

Museum Studies Graduate Certificate Program
University of Memphis
Memphis, Tennessee
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Graduate Student

The Interdisciplinary Graduate Certificate Program in Museum Studies has several requirements that students must meet for satisfactory completion of the Museum Certificate. These requirements comprise 18 graduate hours, which include two core courses, Museum Practices and Museums and Communities. Essays from the Museum Practices course are included in this packet. The core courses are designed to allow discussions regarding the management and theory of museums among graduate students, faculty, and museum professionals.

In addition to courses, students in the certificate program are required to complete two internships in local museums to gain hands on experience. I completed an internship with the Pink Palace Museum, the C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa, and I am currently working towards a third internship at the National Civil Rights Museum.

To complete the interdisciplinary study, students choose two elective courses. In the Spring 2010 semester, I enrolled in Museum Exhibits, a graduate level course in development, theory, and application of exhibits. I met requirements for other electives through research seminars in the History Department. Assignments from these courses are included, as well.

For the Museum Exhibits course, my class was responsible for developing and presenting an exhibit in the Art Museum of the University of Memphis. Our exhibit displayed the masks and puppets of the Bamana of Mali. The exhibit opened April 23, 2010.

Museums and Communities includes exercises in grant writing. Our main project for the semester was going through the entire process of finding funding and applying for an IMLS grant. The class also focuses on the new paradigm of museums, as set forth by John Cotton Dana in 1917, and the changes over time and the implementation (or not) of this paradigm in museums throughout the country.

Having just recently moved to Memphis, I have not been fortunate enough to visit all of the museums in the area as of yet. I had heard several things about the National Civil Rights Museum from fellow museum enthusiasts both good and bad. Luckily, a friend of mine from high school, Sara, is currently interning at the museum and offered to give me a private tour of the facilities. There were several things about the complex that I found troubling from a museum studies perspective, but also several things that stood out as exceptional.

I started my tour of the museum in the older building. My first impression was that there is too much to read and that the information is too cluttered together. The timeline in the first exhibit is beneficial to those with no background of African-American history. I found it odd that this first section had few artifacts or collections, but Sara explained to me that the museum was originally an informational, not collections centered, exhibit.

There are a few artifacts such as a Ku Klux Klan robe, original segregation signs, and brochures which help to explain what the printed words are explaining. One of the items in the first section of the museum appears to be a uniform. There is no explanation or label around this uniform that is in a case. Sara explained to me that it is a porter's uniform, and there is a small picture of a porter wearing a similar uniform. Since there are so few artifacts in the first section of the museum, there should be no excuse for their being unlabeled.

As the collage of pictures and words continues, it does meld together with more artifacts and more interesting exhibits. A few of the pictures used in the collage are of very poor quality and grainy, which is understandable because of the technology of the time in which they were taken. However, perhaps a better picture could have been chosen for the centerpiece photo.

The museum has a very nice flow which makes it simple to follow without the confusion one sometimes encounters in a museum. As the exhibits continue, I feel they get more interesting with more artifacts and interaction. In the Brown v. Education section, a television plays actual video clips regarding the case and its effect on the population. The façade of the Little Rock High School is also impressive. Again, the video-clips that are playing and the statues were a nice touch.

One of my favorite exhibits in the older section of the Civil Rights Museum is the interactive bus exhibit. The visitor enters a bus from the 1960s and sits in the front seat. This activates a speaker which plays the voice of a bus driver telling the visitors that they must move to the back of the bus. It goes on chastising those sitting in the front seat until finally threatening them with arrest. I think that it is a great representation of the situation that Rosa Parks and all African-Americans lived with everyday that people today might not understand.

Also creative is the recreation of the Woolworth's counter with mannequins representing the students who enacted a sit-in at the lunch counter. Again, video clips are shown that explain what was going on and people's responses to the protests. Across from this display is another well-produced display of Freedom Songs. This display plays various songs and has sheet music and information about the songs that are being played.

Another effective exhibit is the recreation of a fire-bombed bus from the Freedom Rides. Though the bus and the thoughts it evokes are great, again there are not a lot of explanation or information labels about the event. Past this is a little alcove with telephones and the recordings of conversations between a government official in the south and President John F. Kennedy.

Though this display is creative, when I visited one of the speakers was not working and I could barely hear one of the sides of the conversation.

I thought that the recreation of the street corner in Birmingham is very effective. The giant TV screen showing the violence against the protesting children helps visitors to see the violence inflicted upon those children by the law enforcement. However, as soon as visitors turn around from the news clip, they see that the display case behind them is literally falling apart. Pictures and display text within one of the mirrored cases has fallen from mounts and has not been repaired. Sara explained to me that the case had been poorly designed and were not easily opened.

As the museum path continues on, the visitor comes upon a recreation of a jail cell from Birmingham. There is some explanation that this is what the cell that Martin Luther King, Jr. was held in after the Birmingham protests would have looked like. Around the next corner is a cell with several cots in it, but there is no explanation anywhere near it that I could find to tell what this was. It is obviously a jail cell, but I would never have known what the story was behind this cell as it had no labels or display case explaining how it was used.

There are a few interactive exhibits throughout the museum that really draw the visitor in. One that sticks out in my mind in the older section is a wheel that visitors can spin to see if they would have the privilege to register to vote that day. This really shows the problems registering to vote that African-Americans faced during the Civil Rights Movement.

The next section is very confusing to me. Sara explained that the wooden frame that was built against the wall is a representation of a Freedom School. However, the information contained within this frame is about politics. Information about the Freedom Schools is across from the frame and in an alcove that I would probably have missed had I not been directed there.

One of the next very attention-grabbing displays was that of the Memphis sanitation workers. The angle from which visitors view this exhibit (from above) is original and appealing. Again, there was not an immediate understanding or explanation about this. There was a television mounted above the viewing area, but when I visited it was turned off.

I feel that the recreation of the hotel rooms in the Lorraine was very well done. Evidence pictures were used to represent what the hotel room looked like while King was staying there before his death. Visitors are able to stand where King slept and view where he was standing when he was killed. After exiting the main NCRM building, visitors walk across the lawn to the boarding house where King's assassin stood to take his shot. The walkway to the elevators that take visitors to the main upstairs exhibit has photographs of King's funeral with digital captions which are well-done.

Again, the recreations of the rooms as they were in the 1960s are very well done. Evidence photos are shown of each room, and the way they are set up today is very similar to how they looked when James Earl Ray was staying at the boarding house. One of my favorite things of the whole museum was in the boarding house space. A case filled with the evidence used during Ray's trial is set up with touch-screen computer monitors on either side. Visitors can use the monitors to pick and choose a piece of evidence from the case and learn what this piece is and how it was used in the trial. To me, this interactive display was a great way to educate visitors in a fun way.

As visitors exit the museum the exhibits give a message that though things have greatly improved for African-Americans since the Civil Rights Movement, there are still many changes that need to take place. There is a message of hope which leaves the visitor feeling as though

things are going to continue to change for the good. The exit is through the gift shop which is, of course, a great marketing scheme that probably brings in great revenue to the museum.

Overall, the museum is quite nice. There are several technical problems with cases and displays. The flow is easily followed, but the lack of labels and explanation for exhibits is distracting and troubling. Audio tours are offered for children and adults in both English and Spanish which is a very good thing. There is always room for improvement and renovation in any museum, however, and this is no exception.

Katie Stringer
Museum Studies
Assignment 2

For the second assignment I chose to review the quarterly publication *Curator: The Museum Journal*. According to the website, this journal has been published for fifty years as a resource for museum professionals written by other museum professionals. The journal strives to cover most aspects of museum professionalism from education to collections management among many other topics.¹

This journal is accessible from the University of Memphis website. The full-text articles are published through the WilsonWeb Journal Directory online periodical database. I reviewed the issues from July 2008, April 2008, January 2008, October 2007, and July 2007. This selection of articles offered several diverse topics relating to museum practices including education and interpretation, conservation, marketing, exhibits, ethics, and the visitor experience. There were several articles in the issues reviewed relating to these various topics, so in this paper I will summarize the content of the articles from each category.

The most prominent subject that I found throughout these journals was education and interpretation. In the July 2008 issue an article by D. Anderson, et al. titled “Competing Agendas: Young Children’s Museum Field Trips” focuses on understanding the personal agendas of visitors². The article examines how museum operators can overcome competing agendas of children and adults to enhance the learning experience for children on field trips and to make the most of the learning experience. In the April 2008 publication, the article titled “Interpretation and the Role of the Viewer in Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art” by P. Carter-Birken presents evidence from studies that shows visitors want more information about the interpretation of art in museums.³ The author offers her views on this problem and possible solutions that would not detract from personal interpretation.

Along with education, the area visitor experience is addressed in several issues of *Curator*. The October 2007 publication features an article by D. Anderson, et al. called “Recollections of Expo 70: Visitors’ Experiences and the Retention of Vivid Long-Term Memories”.⁴ The article reviews the experiences of visitors to the Osaka, Japan World Exposition in 1970 and their long-term memories that resulted from this event. This subject does

¹ <http://www.altamirapress.com/RLA/journals/Curator/Index.shtml>.

² David Anderson, et al., “Competing Agendas: Young Children’s Museum Field Trips” (*Curator*, July 2008) p. 253-73.

³ P. Carter-Birken, “Interpretation and the Role of the Viewer in Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art” (*Curator*: April 2008).

⁴ D. Anderson, et al., “Recollections of Expo 70: Visitors’ Experiences and the Retention of Vivid Long-Term Memories” (*Curator*: October 2007).

relate back to the topic of interpretation of exhibits previously discussed. The author relates this story to today's professionals giving them several things to think about in their own museums and the long-term memories these museums leave with their visitors.

