can we create support networks that help public historians prepare to cope with the psychological burdens of interpreting historical trauma?
- What resources do those experiencing the impact of historical trauma need? What is the role of public historians in the process of healing?
- How can we better train public historians--aspiring and practicing--to contend with historical trauma?

We anticipate a working group with a range of professional experiences and positions. Like many other working groups in the past, we hope that this will also be just the first step in a much longer conversation and set of transformative practices.

## 9. Rethinking Black Museums in the Era of Black Lives Matter

**Facilitators:** Ashley Bouknight-Claybrooks, American Association for State and Local History  
Yvonne Therese Holden, The Whitney Plantation  
Jennifer Scott, Urban Civil Rights Museum, National Urban League  
Janera Solomon, writer, independent curator, and cultural strategist

In her book *Negro Building* (2012), architectural scholar Mabel O. Wilson describes the emergence of black museums in the 1960s as a unique blending of 1940s left radicalism and 1960s black nationalism that recombined to address the Civil Rights Era. These fledgling museums with enormous promise utilized exciting frameworks that were shaped by nuanced ideas of blackness and identity evolving

during this time. They demonstrated a sharp departure from 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas of progress best articulated by historian W.E.B. DuBois, and a decisive move towards 20<sup>th</sup> century influences of Pan-Africanism, Negritude, cultural nationalism, and anti-imperialism.

Grassroots black history museums that began at this time, such as the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago (1961), the Museum of African American History in Boston (1963), and the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit (1965) were explicit about their goals. Beyond 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas of elevating black pride and encouraging self-improvement, they intended to reject erasures and dispel myths of black communities, show evidence of black contributions, detail enslavement and other oppressions, and present black history as locally, nationally, and globally relevant. They were acutely aware of anti-black structural racism and how it restricted access and power. The founders wanted these museums to serve as monuments to local and global black freedom struggles against racial oppression and to participate as agents of that change. Ahead of their time, they were diasporic, socially engaged, activist, community-centered, and inclusive.

They, indeed, paved the way for the opening of the long-awaited Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in Washington DC (2016). In anticipation, *The Public Historian* journal planned a thoughtful reflection on the "State of Black Museums" with a dedicated issue exploring the history of black museums, their leadership, the growth of the field, and several case studies (2018). It built upon prior important work such as Andrea Burns' volume *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of Black Museum Movement* (2013). Now, almost six years since NMAAHC's opening, we have experienced a global pandemic, accelerated civic unrest, and social protest, triggered by a series of brutal murders of black people and other injustices. It is an important time for black museum scholars and practitioners to build collectively upon these discussions.

Considering their powerful grassroots and activist histories, how can we think about black museums in the era of Black Lives Matter and in the age of a national black museum? Is it possible to situate black museums historically and uniquely 'in their own right,' not as past 'rehearsals' for a larger national museum? In the age of DEAI, where museums nationally and globally are being called to task for failing in areas that black museums addressed more than 60 years ago, how do we recognize and advance the work that black museums already have done in these areas? What can we learn from the tremendous history of community engagement of black museums as to what is possible for them and for all museums?

The facilitators of this working group have collectively worked almost 40 years with a range of black museums, from historic houses to art museums to historic plantation sites in a variety of cities and states across the Midwest, West Coast, Southern states, and Northeast regions. Some of these institutions were start-ups, while others were more established or are beginning to go through a strategic planning process and other major transformations to refine their missions and structures. They include the August Wilson Center in Pittsburgh; NMAAHC in Washington, DC; Museum of the African Diaspora (MOAD) in San Francisco; Whitney Plantation in Edgard, Louisiana; Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn, New York; and the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, Michigan. We have worked with these museums in a variety of roles, as directors, educators, interpreters, curators, fundraisers, consultants, advocates, volunteers, and more.

Our intention is to build upon our extensive professional experience and theoretical knowledge with other colleagues who are grappling with similar issues. We want to connect with those who are attempting to re-imagine black museums and to realize their possibilities in the present moment and in

future, while considering their long historic pasts of community engagement, activism, and grassroots organizing.

Working group goals are:

- To bring together black museum scholars and practitioners to collectively explore the history of black museums and help to situate them in relationship to the current era of Black Lives Matter, DEAI, and the opening of a black national museum and other new black history sites;
- To create case statements and an online public discussion prior to the 2020 conference using the NCPH format/tool;
- To host at least one zoom brainstorming meeting among working group members to plan for 2023 conference meeting and discussion;
- To host an in-person discussion at the 2023 conference with working group members that presents and discusses various (and often overshadowed) case studies which engage both the histories and the futures of black museums, identifying prominent themes and making links across studies to think about the possibilities of the future;
- To create a blog with edited case studies and analyses of specific black history museums in relationship to the present time and future goals. (We would want to make these publicly available and would be especially interested in working with NCPH to see if we could partner through the organization's blog or through other platforms).
- We would also like to consider, depending upon capacity, an ongoing discussion on this topic through a podcast, but we plan to begin with a blog.

## 10. Toward a Statement of Principles for Activist Public History

**Facilitators:** Richard Anderson, Moravian University

Cathy Gudis, University of California - Riverside

Iara Kelland, University of Missouri - St Louis

Kristyn Scorsone, Rutgers University - Newark

Daniel Vivian, University of Kentucky

"The Limits of Public History," a structured conversation held at the 2022 NCPH virtual meeting, explored questions about public history's ability to serve as an agent of social and political change. Although many practitioners see shared investigation of the past as a vehicle for community empowerment and advancing social justice, recent events have raised questions about the effectiveness of such efforts and their potential to achieve meaningful outcomes. The session produced a lively exchange of ideas and perspectives and attracted a large audience, many of whom expressed a desire for extended dialogue. Afterward, several participants discussed opportunities for continuing the conversation and beginning work toward tangible outcomes. This working group is the result of these discussions. Moving forward, we seek to develop a statement of principles and a set of best practices to guide practitioners undertaking activist public history projects that balance multiple perspectives, employ evidence-based factual interpretation, and are committed to justice and equity for all.

