

INF 388E Historical Museums: Context and Practice, Fall 2014

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Course Description

The purpose of this course is to look at and think about the process of museum exhibit creation in historical museums, from planning through development to opening and maintenance, as a negotiation among many stakeholders for influence upon the story that is told. We will consider the many facets of historical museums: their institutional positioning, including history and resources; the interests and concerns of museum employees (registrars, researchers, curators, conservators, education specialists, support staff, and volunteers); the influence of the public, both the "audience" public and those whose interests are directly affected and/or represented by an exhibit's story; and the role of contractual professionals when they are used (designers, exhibit construction firms, visitor studies experts). As a field for the study of this knowledge we will use the range of historical museums and museum-like venues in Austin where informal learning about history is available to citizens.

Documented Disability Statement

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, telephone 512-471-6259.

Religious Holy Days: By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Course Objectives

Students will visit historical museums and similar venues in the Austin area and try out methods of "reading" them for history of construction, intended audience(s), and overt and implied messages. At the end of the course, students will:

- Understand the knowledge and power issues surrounding the representation of the historical past in museums
- Be familiar with the roles and motivations of museum professionals in historical museums

- Be familiar with a range of concerns experienced by members of the public who find themselves or their communities the subject of a historical museum exhibit
- Be familiar with the interests and concerns that attract members of the public to visit historical museums
- Be able to analyze the production and consumption process in which a historical museum exhibit is embedded
- Be able to devise a framework for historical exhibit planning that addresses the broadest range of community concerns

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The syllabus should be checked regularly for any changes. Any students requiring accommodation for disability or religious holy days should contact the instructor at the beginning of class.

Textbooks (obtain as soon as you can or after the first class)

Ivan Karp, et al. (eds.). *Exhibiting Cultures* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991).

Ivan Karp, et al. (eds.). *Museums and Communities* (Washington:, Smithsonian, 1992).

Ivan Karp, Corinne Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (eds.), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006)

Bettina Messias Carbonell (ed.), *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, 2012).

Assignments

Class participation (40% of grade):

Students will be expected to carry out **assigned museum visits** and do the **readings** by the time of the class meeting to prepare adequately for classroom participation in **discussion** and in **exercises**. We will be discussing both the readings and your museum visits. The readings and museum visits have been coordinated to a certain extent, so I will expect that you think about your visit in the light of the readings for that week, although you should also bring previous readings to bear as well. To start you off, I will provide a checklist to guide you in the kinds of things you might look for during a museum visit, but as the course goes on you will be exposed to (and will hopefully think up) many more.

Everyone needs to contribute actively to our discussions, because part of the potential richness of the class lies in our understanding how people (including ourselves) bringing different experiences to the table react to different museums. We are all museum audiences; many of you will have visited lots of history museums; others may have visited other cities or neighborhoods where history is all around. In our discussions we will use it all as we begin to be able to see that history just can't be confined to museums, but spills over everywhere.

We will certainly visit the Jourdan-Bachman Pioneer Farm together to take advantage of the group rate, but you are not expected to stay together in groups (alas we know all too well how organized classes visit museums); part of what you will be trying to look at, at all the museums, is how other people are taking it all in, so you are very welcome to bring family and friends along on all of your visits (especially on the group one--let me know in advance), and thus find out how well the museum works for such groups as you may choose to form for yourselves.

In addition to discussions, there will be several other exercises carried out in class, and students will be expected to pitch in no matter how silly it all seems.

Term essay (50% of grade):

Each student will write an essay on a topic selected from a list to be announced on September 29. The essay will be an original piece of work, formally researched and documented, of 15-20 pages (exclusive of references and notes). (Note that there are also alternative formats for this term project.) Each essay will use at least one of the Austin historical museums we visit as an example to inform the paper (the reason for this is to encourage you to make repeated "reference" visits to a museum as suggested by Carr). Student papers written for this course have been presented at conferences and published, so you are encouraged to be ambitious. The term essay is due on December 5, the last day of class. For details, see the paper topics file on Canvas.

Take-home essay (10% of grade):

Students will be given a take-home essay assignment to write at the last class on December 1, to be returned by the date that the examination would be regularly scheduled.

Grading policy:

Since class participation is so important in this class, attendance is also important: you can't participate if you are not there. If you are actually ill I don't want you to come and spread

contagion, but please notify me if you must miss class and I will suggest a make-up activity. Grading itself will make full use of the plus/minus system.