Another topic which was not addressed in these 5 issues as often as one would expect was conservation and preservation of collections. In the July 2008 publication conservation is an article by M. Parsons, "Saving Film Technology in Museums Before It's Too Late."⁵ The author supports the idea that professionals should preserve older technology within the new museums. Parsons believes that museum operators focus on the preservation of the art and culture within the museum, but they neglect the older audiovisual technology which is just as important. The article, "Preservation and Access for a Digital Future: The WebWise Conference on Stewardship in the Digital Age" by Diane Zorich in the October 2007 issue addresses a similar topic of digital preservation.⁶ The opinion seems to be that digital preservation is very important, but the process to get materials digitized and the questionable lifespan of digital media makes this difficult. The article offers solutions to museums to help with the process of digitization and emphasizes the importance of this preservation technique.

The matter of exhibits is addressed by T. Freudenheim through his series "Installation Ruminations" in both the April and January 2008 issues. In these articles the author observes the setting up of recent exhibitions and the successes and failures at these installations. In the January 2008 publication, Freudenheim explains how the Museum of Modern Art in New York was able to overcome problems to have a successful installation which gives others ideas and hope for their own museum; however the situation of the Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy is a great example of "mis-installation."⁷ In the April 2008 issue, the author visits several museums to decide whether these museums should renovate their exhibits or leave them how they already are.⁸ He gives examples of the different museums and what has and has not worked for their re-installations and changing exhibits.

The professional aspects of marketing are addressed in the January 2008 issue by A. Russo, et al. in "Participatory Communication with Social Media."⁹ The authors assess how museums are using digital media such as blogs and podcasts to connect with visitors in a more interactive way. The article explains that using these resources for outreach helps to build more communication and contact with visitors or potential visitors. This offers readers a new way to reach visitors and new ideas for marketing their museum to the community.

A matter that was discussed extensively in class and only mentioned through the journals was ethics. Cheryl Meszaros' article "Modeling Ethical Thinking: Toward New Interpretive Practices in the Art Museum" in the April 2008 issue explains that art museums are the perfect place for perfecting ethical interpretation for two reasons: the objects within the collections and the similarities of art museums to other museums. The author states that, "Ethical thinking allows museums to take up their interpretive responsibility in self-consciously critical ways."¹⁰

In relation to ethics and accompanying lecture, H. H Thompson addresses laws and governance of museums in the January 2008 article "International Law and its Vision of the

⁵ M. Parsons, "Saving Film Technology in Museums Before It's Too Late" (*Curator*: July 2008).

⁶ Diane Zorich, "Preservation and Access for a Digital Future: The WebWise Conference on Stewardship in the Digital Age" (*Curator*: October 2007).

⁷ T. Freudenheim, "Installation Ruminations" (*Curator*: January 2008).

⁸ T. Freudenheim, "Installation Ruminations" (*Curator*: April 2008).

⁹ A. Russo, et al., "Participatory Communication with Social Media" (*Curator*: January 2008).

¹⁰ Cheryl Meszaros, "Modeling Ethical Thinking: Toward New Interpretive Practices in the Art Museum" (*Curator*, April 2008) p. 157-70.

Ideal Museum”. The story gives the history of museums with intergovernmental organizations such as the United States and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and their evolution within museum practices over the years. However, not all museums in the world have adopted practices advocated by these intergovernmental groups, and the author believes that, “until more nations make ratifying these instruments a priority and concentrate on turning the subjects of recommendations into legally binding conventions, individual institutions will continue to bear the responsibility for transforming this ideal into reality.”¹¹

The fact that this journal was titled *Curator: The Museum Journal* is not necessarily misleading, but I did feel that there was an excess of information about education and interpretation. This is not negative, but I did expect more articles about conservation or exhibits in a professional museum journal. The articles are diverse and very beneficial for those interested in museum practices. Overall, *Curator* is a great resource for museum professionals or those who are studying how to run a museum.

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¹¹ Hilary Thompson, “International Law and its Vision of the Ideal Museum” (*Curator*, January 2008) p. 5-10.

Originally constructed as a residence, the Pink Palace Museum was converted into a museum between 1925 and 1929. In 1930, the building opened as the Memphis Museum of Natural History and Industrial Arts. Later, in 1977, a new building opened to house permanent natural and cultural history exhibits instead of the curiosity cabinet within the mansion. This analysis will cover those exhibits opened in 1977.

The natural history exhibits on the first floor explore the geological and ecological history of the mid-south as well as other natural history elements of the world. Several cases containing animal remains are the first thing the visitors encounter. Many of these cases have an uncomplicated labeling of what animal each skull is, while some have more information about the shape of skull and its importance. As we discussed in class, this is excellent for those visitors who want to do the extra reading, but it is not obstructive to those who just want to look rapidly and get out without reading every little thing. The text is large and clear on these labels.

The exhibit about birds has cases hanging overhead, and some of the text is acceptable for reading, but some is too elevated for me, so obviously too high for children. The following area about insects and animals in their habitats has cases with various animals displayed inside, and are sometimes concealed by other objects. The labels are very good in that they have a silhouette of the animals beside their name to help identify them.

One of the most popular exhibits, Rollo the Triceratops, has a small sign explaining why she is no longer an animatronic display and also a small cardboard cutout that gives a small history of this particular breed of dinosaur. Maybe a more permanent label rather than this could be more effective, but it works for now without looking substandard.

My favorite part of the natural history exhibits is the mammals section with many stuffed mammals in various natural positions. The labels for this area have a representation of the animal adjacent to their scientific and common name, much like the silhouette previously mentioned, though improved with color and detail. However, some animals have the word "eliminated" in red over them. At first glance, one may think that this means the animal has been removed from the exhibit. In some instances, this is the case but not all. I'm still trying to find someone to ask about this. In contrast to this, the cases across from the animal diorama have several animals inside but only a description of their arrangement. This is not too confusing, but inconsistent to the label across the aisle.

The next section on Geology has several different examples of rocks and minerals from all over the world. The rocks are meticulously labeled with scientific name, common name when applicable, and place of origin. There is a very old model of a seismograph that is no longer working. The label explains this and claims that the museum will be upgrading to a newer model in the near future. There is no way for visitors to know how long this label has been in place or when this exhibit will be updated, but at least the label acknowledges this fact.

From Geology, exhibits change to fossils and dinosaurs. The cast of sauropod tracks has a picture of the casting on the label which is just as informative as words. As with the rocks and minerals, labels telling the name and place of discovery of the fossils are present. Many of the cases of examples contain background information as well as the name and place. As with previous natural history exhibits in the museum, there is plenty of information for those who would like to take the time to read. A large section of wall is taken up by a cast of a mosasaur

fossil; the label has several bits of information all along the cast which emphasizes the length of the fossil. Next to this, a triceratops skull has a label with a picture of what a live triceratops would have looked like along with the information about this creature.

Many of the cases in this section are lower to the ground which is great for children or handicapped. In contrast, the low cases could pose problems for taller people. As with many things, there are rarely ways in which one can please all visitors. Though this section was originally opened in 1977, it does not seem to contain very much out-dated or inaccurate information.

Up the stairs from the natural history exhibits, visitors enter the cultural history area. I began my circuit around the history exhibits at the Clyde Park Circus display. This display, built during the Great Depression, has original labels written by the creator of the circus still exposed. These add to the experience of seeing this antique artifact. Along with original labels are new ones that explain the reasons for offensive depictions of African Americans in the display. Another creative way of labeling on this display is a panel in the exhibit that has questions and answers explaining the construction and mechanics of the circus.

Around the corner is a Ford Model T display that explains the importance of the development of personal cars. There is a label explaining the scene depicted, but there is much more information in laminated booklets around the display with more information for those who wish to learn additional information.

Many of the history exhibits consist of a diorama set-up with no labels on or in the case, but behind or near the display. This is positive because the labels do not take away from the information gained from seeing the original arrangement. For instance, information is on the wall opposite the display of the drugstore diorama. The situation is similar in the country store exhibit. The Victorian Parlor exhibit has all of these things, as well as a label similar to the ones in natural history exhibits. A diagram of the objects in the room as a silhouette describes the significance and placement of each object in the room. Many of these exhibits are staffed by a volunteer docent who explains many things that the labels do in a more interesting way.

Text throughout the history exhibits is generally readable and in colors, font, and size that are easily recognized. Many labels highlight words that are written in bold and capital letters; these are the significant vocabulary words of the existing exhibit or words that relate to the objects within the case. The labeling is consistent throughout the exhibits. One exhibit in which the labeling was unclear is the exhibit with wedding dresses. The exhibit case is rather deep, and there is text concerning one of the dresses at the very back of the case. The lettering is the same size as the rest but farther away, which makes it difficult to see and interpret.

These exhibits are older, but they do not show the dating that some exhibits from the 1970s contain. The museum has tried to keep up with the times by adding information where needed, or upgrading exhibits. However, some of the fonts and colors reflect the age explicitly. Understandably, a complete overhaul of every label within the exhibits would be expensive and time-consuming. The labels are not so bad that they should be replaced immediately, but an update within the next ten or so years would probably be beneficial to the aesthetic value of the exhibits. The labels are very informative and educational without being superfluous, which is the purpose of these labels.

