



Call for Working Group Discussants
2018 NCPH Annual Meeting
Las Vegas, Nevada
April 18-21, 2018

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 2018, eight working groups are assembling:

1. Insider/Outsider: Racial Bias and Positionality in Interpretation
2. Disrupting Institutional Power: Imagining a Regional Model for Public History Education
3. La Frontera: Public History on the Borderlands
4. Negotiating Power Lines: Economic Justice and the Ethics of Public History
5. Agriculture and Public History
6. Crossing the Line: Facilitating Digital Access to Primary Sources
7. Millennials as Change-Makers: The Power Lines between Generations in Public History Institutions
8. The Public History of Labor

To join a working group, 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 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.

Expectations: This winter the group facilitators will ask participants to contribute a 500-1,000 word case statement for discussion. The case statement will describe a participant's particular experience, define the issues it raises, and suggest strategies and/or goals for resolution. Case statements will be circulated among participants by email and posted to 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 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 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.

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

1. Insider/Outsider: Racial Bias and Positionality in Interpretation

Facilitators: Shakti Castro, Independent Scholar
Patrice Green, University of South Carolina
GVGK Tang, Temple University

Who gets to do what kind of work? Public historians must engage the ethics of occupying/interpreting spaces to which we do not belong. In a “top-down” approach, practitioners pave the way for disenfranchised populations to lead the interpretation of their histories. In a “bottom-up” approach, the disenfranchised originate grassroots initiatives to disrupt institutional power. This working group grapples with institutional and individual self-assessment of positionality – when to learn through witnessing, when to educate through action.

Objectivity is a myth; everyone’s relative positions in society are defined by intersecting, ascribed characteristics such as race, gender, and class; these positions comprise the breadth of our perspectives. Most marginalized folks carry a broad consciousness of these intersections; when people of color (POC) have the authority to communicate their accounts of the past and the present, we challenge the master narrative. We wrest the dialogue of inclusion and representation from those who would undermine it through their proclamations of “giving voice” to our struggles.

Discussion questions include:

- Institutionally and individually, how do we prioritize POC perspectives by affirming the value of POC-led projects (e.g., through organizational policy, funding opportunities, one-on-one dialogues, etc.)? What are the pros/cons of these approaches?
- How do we ensure that POC are neither shut out of the interpretation of their own histories, nor pigeonholed as experts on said histories?
- How do we balance the right to tell our own stories with the burden of that responsibility? Does “performing race” give or take away power? How do we confront tokenization (in hiring practices, in the workplace, etc.)?
- How do our own positionalities as POC doing POC-based interpretation shift when we interact with one another on projects outside of our own identity spheres?

Discussants will exchange case statements describing examples of and experiences with specific problems relevant to those listed above, and help hone the discussion questions. Participants will have access to a blog where they can publicly (or privately) share feedback, commentary, and resources – creating a safe space for discussion of issues impacting public historians of color, and an open-access, online learning tool for others interested in witnessing the conversation before, during, and after the conference. During the conference, a designated participant will take notes on a Google Doc to provide everyone with a transcription of the proceedings in real time; live-tweeting will be enthusiastically encouraged.

2. Disrupting Institutional Power: Imagining a Regional Model for Public History Education

Facilitators: Devin Hunter, University of Illinois, Springfield
Denise Meringolo, University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Elizabeth Nix, University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Kathryn Oberdeck, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Eli Pousson, Baltimore Heritage, Inc.

Anke Voss, The Urbana Free Library, Champaign County Historical Archives

The facilitators of this working group have begun to experiment with and consider opportunities for cross-institutional cooperation. Facing a devastating budget crisis during which at least one public history program has been shuttered, faculty teaching in Illinois State University system have been working to minimize competition and demonstrate the broad civic value of public history education. They recognize cross-institutional collaboration as a tool that might not only attract students and build better History programs, but also strengthen a variety of public history institutions across the state, including academic programs, public libraries, and local museums. What is good for the field, they argue, is good for the university system, and vice versa. The situation in Maryland is less dire, but universities struggling to attract students are unnecessarily replicating programs and flooding the cultural marketplace with students whose skills and interests do not match organizational needs. In Maryland, open forums like Bmore Historic, an annual un-conference, enable public history faculty to come together with staff from a variety of cultural institutions to identify better strategies for project development and partnership.

For this working group, we are interested in gathering with colleagues from across the country who have faced similar issues in order to identify, document, and create potentially productive models for collaborative public history education.