Class Schedule

September 8: Historical Museums: what are they?

Housekeeping: Syllabus, books, visits, etc.

Lecture/Discussion: "My most memorable historical museum"--What makes them memorable? What is a "good" historical museum? Discuss history museums students have visited, reflect on the ways in which history museums may be contested spaces, and look at a critical framework for visiting and discussing history museums.

September 15: Visiting a historical museum

Preclass site visit: **Daughters of the Republic of Texas Museum**

Address: I-35 and 183 junction/access road (510 East Anderson Lane)

Hours: Monday-Friday 10AM-4PM

Entrance fee: \$2 for students with ID

Website: <http://www.drinfo.org/preservation/drt-properties/republic-of-texas-museum>

Readings:

David Carr, "Appendix B: To Observe," in *The Promise of Cultural Institutions* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2003), 193-200. This reading provides one tool for a reflective museum visit and you will test it on your preclass site visit for next time. Available on Canvas.

Jessie L. Embry and Mauri Liljenquist Nelson, "'Such is our Heritage' Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museums," In Amy Levin (ed.), *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the Construction of History in America's Changing Communities* (Altamira, 2007), 161-176. Available on Canvas.

Exercise: Observing museum layouts

Lecture/Discussion: How do you physically visit a museum? Discuss the visit to the DRT Museum. Who makes history museums? Why? For whom do they make them? How can you tell?

September 22: Understanding historical museum practice

Preclass site visit: LBJ Library museum exhibits (UT campus)

Address: 2313 Red River, on UT campus

Hours: Every day except Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, 9AM-5PM

Entrance fee: free with your student ID card; parking also convenient and free (off Red River)

Audio tour guides are downloadable to a smartphone from the webpage or you can rent an acoustiguide wand in the museum shop for \$3.00 (or you may decide you do not need an audio tour).

URL: <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/footer/plan-your-visit>

NOTE: This museum was completely overhauled in 2013 to replace the 1987 design; to quote the new director of the Library, "Now is our opportunity to present this story using 21st century technology with state-of-the art interactive elements." You will visit the new museum and in class we will look at a slideshow of the old design.

Readings:

Eco, Umberto. "Travels in Hyperreality," in *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 3-58. This one is optional, chiefly for the little section on the LBJ exhibits called "Fortresses of Solitude." Find this via Google Books, which has the whole essay along with a lot of the book.

Randolph Starn, "A Historian's Brief Guide to New Museum Studies," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 10, Issue 1 (2005). Online at <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/110.1/starn.html>

Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations* 4 (1988), online at http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/newformations/04_73.pdf

Joseph Masco, "5.29.45 AM," in *Museum Frictions*, pp. 102-106.

Mike Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History museums in the United States," *Radical History Review* 25 (1981), online through PCL catalog.

Lecture/Discussion: Collecting, maintaining, and displaying are at the center of traditional museum practice, but changes have been coming for some time, as is detectable by the publications and projects of the American Association of Museums. What are the assumptions of traditional practice? Do all historical museums really follow them? Can you tell whether the AAM's initiatives as manifest in the readings have had any impact? What are the implications of classification in the museum? How do traditional practices and classification play out in the LBJ Library/Museum?

September 29: Artifacts I: What's in a thing?

Exercise: Show-and-tell. Students will bring an "old" artifact with a personal connection to be discussed in class; **no preclass museum visit this week.**

Readings:

Spencer D. Crew and James E. Sims, "Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue," in Karp and Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991), 159-175.

Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural biography of things: Commoditization as process," in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 64-91. Available on Canvas.

Elaine Heumann Gurian, "What is the Object of this Exercise?" *Daedalus* (special issue "America's Museums"), Vol. 128, no. 3, Summer 1999. Online through PCL catalog.

Abby Clouse, "Narratives of Value and the *Antiques Roadshow*: 'A Game of Recognitions'," *Journal of Popular Culture* 41(1), 2008, 3-20. Online through PCL catalog.

Lecture/Discussion: The production and meaning of historical artifacts and how artifacts fit into personal narratives. What is the importance of "the real thing"? How do you make sense of an object if it isn't yours?

Essay topics announced; between now and the next meeting you will need to prepare a one-paragraph paper proposal based on one of these topics.