Katie Stringer
November 2, 2008
Museum Studies
Assignment 4

The worst exhibit that I have ever seen was undoubtedly the Cannonsburgh Village Museum in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Though the village itself is quite interesting and educational, the museum on the grounds leaves a lot to be desired. Cannonsburgh is the name of the pioneer town that would eventually grow to be the railroad town Murfreesboro, south of Nashville. As visitors walk around the village, they observe various reconstructed buildings as they would have appeared in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. However, after visitors enter the museum they encounter a disaster of exhibition.

To begin with, a draft barn houses this museum. When I visited the location it was raining outside, and there were leaks visible in corners of the museum. The building is really just one large room with no organization visible. The basic content covered by the exhibits is the history of Murfreesboro, pioneer life in the area, and various other random bits of information thrown in.

The material reviewed has some flow beginning with early history and flowing into more recent history, but there is some information that seems completely unrelated to village life in Cannonsburgh. For instance, I can specifically recall an exhibit regarding the life of American soldiers during the First World War. While important, this information does not directly relate to the purpose of the site that the museum is supposedly interpreting. While considering this, I tried to find some sort of a mission statement on the Cannonsburgh website or anywhere online, but I could not find anything. Therefore, perhaps there has not been any mistake made by this museum if a mission statement exists somewhere that includes recent history of America as part of the mission.¹²

According to the city's website, citizens reconstructed Cannonsburgh in 1976 as part of the bicentennial celebrations of the country.¹³ It is obvious that no one has updated nor consistently repaired the exhibits in this museum since that time. Another relative note is that this site is home to the World's Largest Cedar Bucket.¹⁴ Unfortunately, sometime in the past few years vandals set the bucket on fire. There is no security or protection for these artifacts, especially the famous bucket, formerly housed in an open air shed outside.

Typed on regular white typing paper and pasted upon the cases, the labels lack a pleasing aesthetic. They are yellowing and peeling off the surface, and some are even missing in various places around the exhibit. Visitors find typos, as well as out-dated information on these labels. In additions, several of the display cases are broken or falling apart. The lighting in this museum comes from overhead hanging lights. The lights are not of the best quality for viewing artifacts, and the lights do not set any kind of mood or atmosphere.

In contrast to this museum is the dynamic Sam Davis Home museum in Smyrna, Tennessee. The Sam Davis Home consists of a plantation home, several outbuildings, and a visitor's center with museum. This museum is located on the grounds of the historic plantation and interprets not only the Sam Davis Home, but along with that presents the Davis family

¹² http://www.murfreesborotn.gov/government/parks_rec/cannonsburgh.htm

¹³ http://www.murfreesborotn.gov/government/parks_rec/cannonsburgh_history.htm

¹⁴ http://www.murfreesborotn.gov/government/parks_rec/cannonsburgh_bucket.htm

history, the story of Sam Davis, life during the Civil War for both whites and blacks, and the recent history of the site.¹⁵

When one enters the museum, an illuminated glass display greets the visitor with a poem that tells the story of Sam Davis. Though the museum is somewhat small, it has wide walkways and an easy to follow flow. Each segment of history is sectioned off into its own area for easier understanding. This museum also has several activities for the children who often visit the museum.

The lighting and colors help to convey the moods of each section. For example, a room that commemorates the life and death of Sam Davis is darker than the rest, with a small stained glass light for illumination. This room communicates the somber mood of the information presented in this area. Another section has a model reconstruction of the entire plantation. The walls are covered to look like the outside with fields and trees, and the lighting above the model is bright and cheerful like a sunny day. The lights are controlled with dimmers and can be changed by the staff at any time to convey different moods for different events held within the museum.

The labels within this museum are clear and more professionally constructed than those at Cannonsburgh are. Clear labels explain and name each artifact in the museum. One artifact, mislabeled a sword, was identified as a saber. A visitor pointed this out to the staff that should be able to fix this problem easily. The artifacts and displays are all in very nice shape, and clear cases protect them efficiently. Alarms provide the security needed to protect these artifacts.

To be reasonable, the Murfreesboro Parks and Recreation department of city government runs the Cannonsburgh museum. This site is not as well visited as many of the others that also require funding from the city. Therefore, this site does not receive the first priority when it comes to financial support. However, the site does host one of the most productive public festivals held in Murfreesboro. One would think that some of the proceeds from that event would go to fixing the museum that is in so dire need of assistance.

Dissimilar from Cannonsburgh, a board of directors and trustees runs the Sam Davis Home museum, and the board and director seek out private donations and grants. For instance, the organization recently received a grant to build the new visitors center and museum in 2004. Consequently, the museum appears newer and in much better shape than the older, disused museum at Cannonsburgh.

Katie Stringer
Assignment 5
Museum Studies
November 18, 2008

For this fifth writing assignment, I chose *How Students Understand the Past: From Theory to Practice* by Elaine Davis. This book was published in 2005 and is a comprehensive book for all educators who teach the past to any students. This book would be useful for school teachers, museum educators, or docents in museums or historic sites.

This book explains ways that people make meaning of the past. It is helpfully divided into three parts, each with their own focus. The first part is titled “Teaching and Learning History”. Part I is about the importance of history and how it can be used. The author offers her own history as an example. Chapter 2 is about the issues relevant to history education such as

¹⁵ <http://www.samdavishome.org>

cognitive development, construction of knowledge, act of interpretation. Part II is observations and data from a case study of how students learn conducted by the author. The last part includes conclusions and further inspection of the data collected from the case study, as well as ways to apply those lessons learned from the case study.

Chapter one presents a case in which 5th grade students were assigned to come up with events from memory of past events to place on a timeline. The timeline was twelve feet long with each foot representing a thousand years. Students were only able to come up with events in the last six inches, which is basically the time since Columbus “discovered” the Americas. Students stated that they believed that nothing of importance or change had happened in the previous years not represented, or that we did not know anything about that time. However, even as they stated these thoughts, they knew that it was wrong.

This example shows how the study of history has been limited and the study of women, Native Americans, and African Americans is relatively new, only appearing within the past forty or so years. The exercise also shows the need for improving history education. Teachers should use, and are beginning now to use, a critical approach to history. The use of primary sources, oral history and archaeology, are finally seen as integral parts of the education of history.

One quote that seems to be important for educators and instructors that stood out to me is from page 17: “Understanding how the past is constructed in the minds of individuals and how constructions are influenced by variable such as age, culture, ethnicity, and instruction is essential to the improvement of history and archaeology education.”

The second chapter explained the technical terms and psychology of the ways people learn. The author explained that everyone constructs the past differently, and that the cognitive development and concept of time of each individual is different. The section also refers to the several different types of learners such as axiological, empirical, and organizational. Here the author explains that she is not trying to answer the questions of how people learn, but rather to show the complexity which exists and is used in her case study.

The case study by Davis comprises the entire second part of the book. It is a bit long to read, but it is very interesting. All history instructors should read this case study as an introduction to learning how students learn. The study begins with background about the area, school, students, and centers used. There are small sections of information about the individual teachers and students used in the study. The study examines the approaches used in the past to instruct students about history, and explains the new technique that will be used for the study.

The study focuses on how fourth grade students in a Colorado school learn about Pueblo history. For the new way of studying, Davis takes the students on a site tour, simulates an archaeological dig, and guides the students through a Pueblo Heritage center. Following descriptions of these exercises, the author presents all of her data and analysis of what students did and did not learn. She also provides charts of her data for better understanding. Davis uses her data on what changed in the students’ learning to explain to the reader how to teach students about the past.

Some of the most interesting information in this section, for me, was information about the interviews conducted by Davis with various students about how and what they learned. It is remarkable how much students were able to retain after visiting and getting hands on experience.

Part Three is basically conclusions of the study and points for instructors to remember. The author reminds instructors to not be limited by assumptions and to carefully chose what context and text to use when instructing those with different learning styles.

Pages 119-120 contain a list of essential points for history educators to remember that I think is very important:

- Historical knowledge is constructed 2 ways: narrative understanding and logical-scientific understanding.
- History should be viewed as all of the human past, not just written past.
- Knowledge of the past is constructed and learners enter into studies of the past with preconceptions.
- What educators believe they are teaching may not, in fact, be what students are learning.
- Educators have their own assumptions.
- Learning requires active engagement.
- Several models of instruction are useful for helping students understand the past.
- Objects (artifacts, replicas, etc.) help a learner understand the past.
- Learners are more engaged in studies of the past when they are involved in constructing it.

This book has been helpful to me for working as a Social Studies instructor in the museum setting. Many of the things in this book could be considered common sense, but several of these things are important and should stand as reminders. I would recommend this book to any person who teaches or instructs students about history in museum education.

Source

How Students Understand the Past: From Theory to Practice by M. Elaine Davis. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005.

Katie Stringer
Museum Studies
December 11, 2008
Term Project

My term project for this semester consists of a comprehensive compilation of materials for the two Social Studies programs, Native Americans of the Mid-South and Life on the Tennessee Frontier, at the Pink Palace Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. This project contains several files and documents that I found scattered around the education department when I arrived there to begin my job as Social Studies Instructor. Before even beginning to think how to make this project work, I had to find all the documents that relate to the social studies programs.

I began by looking through several binders in my office and in the education department library. In these, I found notes, scripts, outlines, and even video recordings of the programs. Sorting through these was a very daunting task, and much of the material contained within was irrelevant. After discarding plenty of refuse, I began to come up with a simplified outline and detailed script. The existing outlines were perplexing, and the script was incomplete, but I was able to coordinate the outline with a new PowerPoint presentation. Instead of the existing scripts and PowerPoint presentations, which did not accompany each other very well, I created a different presentation with formatted slides that are easier to follow and flow better than the preceding. I developed the script that follows this presentation over the semester and changed as students groups came through to attend the programs.