We seek working group participants who can bring historical examples, contemporary models, and innovative proposals for developing public history education that takes place across traditional institutional lines. Questions we'll consider include:

- Is it possible to disrupt lines of power that establish universities as individual and discrete entities in order to establish deeply collaborative opportunities for teaching and learning?
- How might university-community partnerships broaden horizontally, bringing together faculty, students, and organizations across a variety of borders?
- Is there evidence we can present to department chairs and university administrators that might allay fears of competition?
- Might cross-institutional partnerships help departments clarify and promote particular areas of expertise, complementing one another and building high quality state and regional systems?
- Might cross-institutional cooperation help establish and support best practices for internship project development, supervision, and assessment?

3. La Frontera: Public History on the Borderlands

Facilitators: Ligia Arguilez, The University of Texas at El Paso
Blanca Garcia-Barron, University of Texas at El Paso
Angelina Martinez, The University of Texas at El Paso
RaeAnn Swanson, The University of Texas at El Paso

The US-Mexico border has existed as a contested space since its inception as a line in the sand. The power lines existing in the border regions of California to Texas construct a persistent narrative that divides vibrant communities, fractures identities, and creates racial/social inequities. This persistent narrative filtered through government agencies, legislature, and media cast these border regions and communities as places of disorder and violence. Consequently, this constructed image heightens the fear of those living away from the border, and negatively impacts border residents.

Despite the vast literature that contests these images and narratives, the US-Mexico border region still exists in the shadows of the collective imagination fueled by misinformation.

This working group seeks to explore the role of the public historian, students of public history, and field professionals within the current political climate of misinformation that impacts our work and our relationships with border communities. Specifically, we want to address what our responsibilities as public historians, professionals, and students living and working on the border are towards combating false narratives. We will also explore our responsibility to the diverse communities we serve on the border and how to privilege their voices in order to project a just and true narrative that reflects community struggle and identity unique to the border region. Ultimately, the goal of this working group is to collaborate with different border region public history practitioners and create 3-4 posts on the *History@Work* blog that outlines our responsibilities as a collective.

Thematically, this conversation is critical, but it is also imperative to seek action and collaboration within the field. As a political issue the border region is consistently debated and contested, therefore it needs a unique set of best practices and resources. We hope to begin this conversation by examining critical questions in our practice with other public historians, professionals, and students.

4. **Negotiating Power Lines: Economic Justice and the Ethics of Public History**

Facilitators: Rachel Boyle, Newberry Library
Theodore Karamanski, Loyola University
Dan Ott, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire
Stella Ress, University of Southern Indiana

Building on robust conversations started at NCPH 2017, this working group will navigate beyond “radical” public history – a nebulous phrase with competing definitions – to focus on the ethical foundation of public history: economic justice and questions of access, practice, and training. We will consider the loaded proposition of who – communities, students, practitioners, professors, institutions – can access and practice relevant public history and on what terms, and who cannot. Embedded in these fraught questions, the dynamic reality of public history as a discursive technology of power will rise to the surface, scuttling all hopes of simple answers.

Our goals for exploring the ethical terrain of theory, training, and practice in public history today are two-fold: first, to publish the results of what will hopefully be a meaningful conversation that includes competing perspectives, case studies, thought pieces, useful applications, practical advice, and lofty ideas presented by and among facilitators, discussants, and those who join us; and secondly, to engender a conversation about enacting economic models of public history work that can resist the realities of the current system dependent upon and limited by the gig economy, grant cycles, and the neoliberalization of higher education.

The working group will speak to the following questions:

- As practitioners, how can we realize economically just models of public history in which we can make a living and practice shared authority for the economic and social benefit of community stakeholders?
- What previous understandings and models offer more viable avenues for making public history socially relevant and economically sustainable in the 21st century?
- As community partners, how do we artfully and ethically share authority in a way that reconciles history and heritage in a responsible way? Should we?

- As educators, how do we grapple with the implications of public history's embrace by mainstream academia, particularly with reference to education, practice, and philosophy, as well as economic, racial, and gender access? How do we equip students to navigate the not-so-radical economic realities of both academic and non-academic public history? How can we prepare students to succeed in myriad political and cultural climates and understand the ethical dynamics of history as instrument of power that they are wielding?