October 6: Artifacts II: What survives? ([housephotos](#))

Preclass site visit: George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center

Address: 1165 Angelina Street (next door to the GWC Library which is in turn across the street from East Side Pies!

Hours: Mon-Wed 10-6, Fri 10-5, Sat 10-4; also see URL:

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/carver/contact.htm>

Entrance fee: free

Readings:

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in Karp and Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991), 386-443.

James Horton and Spencer Crew, "Afro-Americans and Museums: Towards a Policy of Inclusion," in Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 215-236. Available on Canvas.

Clement Alexander Price, "Been So Long: A Critique of the Process that Shaped 'From Victory to Freedom: Afro-American Life in the Fifties'," in Kenneth Ames, Barbara Franco, and Thomas Frye (eds.), *Ideas and Images: Developing Interpretive History Exhibits* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 1997), 9-30. Available on Canvas.

Fath Davis Ruffins, "Revisiting the Old Plantation," in Karp et. al., *Museum Frictions*.

Ruth J. Abram, "History is as History does: The Evolution of a Mission-Driven Museum," in Robert Janes and Gerald Conaty (eds.), *Looking Reality in the Eye: Museums and Social Responsibility* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 19-42. Available on Canvas.

Lecture/Discussion: Artifact survival and the effect on meaning; in the museum visit this week pay special attention to material culture as owned and used by ordinary people. How does the using-up of objects affect what can be shown or said in the museum? How does the restriction to artifact-centric display practice disadvantage certain communities? And what issues are raised by "identity" museums as opposed to inclusion of neglected communities in "mainstream" museums?

October 13 : Historical texts: Who says?

Preclass site visit: O. Henry Museum

Address: 409 East 5th Street

Hours: Wednesday-Sunday 12PM-5PM

Entrance fee: free

URL: <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/o-henry-museum>

Note: you will find that this museum and next week's museum (Austin Fire Department History Museum) are located in a cluster with a third museum, the Susanna Dickinson Museum. You may want to visit all three of them at once (all are free) or you may want to revisit this one after discussion in class.

Readings:

O. Henry, "The Gift of the Magi." Yes, you should read it (or read it again), as most of the other visitors to this site will have done so. Available all over the Web; here's a very cool source that points to the clean text from Project Gutenberg and also offers an audiobook version:

<http://librivox.org/the-gift-of-the-magi-by-o-henry/>

Giovanni Pinna, "Introduction to Historic House Museums," *Museum International* 53 (2001), 2, pp. 4-9. Online through PCL catalog.

Tami Christopher, "The House of the Seven Gables," in Amy K. Levin, *Defining Memory: Local museums and the construction of history in America's changing communities* (Lanham: Altamira, 2007), pp. 63-76. Available on Canvas.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), Chapter 1, "The Power in the Story," 1-30. Available on Canvas.

Thomas Schlereth, "Collecting Ideas and Artifacts: Common Problems of History Museums and History Texts," in Carbonell (ed.), *Museum Studies*.

Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 7-24. Available online through the PCL catalog and JSTOR. If you haven't read this, for good or ill, you should.

Lecture/Discussion: "Reading" paper-borne culture, voice, images, other cultural productions: how do they all affect the "story"? What are the textual sources for historical museums? How are they used? How do they compare to material sources? How do you know what to believe when most of what you know comes from docents rather than labels?

Paper proposals are due to be turned in at this class meeting.

October 20: Communities I: Community museums

Preclass site visit: Austin Fire Department History Museum

Address: 401 East 5th Street

Hours: Sat and Sun 12 noon-5

Entrance fee: free

URL: <http://www.austinfiremuseum.org/>

Readings:

Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), read Chapter 1 (15-36) and 4 (89-114); if you have time also read "Afterthoughts," 177-208. This book is available as an e-book through the UT Library catalog. Note that the stunning results of this project make it an extremely important book for those who wonder how they could ever care about doing quantitative research.

Ciraj Rassool, "Community Museums, Memory Politics, and Social Transformation in South Africa," in Karp et al., eds., *Museum Frictions*, 286-321.

Ruth B. Phillips, "Community Collaboration in Exhibitions, toward a dialogic paradigm: Introduction," in Laura Peers and Alison Brown, eds., *Museums and Source Communities* (London: Routledge, 2003), 155-170. Available on Canvas.