I tried to create a script that would create a positive learning environment for field trip visitors. My previously reviewed book *How Students Understand the Past* by Elaine Davis was very helpful in the development of a script. As the book explains, students learn and understand much better when they are actually involved rather than listening to a lecture. Often, educators do not have access to the artifacts that we at the Pink Palace do. While presented to groups of up to one hundred students, the programs do try to accommodate as many student volunteers as possible. The fact that students actually get to try to grind corn or try using throwing sticks facilitates learning according to Davis' book more than just an address would. In addition, even if I am not able to call on every student to volunteer, I make sure to pass around several small items such as a mastodon rib fossil, a rabbit fur, and a small ceramic vessel.

As students began to attend the programs I teach, I had to modify the way that I teach different age groups. The education guide that we send to teachers every year before school starts tells that we offer the Native Americans program to grades Kindergarten to second grade. However, when looking through curriculum standards, it appears that students learn about Native American cultures later in elementary school, and thus many of the classes I received were fourth grade or fifth grade. The script and presentations I developed, while malleable, are generally at a fourth grade level. When I had my first group of Kindergarteners who do not understand many of the terms I use in the presentation, I had to adapt quickly. When in front of this group of seventeen students I was luckily able to adjust the program to focus primarily on touching and feeling and trying things. Being a small group, the teacher and I allowed every student to try to grind corn, play stickball, and touch every animal skin available.

I now realize that while I was able to adapt to this group, others may not be able to if they take on teaching the Native Americans program. Therefore, the next step in further improving this project will be to develop separate scripts for different age groups. Students on a kindergarten or first grade level are obviously in different stages of cognitive development than

students in a fourth or fifth grade class. Over the school break, I plan to develop these scripts to add to my project. Not only will it be helpful to me to have a written and planned way to present material to younger or older students, but it will make the information available to others in the department should they have an interest or need ideas for adapting their own programs for different age groups. In addition, a group of special education students in grades kindergarten to second grade made a reservation this fall to attend a Native Americans program. Having no experience with teaching special education students, I asked a fellow student with such practice to come and help with the presentation. Unfortunately, the school cancelled the class before I was able to learn about teaching these students. This is another example of information I can gather in the future in case no one is available to help teach me how to teach special needs children.

Integral to teaching these programs, I included a list of items needed to present these lessons. In addition, pictures of the set-up used in the Mansion Theatre to present the Social Studies programs help instructors to know what items they need to use throughout the programs and what is the easiest way to set them up for use. I have also organized and catalogued all of the items in their designated area backstage of the Mansion Theatre. Anyone can now easily find everything in clearly labeled individual plastic containers. I placed the taller items such as spears, digging tools, and a model dugout canoe in a large rolling trash can for easy set-up and storage.

Another part of the workbook is a collection of curriculum standards that the programs cover. Schools that attend programs at the Pink Palace include not only Tennessee public schools, but also Arkansas, Mississippi, and the Catholic Dioceses. Each area has different curriculum standards, but it was easy to find these standards on the states' education websites. Knowing what standards the programs actually cover was not nearly as difficult as transferring the information into the Excel documents that accompany this compilation. The Excel documents are organized by state, and then by grade level. The document contains the number combination assigned to each standard along with a description of what that standard is. Making these standards available to the teachers who attend programs at the museum helps them to more easily plan a trip and justify it to their administrators.

Once I gathered all these materials together, I began to organize them in a concise binder where anyone can find and understand the contained information. First, I divided the binder into two sections, one for each program. A table of contents at the beginning of each division provides a reference to what is contained in the section, and both have the same table of contents and pertinent information. The order of the documents within each segment is ordered in such a way that one can start by reading at the beginning and by the end have all the information needed to teach the program. For example, general information or an introduction to the material is the first page of the binder. The curriculum standards the presenter must understand to convey the material that teacher expect follows. A handout with Pre-Post activities that is available to teachers is next in the binder. This is important to the education instructor so he or she will know what students may already have covered in their classroom prior to arriving at the museum. Next are the presentation materials. The checklist is first, as instructors must set up the displays and worktables before students arrive. Next is a copy of the PowerPoint presentation that the instructor can familiarize his or her self with before presenting. The slides contain pictures of the items and concepts covered in the class, which are helpful to understanding exactly about what one is supposed to be talking. The outline is next, and it is helpful to have when presenting in case the instructor loses his or her place. What is possibly the most important part of the presentation, the script, follows. After this information are several handouts and activity sheets

that I found around the office. They relate to Native American culture and the presentation, and possibly, in the future we may use these on the website as pre-post activities.

A CD is also included with the document that contains all the information presented. Instructors in the education department can use this CD disk on any computer and then use it during classes to project the accompanying PowerPoint on a screen for the students to see.

With the inception of this assemblage of materials, any instructor within the education department should be able to pick up this folder and teach the programs covered. This binder may help to avert a crisis should an emergency occur and the person assigned to teach the program could not be there. In addition, when a new person is hired, he or she will not face the same problems that I did.

Furthermore, this project has provided a template for other programs within the department. There are several science labs and presentations in similar states as the earlier social studies programs, but with this model, these programs may become more organized and understandable, too.

Katie Stringer
Museums and Communities
February 6, 2010
Assignment 1

For me, the word “museum” has always evoked feelings of fondness and attachment. Born in 1986 when the new paradigm had already begun implementation in museums around the world, I rarely felt the exclusion and elitism of the institutions of the early twentieth century and before. Though introduced by John Cotton Dana in 1917, this new model of stewardship in museums has had a slow start, and the ideals set forth have still not been perfected or even accepted in many museums.

Though the history of museums goes back several centuries, the “modern” museums of Europe and early America prior to Dana’s proposal were generally seen as elitist closed institutions that catered to the rich and privileged patrons who were able to travel to and appreciate them. Dana, the head of the public library of Newark, New Jersey, was a revolutionary in the field of public education and the institutions that supplement general education. One step towards this was the opening of stacks in the library so scholars could search the books themselves rather than being restricted by the librarian. He also included objects in his library for the public to view.

Dana’s revolutionary ideas extended to museums, which he saw as isolated and distant repositories. Early American museums catered to the European ideas of art and architecture, and Dana felt that the growing ideas of national identity within America could be demonstrated within and by museums. He believed that museums of tomorrow should be places of pleasure rather than European gloom and promoters of those in the museum’s community instead of imitations of Europeanisms. Museums should, according to Dana, discover and develop talent at home in the United States.¹⁶

One instance in which Europe, particularly England, should have been emulated was in the Crystal Palace Exhibitions in London in 1851. The exhibition consisted of displays from all over the world, and the objects were left in the care of the English people. This led to the foundation of the Albert and Victoria Museum, which was open to the public and offered education to visitors. The modern museum system in England stemmed from this first exhibition, and the government’s involvement in the museums is discussed later in Elizabeth Crooke’s “Community development and the UK museum sector.”

Dana believed that museums had several changes to make before they could escape the gloom of traditional European museums. One of the most important was the museum building itself, which must be located in a central location where any people, particularly those who lived in the city itself rather than the suburbs could benefit from its offerings. In addition, the museum should be welcoming, large, and beautiful with excellent lighting, so as to combat the dark gloom.

Furthermore, the museum should be diverse, and it should display only art, but also items which are diverse and make life interesting, joyful and wholesome. Most importantly, Dana believes that the two most important things a museum must do are teach and advertise.¹⁷ They

¹⁶ John Cotton Dana, “The Gloom of the Museum,” in *Reinventing the Museum*, ed. Gail Anderson (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2004), 13-29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

must also broaden the sympathies and multiply interests in the subjects they provide to the public. Though Dana was one of the first to suggest this in America, it took many decades to catch on, and other museum specialists re-worded his ideas throughout the years that would follow.

Theodore Low, in 1942 provided the article, “What is a museum.” His opinions about museums closely followed those of Dana. The spirit of nationalism that was rampant during World War II is evident in this article in Low’s assertion that museums must recognize their responsibility as a place for communities to gather and prepare for peace times.¹⁸ Low also recognizes that museums need to focus less of their attentions on acquisition and preservation and more on education.¹⁹ Active education encouragement of curiosity are also promoted: “education, however, must be active not passive, and it must always be intimately connected with the life of the people.”²⁰

Recently a “History of the Memphis Pink Palace Museum” was made available to all staff at the museum. Written by Ron Brister, the short history emphasizes the shift from old to new paradigm. Opened in March of 1930, the early museum fit the old paradigm perfectly: “there were no children’s education programs and youngsters were not encouraged to visit the museum.”²¹ The museum remained an elitist and distant institution until 1950 when Ruth Bush, a manager of educational programs, was hired as director. She began to offer classroom activities, field trips and other classes for children. This was a great step forward for the museum, and the Pink Palace was even ahead of several other institutes in the country.

However, the museum is run by the city government, and must abide by their budget. In 1981, a third of the staff was let go, and because of the loss of personnel, programming suffered.²² Throughout the years, the budget problems have been a source of frustration and have even set the museum back in the paradigm even though the museum started out as a pioneer in museum education and community involvement.

In 2008 the economy problems experienced throughout the nation were particularly felt by those involved in arts and arts education, including museums. The Pink Palace was no exception. Several part-time staff members were let go, some who had been there for several years. In an attempt to raise money to help the museum, the education department was unceremoniously removed from the Mansion Theatre, where hands-on programming for children and school groups had been held. The theatre was now to be used as a space that could be rented out to churches and other organizations for a fee to raise money for the Pink Palace. In order to have a space for the programming, which sometimes accommodates over one hundred students, one of the greatest assets of the museum was obliterated.