Arranged around the central ethical question of the field, this working group hopes to solicit the involvement of public historians from across the professional and political spectrum – including practitioners with non-profits and government entities, professors and consultants. The working group itself will engage in rigorous conversation about these questions before the conference, which facilitators will structure into meaningful categories for a stimulating and lively public conversation at NCPH 2018. That forum will further be used as a launching point for organizing an edited publication. Nearly 30 years after NCPH published the outcomes of a roundtable on the ethics of public history, this working group brings together public historians eager to frame urgent contemporary conversations about the practical ethics of public history within the broader project of acknowledging and affecting social and economic power structures in the 21st century.

5. Agriculture and Public History

Facilitators: Debra Reid, The Henry Ford
David Vail, University of Nebraska-Kearney

Agriculture once defined routines for most of the world's population - farmers. The rhythms of the seasons and the needs of livestock and crops dictated work performed by women, men, and children on farms. Cultural distinction resulted, and cultural clashes erupted over land, trade access, and power. Environments changed; ecosystems collapsed. What role does public history play in the interpretation of this all-encompassing topic?

Engaging the public in this history requires reading in agricultural and local history, and thinking creatively about the content. Working group members believe that their work will increase agricultural literacy – a humanist's prerogative – and that it warrants the effort.

Several recent publications can provide a starting point for more precise strategies. Debra A. Reid's book, *Interpreting Agriculture at Museums and Historic Sites* (2017), emphasizes steps to take to put a humanist spin on the STEM subject, while Michelle Moon's book, *Interpreting Food at Historic Sites and Museums* (2016) does the same for foodways programming. Several venues provide opportunities for public engagement. Guests can interact with domesticated animals at historic sites, open-air museums, and living history farms. Visitors can talk to people using tools to plow, disc, plant, harrow, and harvest crops. Community supported agriculture (CSA) and farmers' markets allow customers to engage with farmers and agricultural processors. Restaurants, breweries, and wineries gain cachet by emphasizing locally sourced supplies. Michelle Moon and Cathy Stanton addressed this potential for increasing interpretation in a 2014 NCPH workshop (Engaging with Change: Local Food, Farming, and Public History), an article in *The Public Historian* 36:3 (August 2014) and in their co-written book, *Public History and the Food Movement* (2017).

This working group takes up where these other efforts have left off. It will unpack the terms "agriculture" and "farming." Participants will explore regional distinctions, crop and livestock cultures, and how humanities (history, art, theater, philosophy, literature) and social sciences (politics, culture,

economics, cultural geography) can inform interpretation of agriculture. The group work will offer a framework for museums, historical societies and historic sites (including living history farms) to develop collection and interpretive plans that address agriculture and farming in their own locations. Subjects of interest include how gender and race affected power and authority on the farm, how place affected crop and stock management and human relationships over time, how rural-urban dichotomies began and thrived, and how agriculture differed between the city and the country.

The working group's written reports will become the basis for article submission(s) to *The Public Historian* and *Agriculture History* (the journal of the Agricultural History Society) and a book proposal for the "Interpreting History" series for Rowman & Littlefield pitched as a follow-up to *Interpreting Food*, *Interpreting Agriculture*, and *Interpreting Environment* (in progress). These numerous products can contribute to public interpretation of agriculture and farming.

6. Crossing the Line: Facilitating Digital Access to Primary Sources

Facilitators: Kate Johnson, Loyola University Chicago
Marie Pellissier, Loyola University Chicago

Public history institutions, archives, universities, and libraries are increasingly making archival materials available online. However, as [Sheila Brennan](#) reminds us, research and resources made available online are not necessarily "public" projects. She contends that a truly "public" digital humanities project intentionally places the public's needs and participation at the center of all stages of the project. This working group will engage with Brennan's premise and critically explore the ways in which public digital archival projects have tried to fulfill the call to put the audience at the center of the discussion. Collaboratively, we will produce a website that serves as both a best-practices resource and an index of public-facing digital archival projects.

We wish to bring together a diverse group of public historians and digital humanists to discuss the challenges and benefits of public-centered digital archives projects, using a case study-based approach. Questions for discussion might include:

- Is putting the public's needs and participation at the center of the project practical and achievable? Are there alternate visions for how a "public digital humanities" archival project might appear or engage with the public?
- What are the criteria for success? What metrics are we using to measure or assess audience engagement? How do those metrics limit or expand our view of "the public"?
- How does a project's scale affect its success in engaging with the public?
- How does the goal of incorporating the public at every stage of the project change based on the level of institutional support? Type of collection? Life cycle of the project?
- Are there digital projects that are not suitable for public engagement? Are there other considerations that recommend limiting public engagement on some projects or some aspects of projects?
- When we say "public", who are we talking about? What kind of audiences should digital archives projects be engaging with?