Deepening divisions in American society and culture have presented public historians with new challenges, new perils, and new opportunities. *The New York Times'* "The1619 Project," debates over critical race theory, and the recent Supreme Court decision in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case, to name only a few examples, have sparked fervent interest in the past while causing

other Americans to steel themselves against it. While public historians have long recognized that “doing history in public” is necessarily fraught, the polarization of American society and culture has raised the stakes for many projects and increased the likelihood of backlash.

Amid these circumstances, practitioners need a well-vetted statement of principles and a set of best practices. The proposed working group will develop a statement of principles and a set of best practices by considering the experiences of participants, reviewing liberatory education practices, and examining projects that have tackled controversial topics and achieved demonstrable success. The working group will prioritize projects that combined historical interpretation and audience engagement and those that effectively negotiated divergent viewpoints among community members. The working group will strive to create a framework for defining the tangible outcomes of a project and working within the capacities of the project team or sponsoring organization. In addition, the working group will consider when historical interpretation and education are weak vehicles for addressing contemporary forms of injustice and consider guidance relating to other forms of activism. In this sense, the working group will continue mining the questions that inspired last year’s structured conversation by weighing the strengths and value of public history against its limitations.

We aim to produce (1) a statement of principles, and (2) identify best practices for activist public history projects.

## 11. Uniting Public History and End of Life Care

**Facilitators:** Marla Miller, University of Massachusetts-Amherst  
Sara Jane Ruggles, Auburn Crest Hospice

This working group, which seeks to consider how public historians might more actively contribute to end of life care, grows out of conversations launched at the 2022 NCPH meeting, at which Sara Jane Ruggles shared her experience working as a public historian for Auburn Crest Hospice in north Idaho. At that conference and in the months since, a number of public historians—motivated by professional expertise, personal and family encounters at the intersection of public history and aging, and other observations and experiences prompted by developments in oral history, museum practice, and even virtual reality—have begun to gather for conversation among themselves and with geriatric caregivers to share experiences and insight, read and learn about related work in adjacent fields (including gerontology, nursing, and health sciences), and discuss ways that public history practice might support hospice and elder care work. Ultimately the working group seeks to build a foundation from which we can help more public historians bring their skills into the healthcare world.

In this working group, participants will consider

- How do we begin laying groundwork for interdisciplinary collaboration among public historians and healthcare workers? What is already happening in healthcare spaces, and what do public historians need to learn to join those conversations?
- How do we define the work we are attempting to do and make the case for its importance, to public historians and healthcare workers alike? Put another way, what contribution(s) might public history have to make?

- What scholarship currently exists and what research is being conducted to better understand how oral history, life review and reminiscence, and/or encounters with historic artifacts, spaces, or landscapes, improve cognitive and emotional health for people at the end of life?
- What are the most productive ways to gather and disseminate research findings in order to move forward?

Participants will be invited to join monthly conversations around these subjects. By April 2023 we hope to present and discuss preliminary findings, questions, challenges, and opportunities, and consider where this conversation should head next.

In addition to public historians, we are hoping to identify colleagues in fields like gerontology and psychology, as well as eldercare workers, palliative and hospice workers, and other medical professionals, who are interested in these subjects.

## 12. World War II Home Front, Part II

**Facilitators:** Allena Berry, University School of Nashville  
Suzanne Fischer, Exhibit Coach LLC

Many National Park Service (NPS) and other historic sites tell stories of the American World War II home front, stories that include those of the new industrial workers who made wartime production possible, the building of the atomic bomb, and the Japanese American incarceration experience. As the home front experience passes out of living memory, what new opportunities open up for interpretation? What challenges could these new interpretive opportunities present for NPS and other historic sites? What interpretive techniques could help tell these expanded stories? As part of a suite of projects dedicated to the home front, the National Council on Public History invites you to join a diverse set of individuals coming from NPS sites, academic institutions, and other museum and interpretive professionals in a working group to discuss new opportunities for helping the public engage with these familiar and not-so-familiar stories. This working group is entering its second year of collaboration and discussion, and the results of our first year together can be found in the summary on [page 6 of the September issue of Public History News](#).

In our second year of the working group, we want to focus our attention on workshopping member-initiated quandaries based on their interpretive work of WWII home fronts.

We would have three to four meetings in advance of our meeting during the NCPH conference. In each of these meetings, we would like to discuss a theme of particular relevance to the participants. We would ask that in preparation for these meetings, participants bring an anecdote, artifact, or question that relates to the theme for us to have materials to collectively think with. Possible themes for our second year include:

1. Possibilities and challenges for engaging visitors around oral histories that complicate commonplace narratives of a singular WWII home front;
2. How to move within and beyond celebratory narratives of scientific innovation on WWII home fronts; and
3. Possibilities and challenges of collaboration between NPS and non-NPS sites on specific interpretive programs.

If you are interested in collaborating and thinking with others during focused meetings, we would love to have you join us. We ask that participants have the capacity to:

- Write a case statement about why you would like to participate in this working group. In particular, we would like you to consider the possible themes mentioned above and how they relate to your current work (either in practice or as a researcher) and/or propose new themes that you might consider to be generative for this group;
- If selected to participate, read colleagues' case statements; and
- Show up to our meetings ready to engage and discuss those statements.

In this second year of a three-year working group, we are delighted to welcome back all current participants and to welcome in new participants with different perspectives. We are excited to continue our discussions, and are looking forward to hearing from multiple voices from multiple sites.