Prior to budget cuts, the education department’s Discovery Room was a large room filled with hands-on educational activities for all visitors to the museum and school groups. Staffed by volunteers and designed by the education staff, the room was a great example of the implementation of the new paradigm where learning was encouraged and accessible to any and every person who came to the museum. With the suffering of the economy, however, came the suffering of the education department.

¹⁸ Theodore Low, “What is a museum?” ,” in *Reinventing the Museum*, ed. Gail Anderson (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2004), 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

²¹ Ron Brister, “History of the Memphis Pink Palace Museum”, internal document: 1.

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

Without access to the Mansion Theatre, education staff were told that the Discovery Room would become a Discovery Theatre for programming. This presented several logistical problems such as space limitations, harsh lighting, flat surface for chairs limiting visibility for small students in the back of the room, acoustics, and a myriad of other problems. To compensate, the education department is spending thousands of dollars to convert the Discovery class room into a functional theatre, while a perfectly functional and ready-made theatre sits empty upstairs. Though information has been sent out through the museum's email list, morning programming in the Mansion Theatre has gone unnoticed by this staff member.

When the Discovery Room was closed, plans were made to open a new, smaller one upstairs in the space previously occupied by the museum bookstore, which was also cut out when the budget was revised. More money went into this room, which is essentially a small classroom with display cases on the walls. The idea, as understood by this staff member, is that a paid staff member will offer lectures to passing visitors or school groups for a fee. There are to be three different programs offered: a free, 1 minute lecture, a five minute lecture with more details for a fee of one dollar per visitor, and a longer more detailed lecture for a higher price.

This is a fabulous example of a shift *backwards* in the paradigm set forth by John Cotton Dana. Though evidently initiated by budget cuts, the museum is becoming once again a museum that caters only to those who can pay, and looks to educate through lecture and elitism rather than involvement and inclusion. The museum is at a disadvantage because it is run by the city and their rules, rather than by those who know and understand the education and theory behind museology.

The mission of the Pink Palace states:

The Pink Palace Family of Museums inspires people to learn how history, science, technology, and nature shape the Mid-South. Through rich collections, thought-provoking exhibitions, and engaging programs, we encourage our diverse community to reflect on the past, understand the present, and influence the future.²³

Even though museums should be interacting with their communities in the new paradigm, which the leasing of the theatre to community groups suggests, the mission does not mention using the theatre and other areas of the museum as modes of revenue building. The museum needs to focus instead on engaging the community within the museum and with exhibits, opportunities, and programming as the mission promises, rather than focusing on the business and money issues. While museums do need to pay attention to the budgets and logistics, they also need to follow their missions.

As a historian, I am always interested in ways to foster and encourage a love of history, especially in younger children. Many people still see museums as stuffy institutions where children are told to speak in soft voices and not touch anything. This is discouraging to children; besides the fact that children generally have high energy levels and do not enjoy being quiet, this way of education does not inspire them or encourage their own interpretations.

Elaine Davis' book, *How Students Understand the Past: From Theory to Practice*, is a study of the ways students retain information and express it to others.²⁴ The study focuses on

²³ http://www.memphismuseums.org/about_us/; accessed 2/6/2010.

how fourth grade students in a Colorado school learn about Pueblo history. Rather than having students listen to a lecture and read from a textbook, Davis takes the students on a site tour, simulates an archaeological dig, and guides the students through a Pueblo Heritage center. Following descriptions of these exercises, the author presents all of her data and analysis of what students did and did not learn. She also provides charts of her data for better understanding. Davis uses her data on what changed in the students' learning to explain to the reader how to teach students about the past.

Some of the most interesting information in this book, for me, was information about the interviews conducted by Davis with various students about how and what they learned. It is remarkable how much students were able to retain after visiting and getting hands on experience. This case study is further evidence for the benefits of education and involvement in museums; rather than the old paradigm of look but do not touch, the new paradigm encourages involvement which fosters learning.

The C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa is an example of a museum that embraces the new paradigm and is moving forward to become a place for involvement and education within its community. Though the museum is small and under-staffed, the graduate assistants who were here in the past obviously understood and took to heart the paradigm shift. The hands-on lab is an example of a place where students can touch and see objects that inspire learning and dialogue among them. Programs also offer an outlet for students to touch and see artifacts and objects that help them to gain an understanding of the people and culture of the area.

Though John Cotton Dana first introduced the paradigm to American nearly a century ago in 1917, museums still have a long way to go to reach his ideal representation. Steps have been taken towards a museum system that encourages its community in various ways, yet budgets and bureaucracy sometimes prevent revolution.

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²⁴ M. Elaine Davis, *How Students Understand the Past: From Theory to Practice* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005).

Katie Stringer
Museums and Communities
Essay #2
March 14, 2010

As Crooke states in Chapter 7 of *Museums and Communities*, “the consideration of museums and heritage in relation to social improvement and change is well established and could be said to be central to the founding principles of many of our long-established local and national museums”²⁵ Several museums today look toward issues of social justice within their missions as part of their community involvement.

Readings from class such as “The Art of Empathy” and “Images from the Street” give examples of such museums that have successfully accomplished experiments with their communities for social justice and understanding. Again, Crooke explains that, “museums are presenting themselves as places that can have an impact on the breadth of social problems.”²⁶ The questions of how this is accomplished and whether or not it is a feasible or appropriate goal is discussed below.

Within the new paradigm set forth by J.C. Dana, museums are expected to be a major part of the communities which they serve. Part of this involvement may sometimes lead to addressing social justice issues that are a part of that community and its history. Perhaps not all museums are fit to present this issue, such as natural history museums, though they, too, may find creative ways to involve their communities in a way that breaks the barriers of social injustice.

However, some museums have been made specifically for the purpose of presenting and remembering times of extreme social injustice. Museums such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. and the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis stand as reminders and memorials of the tragedies that occurred which they represent.

The website of the Holocaust Memorial Museum states their primary mission as:
to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy

This museum, which this writer personally visited several years ago, addresses social issues of the past in a relevant and modern way. One leaves the museum with a feeling of understanding of what those people involved in the Holocaust and events leading up to it really went through. The interactive aspects of the museum, even in 1999, create a sense of awareness and the need for action against social injustices such as genocide and antisemitism that are still a threat today.

Today, an exhibit at the Holocaust Memorial Museum invites visitors to look to the past for answers to problems of today. “From Memory to Action: Meeting the Challenge of Genocide” is an interactive exhibit at the museum. Through technology and primary sources such as oral histories, visitors are introduced to the problems of genocide around the world today. The exhibit asks the question, “What will you do to meet the challenge of genocide?”²⁷

25 Elizabeth Crooke, *Museums and Community: Ideas, Issues, Challenges*. Oxford: Routledge, 2007: 41.

26 Ibid.

27 <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/exhibit/>> Accessed March 13, 2010.

More information about this exhibit can be found at the website <<http://www.ushmm.org/visit/whatinside/lc/>>.

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is an organization that works with several historic sites around the world where social injustice and the struggle for change occurred. The coalition works with these sites toward explaining and understanding the problems that occurred there, and preventing similar events from happening again. Their website quotes their founding statement as:

it is the obligation of historic sites to assist the public in drawing connections between the history of our sites and their contemporary implications. We view stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function”²⁸

Through the Sites of Conscience coalition, museums are able to interpret their history, engage in programs relating to social issues of the community, involve the public, and promote humanitarian values.²⁹ One Site of Conscience in the United States that greatly exemplifies the potential relationship between museums and social justice is the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

The sites of conscience website gives information about the Tenement museum and the reasons for its inclusion as a Site of Conscience. The museum is located in a former tenement building in Lower Manhattan where immigrants arrived from overseas and began their new lives in America. The tenements in which they lived had deplorable conditions, and those who lived there struggled with such social injustices as racism and poverty while still managing to play a huge role in the development of American culture.³⁰

The Tenement Museum website states their mission as:

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum's mission is to promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a gateway to America.³¹

The museum, available for viewing only by guided tours, presents the living conditions and stories of those who lived in the tenement from around 1863 to 1935. Through educational programming and the tours, public dialogue is facilitated on such issues as immigration, labor, cultural identity and social reforms.³²

The “About Us” section of the Tenement Museum website makes a statement which is extremely relevant to the topic of museums as centers of social justice, “In recognizing the importance of this seemingly ordinary building, the Tenement Museum has re-imagined the role that museums can play in our lives.”³³ This new role involving social justice and social awareness of issues is recognized in the education programs and tours offered by the museum.

28 <<http://www.sitesofconscience.org>> accessed March 10, 2010.

29 Ibid.

30 <<http://www.sitesofconscience.org/sites/lower-east-side-tenement-museum/en/>> Accessed March 10, 2010.

31 <www.tenement.org> Accessed March 10, 2010.

32 <<http://www.sitesofconscience.org/sites/lower-east-side-tenement-museum/en/>> Accessed March 10, 2010.

33 <<http://www.tenement.org/about.html>> Accessed March 13, 2010.