7. Millennials as Change-Makers: The Power Lines between Generations in Public History Institutions

Facilitators: Kimberly Campbell, Historic Macon

Alyssa Constad, General Federation of Women's Clubs
Katherine Crosby, University of South Carolina

This working group will be facilitated by a group of millennials in national and local institutions focused on archives, preservation, and museums. It aims to engage collaborators with a variety of ages and experiences to reflect on the ways in which millennials entering the workforce have the power to shape institutions and to think about the ways in which they have succeeded or failed to create change within their institutions. Millennials have been taught to encourage inclusiveness, to push boundaries, and engage in tough questions that have been considered "off-limits" in the past, such as the historical effects of racism and climate change.

The questions the group aims to answer include:

- Are the advocacy contributions of millennials in public history institutions different than those of more established professionals? If so, how?
- Understanding that generational statements are stereotypes, how do these stereotypes affect institutional power and the ability to update interpretations and formats?
- How should millennials attempt to change older interpretative formats, so that the change is productive and excites superiors and stakeholders?

This working group aims to produce a series of at least six blog posts to address the questions above that will be contributed to by a discussant who identifies as a "millennial" as well as a discussant who identifies as a member of a different generation. This blog posts will be written with *History@Work* in mind as a format, and all posts will seek to offer concrete strategies for creating change in public history institutions.

8. The Public History of Labor

Facilitators: Rachel Donaldson, College of Charleston
Richard Anderson, Princeton University

Labor and working-class history has featured prominently in in roundtables and panels at recent NCPH conferences. Similarly, scholars have presented publicly-engaged research on labor and working class history at more traditional academic conferences, such as the Labor and Working Class History Association and the North American Labor History Conference (NALHC). With some exceptions, however, participants in these networks remain largely distinct. The purpose of this working group is to bring these groups together in a collaborative enterprise to enhance both the representation and understanding of labor history in the public realm, following up on the joint working group being held at this fall's NALHC in Detroit.

During the last four decades, the American workers and labor unions have suffered numerous blows. Automation eliminated many traditional working-class jobs, while "Right-to-Work" states lured manufacturing jobs away from union strongholds. Since the early 1970s the number of American workers represented by labor unions has fallen below 11%. Wages for almost all workers, both organized and unorganized, stagnated during that same period.

Yet, rather than merely document the loss of working-class jobs and the decline of traditional working-class communities, we should recognize that labor in the United States is currently at a crossroads: waves of anti-labor policymaking at the state and federal levels exist alongside an upswell of worker-driven activism, and occupations in service industries that have rarely been considered part of the

traditional labor movement are leading drives for unionization and living-wage campaigns. In contrast with the older image of white, male union members, women and people of color have become the leaders of these political and workplace mobilizations. Furthermore, the new battlegrounds for labor struggles are in the very places where, historically, labor organization has not fared well. As the face of labor organizing changes, historians—public and academic—must grapple with increasingly urgent questions about what the working class *is* and who working-class Americans *are*, and how the answers to those questions differ across time and space.

Some of our driving questions include:

- How can public historians connect the past to the present by using the multifaceted history of the labor movement to make sense of current issues and struggles?
- How can we use labor history and cultural heritage to support or enhance contemporary political and workplace struggles among organized and unorganized workers?
- How can our work broaden the larger understanding of *what labor history is* and *who is a worker* (e.g. what places can be considered historical sites of labor, even if they haven't been identified as such? How have workers and labor activists created cultural products, thus generating a cultural heritage of labor?)
- How can our work help to generate a more socially and culturally inclusive understanding of history, particularly that of the United States?
- How can historic sites, museums, archives, and other repositories of labor history help to challenge historical myths, reshape popular conceptualizations of this past, and communicate to labor audiences that our institutions belong to them as well?

The intention is for this working group to push conversations begun at 2017's North American Labor History Conference further and create a network of scholars and practitioners of labor history that will enhance future projects in the public history of labor. Some discussants will participate in both working groups, but we also seek discussants who are not involved in NALHC and will bring a fresh perspective to the group in Las Vegas.