Steven D. Lavine, "Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing relations between museums and communities," in Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine (eds.), *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1992), 137-157.

Lecture/Discussion: Working with communities: How do people use history and care about it? Why do they work really hard to express it in museums? Who are the story-bearers who speak in the museums we have seen and those we have discussed today? What community do they represent and what community to they address?

October 27: Communities II: visitors

Preclass site visit: Texas Military Forces Museum, Camp Mabry

Address: Camp Mabry, off 35th Street; drive past the closed-up entrance just west of MOPAC, to the new post-9/11 gate and ask directions there. There is a driving directions page on the site. If you plan to travel otherwise than by car, you should call in advance. Be prepared to state that you want to visit the museum, to undergo a security check, and have your car searched. Dress conservatively.

Hours: Tues-Sun, 10AM-4PM

Entrance fee: free

URL: <http://www.texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org/about-us>

Note that I enquired and was told that it is allowed to take photos, but be sure to ask anyway

Readings:

Susan Crane, "Memory, Distortion and History in the Museum," in Carbonell, ed., *Museum Studies*.

Wallace, Mike. "Museums and Controversy," in *Mickey Mouse History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 115-129. Available on Canvas.

Martin Hall, "The Reappearance of the Authentic," in Karp et al., eds., *Museum Frictions*, 70-101.

Lecture/Discussion: What makes the visitor's experience in a historical museum? Does the experience differ if there is no "identity" element for the visitor? What does it take for the visitor to recognize enough to feel part of the story? And, bearing in mind that the museum is being reconstructed, what is the impact of such an effort on a museum?

November 3: Work of the exhibit team**Preclass site visit: Bob Bullock Museum of Texas History.**

Address: Located across MLK from the Blanton Museum

Hours: Mon-Sat 9-5, Sun Noon-5

Entrance fee: If you visit the museum on November 2, which is the First Sunday of the month, it is free; otherwise the cost is \$10.00 for a student with student ID. I highly recommend going on Sunday!

Be sure to take your time and do not stop with the construction of La Belle on the first floor but see **all three floors** of the permanent exhibits; it should take you at least 2 hours and possibly more, so don't run in an hour before closing time.

URL: <http://www.thestoryoftexas.com/plan-your-visit/general-information>

Readings:

Michael Belcher, *Exhibitions in Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1992), Chapters 7 and 8, "Museum Exhibition Policy and Planning" and "The Museum Exhibition Brief," 69-95. Available on Canvas.

Candace Tangorra Matelic, "Forging a Balance: A Team Approach to Exhibit Development at the Museum of Florida History," In Ames, Franco, and Frye, *Ideas and Images: Developing Interpretive History Exhibits*, 187-209. Available on Canvas; there is also a copy of this book available for research in the Briscoe Center for American History library.

Lonnie Bunch, "Fueled by Passion: The Valentine Museum and its Richmond History Project," in Ames, Franco, and Frye, *Ideas and Images: Developing Interpretive History Exhibits*, 283-311. Available on Canvas; there is also a copy of this book available for research in the Briscoe Center for American History library.

Patricia Galloway, "Mississippi 1500-1800: Revising the South's Colonial History for a Postcolonial Museum Audience," in Galloway, *Practicing Ethnohistory* (Lincoln: University of

Nebraska Press, 2006), 377-387. See also "Mississippi 1500-1800: Final Draft Exhibit Script." Both available on Canvas.

Lecture/Discussion: We'll discuss the visit to the Bullock with special emphasis on artifact management and design and especially its innovative inclusion of exhibit construction as an aspect of the visitor experience. Because of the the Bullock museum's dominant official voice we will also discuss how it treats stakeholders but all its aspects are open for discussion and our discussion of it will not stop with today's class.

November 11: Communicating histories I: physical

Preclass site visit: Jourdan-Bachman Pioneer Farms.