The people who lived in the various tenements of New York City in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were mainly immigrant families from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Russia and many other countries. These people generally worked very long hours in terrible conditions, which led to sickness and disease. Many tenements did not contain bathrooms or running water even into the 1900s. The Tenement Museum seeks to inform the public and community that even today, Lower East Manhattan is home to first-generation immigrants and descendants of immigrants who face similar conditions still.³⁴

Along with the other Sites of Conscience, a program of Dialogues for Democracy was established at the Tenement Museum. Through presenting history, the museum is able to inspire dialogue among visitors and the community about current issues related to the past. According to the Sites of Conscience website, today 36% of the residents of Lower East Side Manhattan are foreign-born, and 60% of those speak a language other than English in the home. The museum presents that issue, along with the fact that many of the immigrants of today experience the same challenges of their counterparts over a hundred years earlier.³⁵

Every visitor to the museum is required to take a guided tour through the restored apartments of tenement dwellers. Public tours include “Getting By” and “Piecing it Together” which present the homes and lives of immigrants and reenactments of events such as bereavement calls to mourning families. The “Confino Family Living History Tour” for families puts the visitors in the role of immigrants themselves, and the visitors are allowed to handle actual objects found in typical immigrant households. A neighborhood walking tour explores the places visited by immigrants such as places of worship and schools. A more in-depth program called “Getting By: Past and Present” seems to be a perfect example of involving the current community with current issues by looking to the past. The information provided about the program explains, “Spend extended time inside two restored apartments and join in a conversation about the themes arising from the tour. You are encouraged to share your own experiences, thoughts, and family histories with a trained educator and your fellow visitors.”³⁶

According to the Sites of Conscience website, in addition to the daily tour programs that engage visitors in discussions about immigrant issues, programs that engage the community in various aspects are also offered. “Teaching English Through History” is one such offering which uses the historic primary sources of immigrants from around the world to teach English to the new immigrants of today. The museum is also collaborating with *The New York Times* and St. Martin's Press to create an Immigrants Resource Guide in several languages for new arrivals to the United States.³⁷

A great example of using the museum to combat social injustice is the “Housing Abuse Action” course offered in conjunction with the New York City Department of Housing, Preservation, and Development. Many students who are involved in the course live in sub-standard housing in the area. The program explains the role tenants and reformers in the past played in improving the living conditions of immigrants. The students each receive a checklist at

10 <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/sites/lower-east-side-tenement-museum/what-happened-here/en>> Accessed March 13, 2010.

35 Ibid.

36 <<http://tenement.org/tours.php>> accessed March 13, 2010.

37 <<http://www.sitesofconscience.org/sites/lower-east-side-tenement-museum/museumprograms/en/>> Accessed March 13, 2010.

the end to become an “inspector” of their own buildings in hopes of raising awareness about and reforming current housing problems.³⁸

All Sites of Conscience have developed a “Dialogues for Democracy” program, which helps the visitor understand the past to better understand current events and inspire change. The Tenement Museum's program states its goals as:

to increase understanding of the evolution and impact of American immigration and immigration policies; stimulate dialogue among people of diverse backgrounds on immigration and related enduring social issues; challenge prejudices based on ethnicity, citizenship status, nationality, class and race; and inspire civic action among recent immigrants and descendants of immigrants.³⁹

These goals are accomplished through a tour, generally given by an immigrant followed by a facilitated discussion on current issues of immigration. Questions asked include: Who gets to come to America?, Who should be allowed to decide?, What does it mean to be American?, What, if any, assistance should be given to new immigrants? Discussions on these issues have been led by the museum with community leaders and the public to address the problems of today by looking at the past.⁴⁰

The museum also sponsors artwork that has been created by immigrants which are available for viewing on their website at <http://www.tenement.org/darp.html>, as well as at the museum.

The Tenement Museum, as a Site of Conscience, exemplifies the way a museum can be involved in issues of social justice within its communities. Through guided tours and community education, as well as through collaborations with other community organizations, the museum involves the communities it presents. This involvement leads to social awareness, and potentially to social change.

Though Crooke reminds museums to be mindful of potential political motivations behind social justice movements, museums such as the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and those museums involved with the Sites of Conscience Coalition prove that it is possible for museums to take an active role in such movements. Again, not all museums are suited for such a large undertaking, but with the support of the community and the museum, social justice can be achieved through the museum in many cases.

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Museums and Communities Fantasy IMLS Grant Application

1. Statement of Need

The C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa, operated by the University of Memphis, exists to give visitors an understanding of archaeology and of Native American history of the Mid-South. The museum exhibits interpret the prehistory of the Mid-South, and contemporary Southeastern Indian cultures. Workers preparing the T.O. Fuller State Park in the 1930's rediscovered a Mississippian Mound complex, and the **C.H. Nash Museum** was founded in 1956. The site was developed as a training ground for area archaeologists and students and as a place to interpret archaeology to the public. This mission continues today with museum exhibits, tours, public events and educational programs.

Project goals in conjunction with MFA goals

The C.H. Nash Museum requests support from IMLS to undertake a project that will enhance the collections management software currently utilized at the museum. This support will enable to museum to undertake a one-time, comprehensive program to update the hardware and software used to manage the permanent collection. The initial project will focus on the 40SY1 site material that was found at the Chucalissa site. Grant funds will also go towards hiring a new staff member to head the project. Once the collections are managed and inventoried, the museum hopes to create an online collections component, which will be hosted on the museum's webpage. This updated software will allow collections staff at the museum to have more efficient access to the permanent collection and its related information, resulting in greater service to the University of Memphis and Memphis communities. This project is in conjunction with the MFA program goal of collections stewardship which states, "this category supports all activities that museums undertake to maintain and improve the management of museum collections in order to fulfill the museum's public service mission."

The first inhabitants of Chucalissa probably arrived around 1000 CE and stayed only a short time. However, this first occupation led to more stable development for the following peoples. In around 1200 CE the village was once again inhabited during what is known as the Mitchell Phase. Archaeological evidence and artifacts show that this is when the mound-building phase at Chucalissa began. Once again the site was abandoned for around two hundred years until 1400 CE, when the site entered the Boxtown Phase. Evidence from this period shows contact between other groups of people across the country; the most important evidence of this trade network is the potsherds found here and at other sites. By 1500 CE the site had grown to be the most powerful settlement in the area. Social stratification and a chiefdom are evident in the archaeological record, and the site as it is seen today is representative of this time period. It is unclear why the residents of the mounds abandoned the site, but by the time Hernando DeSoto explored the area the inhabitants were gone. In 1854 the land was bought and run as a cotton plantation with nineteen enslaved African-Americans on site. After the Civil War the slaves were freed and the land traded hands several times. By 1936 the land was bought by the state of

Tennessee to become a Jim Crow-era park, the Shelby County Negro Park. In 1938, Civilian Conservation Corps workers discovered the mound complex, and in 1940 the University of Tennessee began excavations. The Second World War stopped excavations, but in 1955 the excavations resumed, and in 1956 the first museum was opened on the site.

By 1962, Memphis State University had taken over, and the Archaeology and Anthropology departments assumed responsibility for the site. The National Register of Historic Places recognized Chucalissa in 1974, and in 1994 the site was declared a National Historic Landmark. Today the site and museum are still owned by what is now the University of Memphis, and the staff, graduate assistants, and interns from the university offer educational experiences to the public and for groups of students and scouts on a regular basis. The goal of the museum is to provide a range of educational programming to promote greater awareness and appreciation of the accomplishments of the Native American people in the mid-south both of the past and the present. The C.H. Nash Museum and Chucalissa support several undergraduate and graduate programs at the University of Memphis, and the museum and its educational programs provide training opportunities for students in the Museum Studies Graduate Certificate Program. The museum continues to work for an expanded and enhanced visitor experience at Chucalissa and continued service to the educational mission of the University of Memphis.

Chucalissa offers guided tours, traveling exhibits, and a variety of special events for students and the general public. Events include competitive races, Archeology Day, family days, and various demonstrations of crafts and early technologies.

The collection is central to many museum activities that support its mission; however, the museum has lagged in its attempts to provide the most up-to-date technology and accessibility for maintaining and managing such a large and diverse collection. Most artifacts are stored in the museum's repository, while photographic and file material are stored in the public archaeology lab and library. The information regarding collections was created using FileMaker Pro is stored on one Macintosh computer. The information from files and photographs has not yet been documented. The software is outdated and not accessible by museum collections staff, which makes it difficult to find or provide information on artifacts to visitors or researchers. Information on files and photographs does not yet exist, and a digitization project has been proposed and would be possible with new software. Budget constraints have prevented the museum from purchasing more up-to-date software. With the current software obsolete, it will become more and more difficult and costly to rescue or transfer the information that is available. At this point, failure to act may result in a very expensive "fix" if the current system should fail.

The C.H. Nash Museum is currently undergoing a review to receive accreditation by the American Association of Museums. Accreditation is vital for maintaining our status in the museum community and in dealing with other institutions. Having a modern, reliable collections management system could be a decisive factor in our accreditation.

Audience

As stated previously, the updated collections management software will ultimately aid the C.H. Nash Museum in serving its intended audience, who are members of the Memphis community, out-of-town visitors, and students and faculty at the University of Memphis. The updated

software will aid in serving the communities in a number of fashions, both immediate and long-term. It will also aid the C.H. Nash Museum in achieving many of the objectives outlined in its mission.

Mission and Expansion of Institutional Capacity

The C.H. Nash Museum serves *to protect and interpret the Chucalissa archaeological site for the benefit of the University community and the public*, which the museum is arguably not successfully fulfilling at this time with the lack of collections information. As the museum seeks *to provide high quality educational experiences on past and present Native American cultures of the Mid-South*, the collections need to be ordered and accessible to determine the uses those collections can provide to our audiences and communities. The museum also seeks *to pursue new knowledge of these cultures through research as part of the University's explicitly multicultural and multiethnic educational orientation*. Without efficient, unlimited access to the collections, the staff is unable to provide the best service in terms of exhibition design, artifact information, and related information to its audience. By installing new collections management software and updating the hardware used in maintaining the collections database, the museum can be a better steward of its collection. This updated software will enable the museum to efficiently manage this collection for years to come, effectively serving as an investment to the museum's institutional capacity.

The direct audience served by the enhancement of the collections management software will be the museum's staff, followed by researchers in the community and the general public. Once the updated technology is installed, museum staff can more effectively research and track the status of certain artifacts, thereby enabling them to provide more accurate information to researchers of the museum's collection as well as interested museum visitors, as part of the mission's goal *to pursue new knowledge of these cultures through research*. This increase in the awareness of the collection will also serve to provide better opportunities for renovated exhibits or educational programs, which will in turn engage the museum's audiences. This updated visitor experience will allow for greater engagement and reflection by school groups and individual visitors at the C.H. Nash Museum which is a direct achievement of the mission *to provide high quality educational experiences on past and present Native American cultures of the Mid-South*.

2. Project Design

Goals and Summary

The C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa wishes to implement collections management software; the activities included in this project consists of the following activities:

- Visits to museums at Jamestown to observe collections
- Preliminary evaluation and planning
- Identify objects that need immediate attention and cataloguing
- Order and acquire re:Discovery Software
- Consultation with re:Discovery
- Install and set-up of software
- Data Conversion of catalogued materials
- Training of main staff on software management
- Begin the process of entering 40SY1 site material
- Begin to incorporate volunteers or interns in project

- Continue to process 40SY1 site material
- Continuation of data entry and evaluation of collections materials

By visiting The James River Institute for Technology and Historic Jamestowne and Museum, new staff member Katie Stringer will have the opportunity to see how similar archeological museums have utilized the software and how it has impacted their collections. Grant funds are requested for travel to Jamestown from Memphis, 2 nights' accommodation in Virginia, and meals. Stringer will visit with collections managers at both organizations.

These observations will aid her in preliminary evaluation and planning for the collections at Chucalissa. Once artifacts have been assessed, the objects from the Chucalissa archaeological site, 40SY1, will be set aside for processing and entry into the new re:Discovery program. During this time, the museum will order the required materials: re:Discovery software, and a computer for both the repository and the library. Once the materials arrive, the museum will hire a data consultant to transfer the current data from FileMaker Pro to the new software. After the current files are transferred and the software installed, training of the main staff to use the software will begin. Stringer will then begin the process of entering the information for 40SY1 into the system and will check the artifacts against any records that have been made in the past on the site material. As the data entry progresses, we hope to incorporate trained volunteers or interns in the data entry process. Once the 40SY1 materials have been entered, Stringer will evaluate other collections from Tennessee archaeological sites in the Mid-South and begin to enter those artifacts, as well.

Acquisition and installation of collection management software

Some research has already been conducted by the C.H. Nash Museum to determine the specific collections management software that would best serve the museum's needs as well as allow for optimum growth of the collection. Re:discovery Software's latest release of collections management software, RE:Discovery Proficio, has been determined to be cost efficient, capable, and opportunistic software that could be utilized at the museum. This system is easy to use and comes with strong recommendations from other museums. Re:discovery Proficio will allow staff at the C.H. Nash Museum to input data or view data based on the user name and password assigned to each user. The software is also flexible and will give users the ability to catalog various collections while keeping track of the exhibits and educational collections. The software has the capability to perform many of the tasks required of the museum's collection, including:

- Capacity to catalog individual objects and attach multi-media files.
- Track changes in location and status (condition, e.g.).
- Document accessions, deaccessions, loans, exhibits, conservation activities, restrictions, associated sites, provenance, donors and researchers.
- Perform searches and produce reports.
- View and play all related media.

A basic package for Proficio Re:discovery costs \$2,790, plus a monthly support fee of \$45. This does not include conversion of data. Our current system of collections management in FileMaker Pro can be converted to Excel, which will make the conversion process somewhat easier. We estimate that the conversion will take no more than 10 hours. We have estimated that data

conversion will take around 10 hours at \$50 an hour for a total of \$500. We will also receive a consultation with re:Discovery technicians upon installation of the software which is estimated at \$75 for 2 hours. We also request funds to pay for the monthly technical support fee of \$45 a month for 24 months.

Rediscovery (licence and training)	\$2,790
Data transfer of current information	\$500
Consultation with re:Discovery technician	\$150
Monthly technical support fee	\$1080 (for 2 years)

In addition to the software, data conversion, consultation and support fee, the museum will purchase two computers that meet the system requirements for the software. The two computers, purchased through the University of Memphis, are estimated to cost \$700 each. Each computer requires :

- Windows 2000 Professional SP4 / Windows XP Professional SP2
- Pentium III or compatible, 600 MHz, 512 MB RAM / Pentium IV, 1 GHz, 1 GB RAM
- 500 MB disk space available / 1 GB available disk space available
- Compatible with Windows Vista

Re:discovery Proficio is a powerful and intuitive relational database that will allow the C.H. Nash Museum to completely and efficiently manage all aspects of its collections. Some of the tools that are sure to please power users as well as collections management visitors are: "Smart memory" that recalls preferred user settings, Quick Search, Quick Report, Quick Filter, Drag and drop images, and Customize screen layouts with view designer. Proficio's flexibility will enable the C.H. Nash Museum to choose an implementation that best fits needs for managing the museum's collections.

Project Oversight and management

Staff used through process will include Director Robert Connolly, Administrative Assistant Rachael South, graduate assistants Samantha Gibbs and Sherye Fairbanks, and new staff member Katie Stringer to work full time on the inventory of the 40SY1 collection material. Adjustments will be made as necessary throughout the installation and training process by consulting with the museum administration and University of Memphis. Once the software and adjoining hardware is installed, staff trained, etc. the collections intern will be able to make slight corrections to data conversions, customizations as necessary.

3. Project Resources: Time, Personnel, Budget

The implementation of the collections management software update at the C.H. Nash Museum requires significant inputs in terms of equipment and staff time. Ideally, the museum will acquire equipment as identified with the recommended standards set forth by Re:discovery Software, Inc. The list of equipment includes the following:

- 2 desktop computers, one for the repository and one for the library, with Windows 2000 Professional SP4 / Windows XP Professional SP2 Pentium III or compatible, 600 MHz, 512 MB RAM / Pentium IV, 1 GHz, 1 GB RAM 500 MB disk space available / 1 GB available disk space available, with Windows Vista

- Software: Re: Discovery Proficio Software license

This new equipment will only be effective in accomplishing the museum's goals when utilized by knowledgeable, trained staff with time to devote to the installation and maintenance of the updated software. For this reason, the museum has built in significant time for staff members to devote to becoming familiar with the updated software.

- Dr. Robert Connolly, Director, will spend minimal time on this project. As director and liaison to the University, Connolly will be responsible for the ordering of materials and for project oversight.
- Rachael South, Administrative Associate will be minimally involved in this project, as she is generally responsible for museum management on a weekly basis. She will receive training for the program and gain enough knowledge to access the system when visitors or researchers need access and other staff members are not available.
- Sherye Fairbanks, Graduate Assistant will receive training for re:Discovery to gain a basic knowledge of the collections and artifacts in the repository. In between assigned projects, Fairbanks may be asked to assist with data entry.
- Samantha Gibbs, Graduate Assistant will receive training for re:Discovery to gain a basic knowledge of the collections and artifacts in the repository. In between assigned projects, Gibbs may be asked to assist with data entry.
- Katie Stringer, New hire for Collections management will be responsible for management of the new software and data entry, as well as overseeing data entry by others. Stringer will also select the artifacts for entry into the system and check newly entered records against the old records.

See attachment for further information and resumes of each listed above.

4. Impact

Completion of the technology update and installation of collections management software will allow the collections department and other museum staff to have greater access to the museum's permanent collection in terms of each artifact's history and current status. By equipping the staff with updated hardware to access this software, greater flow of communication can be achieved within the museum, which will result in more exhibit proposals, information for visitors, that can be expressed and shared with the rest of the museum. Completion of this update will also aid in the C.H. Nash's proposed volunteer based process of the digitization of their collections and library.

The installation of updated software will also allow staff to more efficiently utilize the permanent collection for future programming.

Although the technological updates will occur during the grant period, there will be several long-term results that occur long after the initial project has ended. With better access to information regarding their collection, the C.H. Nash Museum will be able to lay groundwork for ambitious future projects, including, but not limited to, the entire renovation of the museum's core exhibits. This project will also lay a foundation upon which the museum can supplement its collection as

well as market the collection's uniqueness and significance to its current audience as well as future visitors.

Key Personnel

Dr. Robert Connolly, Director, will spend minimal time on this project. As director and liaison to the University, Connolly will be responsible for the ordering of materials and for project oversight. Connolly has been the Director of the C.H. Nash Museum for two years and has made significant progress in that time. Connolly was the director at the Poverty Point site in Louisiana prior to accepting the position at Chucalissa. In addition to his duties at Chucalissa, Connolly is also a professor of Anthropology at the University of Memphis, as well as a key component in the Museum Studies Graduate Certificate Program.

Rachael South, Administrative Associate will be minimally involved in this project, as she is generally responsible for museum management on a weekly basis. She will receive training for the program and gain enough knowledge to access the system when visitors or researchers need access and other staff members are not available. South attended the University of Memphis for her Masters in History as well as the Graduate Certificate of Museum Studies. She interned at Chucalissa, as well as the Pink Palace in Memphis, and has a vast understanding of how museums are run.