Address: In North Austin nestled within a newish suburban neighborhood (J-B was there first). See the website for directions: <http://www.pioneerfarms.org/index.php/topmenu-plan-your-visit>
Hours: Fri-Sun 10-5

Entrance fee: \$8 for adults, \$6 for children; groups of 20 or more (that would be us if we can all decide when to go together) are \$5 each

Readings:

Handler, Richard, and Eric Gable. *The New History in an Old Museum* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). **The whole book is OPTIONAL**; it covers a study of Williamsburg by two anthropologists and is an interesting read. I have put it on reserve at PCL for those who want to read it, since it constitutes an anthropological approach to visitor studies. For a shorter introduction to the project you should **read for class** paired articles from the *Journal of American History*, June 1994 (available through the PCL catalog), the first one a summary of the work, followed by a response from Williamsburg:

Eric Gable and Richard Handler, "The Authority of Documents at Some American History Museums," *JAH* 81(1), June 1994, 119-136.

Cary Carson, "Lost in the Fun House: A Commentary on Anthropologists' First Contact with History Museums," *JAH* 81(1), June 1994, 137-150.

Kulik, Gary. "Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present," in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 2-37. Available on Canvas.

Edward Kaufmann, "The Architectural Museum from World's Fair to Restoration Village," in Carbonell, *Museum Studies*, pp. 273-289.

Lecture/Discussion: How do space and movement within the museum setting affect the story? What are standard display modes in closed museums? How can an outdoor museum control the movement of visitors through space? What can an outdoor history museum offer that an indoor one can't? What are its drawbacks?

November 17: Communicating histories II: conceptual

Preclass site visit: Capitol Complex Visitor Center (Land Office Building)

Address: 112 East 11th Street

Hours: Mon-Sat, 9-5, Sun, Noon-5

Entrance fee: free

URL: <http://www.tspb.state.tx.us/CVC/plan/plhome.html>

Readings:

Mark Leone and Barbara Little, "Artifacts as Expressions of Society and Culture," in Carbonell (ed.), *Museum Studies*.

Susan Pearce, "Objects as Meaning; or narrating the past," in Pearce, ed., *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (London: Routledge, 1994), 19-29. Available on Canvas.

Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in Carbonell (ed.), *Museum Studies*.

Baxandall, Michael. "Exhibiting Intention: Some preconditions of the visual display of culturally purposeful objects," in Karp and Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991), 33-41.

Exercise: Making objects into stories

Lecture/Discussion: How does a story become a visit, an experience? How is the constituent meaning of objects put together into a narrative?

November 24: Historical museums and informal learning

Preclass site visit: French Legation Museum

802 San Marcos Street, Austin, TX 78702

Admission \$5; telephone (512) 472-8180

Hours: Tuesday through Sunday from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Tours are given at 1:15, 2:00, 3:00, and 4:00pm

Website: <http://frenchlegationmuseum.org/>

Readings:

Elaine Heumann Gurian, "Noodling around with exhibition opportunities," in Karp and Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991), 176-190.

John Falk, "Museums as Institutions of Personal Learning," *Daedalus* (special issue "America's Museums"), Vol. 128, No. 3 (Summer 1999), pp. 259-275. Online through PCL catalog.

Gordon Fyfe and Max Ross. "Decoding the visitor's gaze: rethinking museum visiting," in Sharon MacDonald and Gordon Fyfe (eds.), *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 127-150. Available on Canvas.

Lecture/Discussion: Reception of meaning in the historical museum or historic site, especially by community audiences: can David Carr's ideal of informal learning be met? Why do people visit and how much in control of their visit are they? How do museums try to find out?

December 1: Historical museums in Austin's landscape

Optional preclass site visit: Texas State Cemetery

Address: 909 Navasota

Hours for visitor center and gallery: M-F, 8-5; Sat 8-1 (maybe); cemetery itself is open seven days a week

Entrance fee: free

URL: <http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us/directions.asp>

Readings:

Constance Perin, "The Communicative Circle: Museums as Communities," in Karp et al., *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1992), 182-220.

Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1974), 15-49. Available on Canvas.

Term papers due; take-home exam questions passed out

Resources

General Resources:

The website of the American Association of Museums is here, but don't expect to see too much free stuff: <http://www.aam-us.org/>

Here you will find a study guide for competencies for visitor studies
<http://visitorstudies.org/resources/professional-development/bibliography>

Additional readings:

Fath Davis Ruffins, "Mythos, Memory, and History: African American Preservation Efforts, 1820-1990," in Karp and Lavine, *Museums and Communities*, 507-611. This is a very long piece (4 parts) but is essential for understanding the historical details of the process that has led to the creation of African-American museums. I've substituted a new reading from Ruffins as an assignment, but this is a good resource if you wish to pursue this subject.