Sherye Fairbanks, Graduate Assistant will receive training for re:Discovery to gain a basic knowledge of the collections and artifacts in the repository. In between assigned projects, Fairbanks may be asked to assist with data entry. As a graduate assistant, Fairbanks is involved in all aspects of the museum. Fairbanks is also a student in the graduate certificate program.

Samantha Gibbs, Graduate Assistant will receive training for re:Discovery to gain a basic knowledge of the collections and artifacts in the repository. In between assigned projects, Gibbs may be asked to assist with data entry. Another student in the graduate certificate program, Gibbs has completed considerable amounts of internships and practicum within museums in the Memphis area, including an internship at the C.H. Nash Museum.

Katie Stringer, New hire for Collections management will be responsible for management of the new software and data entry, as well as overseeing data entry by others. Stringer will also select the artifacts for entry into the system and check newly entered records against the old records. Stringer graduated with her Masters in History and the Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies from the University of Memphis. She has worked in museums for over three years, and in that time has had exposure to collections and collections management. An internship at the C.H. Nash Museum in the Summer 2009 first exposed Stringer to the collections at the C.H. Nash Museum. She has also received training through time at the National Civil Rights Museum in collections management and PastPerfect software, which is similar to re:Discovery.

Budget Justification

We request \$50,070 from IMLS with a match of \$76,800 from the museum to properly manage our collections at the C.H. Nash Museum.

Funds requested include allocations for staff member Katie Stringer to visit museums that have implemented the software we hope to buy to manage our collections. By visiting the museums, Stringer will better understand the responsibilities she will incur once the software is purchased and executed. The funds will allow for roundtrip airfare from Memphis International Airport to Hampton, Virginia, as well as nightly accommodations, meals, and transportation in Virginia.

Software and license purchase moneys are also requested, as well as the funds to pay for monthly support fees, consultations, and data conversions.

The salary for new-hire Katie Stringer will be matched for Year 1 by the University, and the second years, funds from IMLS will make up 90% of her salary. Following the end of the grant period, the University will fund her position.

Katie Stringer
Museum Exhibits
Exhibit Review #1
February 2010

Title: Chocolate: The Exhibition
Dates: January 30 - May 2, 2010
Museum: Pink Palace Museum
Address: 3050 Central Ave. Memphis, TN 38111

The chocolate exhibit, produced by the Field Museum in Chicago, takes the visitor on a journey through the history (and even pre-history) of chocolate, from the unfamiliar and unsweetened chocolate of the Mayans and Aztecs, to chocolate as we know it today, and even theorizes on the future of chocolate. In addition, the exhibit focuses on the relationships people have had with chocolate and chocolate's influence on people from its beginning to today.

I believe this exhibit was very successful; it follows an understandable and cohesive flow from beginning to end. Each section of the exhibit is headed by an introductory panel that explains the time period and area that segment covers. The panel also contains a timeline that shows the progress of chocolate throughout time. Every section also includes the quote "chocolate is..." followed by a phrase describing what each culture represented thought of chocolate. For instance, the Aztecs saw chocolate as money, and the modern world see chocolate as a global treat.

The divisions included in this exhibit are: Prehistory, the Mayans, the Aztecs, the Spanish and transformation of chocolate, Europeans, North Americans, and into the industrial age and then into the future of chocolate globally. Each time period in the exhibit transitions very smoothly to the next section by using specific vocabulary and physical boundaries that guide the visitor. The text panels also ease the transition by presenting a timeline that shows that particular section in relation to the previous and following time periods and locations.

The exhibit opens with a display featuring the sponsor of *Chocolate*, Dinstuhl's Chocolate Company of Memphis. Artifacts from throughout the history of the shop, such as chocolate molds, photographs, and equipment bring in the local history of chocolate to the broad subject of global chocolate history. This may be construed as some advertising, as the sponsor does offer products for sale in the gift shop. However, the display does not contain any overt advertising.

There are many things about this exhibit that struck me as outstanding, from the colorful and large graphics and the various bright colors that draw the visitor's eye, to the flow of traffic and general atmosphere. However, one of the best parts of the exhibit is the opening façade, which draws the visitor in. The warm glow of a candy shop with comforting colors and mouth-watering chocolates surrounds the entrance to the exhibit in the Bodine Hall. Once the visitor enters, a picture of a candy shop counter completes the opening veneer. Unfortunately, no smells of chocolate accompany the beautiful sights of the exhibit.

Regrettably, the magnificent entrance to the exhibit is in sharp contrast to the ending of the exhibit. Though the last main display in the exhibit is incredible, the actual exit is anticlimactic. The final central exhibit is an oversized box of chocolates with inset televisions that play video of people from all over the world describing their experiences with chocolate showing that chocolate truly is a global phenomenon. However, from the television portion of the exhibit the visitor sees a few exhibit cases with modern artifacts of chocolate, and a blank exit back into the museum, which is somewhat disappointing.

The intent of the exhibits seems to be to inform people of all ages about chocolate, with a target audience of the general public, with children and families as a focal audience. The exhibit strives to explain the history and influence of chocolate on the world, and I believe that it is successful in this intent. The overt message seems to be that everyone is influenced by chocolate in such aspects of life as holidays, the stock market, and sociology.

Technically, the exhibit is superb. The text is very readable, regarding both the font and text size as well as content, and draws the visitor in; the panels have important words in a bold font to show key points. The panels also contain text in both English and Spanish, providing an enjoyable experience for the Spanish-speaking population, while not taking away from the English. The language is clear and understandable for the general public.

Chocolate: The Exhibition also contains several hands-on opportunities throughout the exhibit to keep the visitor entertained and involved. Artifacts are housed in cases that blend into the exhibit very well, such as the Aztec and Mayan temple facades that protect the artifacts within, while maintaining the theme of the section. The atmosphere is enhanced with appropriate lighting and even sound effects such as rainforest sounds and music appropriate to the cultures and areas represented. The industrial and modern sections of the exhibit even contain the sounds of factories. Large pictures of events and the people described throughout the exhibit also provide a great reference for visitors.

The website for *Chocolate* states:

Chocolate will immerse you in a sweet experience, engage all your senses and reveal facets of chocolate you may have never thought about before. Observe the plant, the products, and the history of chocolate through the lenses of botany and ecology, anthropology and economics, and conservation and popular culture.⁴¹

The designers and preparers for the exhibit did a great job of producing a product that lives up to the goals expressed by the quote on the website. I would recommend this exhibit to anyone, especially students who wish to learn about exhibits and how to create them successfully.

⁴¹ <http://www.fieldmuseum.org/CHOCOLATE/exhibits.html>

Exhibit Critique 2

Venice in the Age of Canaletto
February 14-May 9, 2010
Memphis Brooks Museum of Art
1934 Poplar Avenue
Memphis, Tennessee 38104

Venice in the Age of Canaletto exhibits the paintings, art, furniture and decorative arts of Venice from the 18th Century. Popular paintings, magazine or newspaper prints, and furniture from the homes of Venetians explore their daily lives and beliefs. Mirrors and sculpture, along with settees and chairs give a glimpse into the homes of people who lived in Venice during the time of Canaletto. From what I was able to glean from the topic panel, Canaletto was an important artist from Venice who painted sober and artistic oils of cityscapes for foreigners.

My first impression of the exhibit was somewhat skewed by confusion. The entrance to the exhibit was frustratingly hard to find. Once I found the small directional sign that pointed the way downstairs I followed the arrow to the bottom of the stairs. At the bottom of the stairs was another directional sign pointing to the left. The gallery on the left appeared to be a small children's gallery packed with students. Straight ahead was a gallery that appeared to contain items from the Venice exhibit. Wanting to avoid the children and thinking that the gallery must be the beginning of the exhibit, I continued forward and found a table containing evaluation forms for the cell phone audio tour. Infinitely puzzled I looked to the first case label and saw that this was indeed a part of the Venice collection. At this time, a group led by a docent entered and began a guided tour. This further confused and convinced me that it must be the entrance.

I began to look at case labels and wall labels in an attempt to analyze the exhibit. However, the topic panels seemed to be at the end of the flow of the exhibit, which did not help the viewer understand the content until the end of their observations. I was also unimpressed with the first artifacts, a settee and a couple of sculptures, which were not very eye-catching. The lack of an exhibit title also seemed a bit strange. I began to go through the exhibit a bit faster to try to find information. Once I got to the "end", I saw the title, information about a cell phone tour, and gallery guides for families. The entrance is hidden on the other side of the children's gallery around a corner. The fact that a tour group started at the end still confuses me, but the truth remains that the entrance was unclear. More clearly stated physical orientation signage could easily fix this problem. The result of the confusion could lead to frustration or lack of understanding of the exhibit.

After I was able to enter the exhibit from the correct end, I was able to evaluate the layout, graphics, and other exhibit characteristics. I did very much enjoy the art on display. The paintings are very colorful and lifelike. Though I am not generally interested in art museums as much as other museums, the art within this exhibit was engaging to me. The title is on a large red wall with straw yellow and white letters. The font and font size are appropriate, and the wall is eye-catching. Opposite the title wall is a sponsors' credit panel with black text on red

background, which is somewhat hard on the eyes. The first table at the entrance contains instructions for a cell phone audio tour, large print label guide, and a family gallery guide for children. I did listen to some of the audio tour, but the content was more information than I was particularly interested in. The idea is great, however, and very valuable for those who wish to learn more information.

The first gallery of the exhibit is dominated by a double screen video of the Venice canals. According to the wall panel, the film was shot and commissioned by the Brooks in 2008 to give visitors the feel of being on the canals of Venice. Accompanying sounds recorded at the time of filming give the feel of actually being in modern Venice. Behind the film is the introductory panel for the exhibit. The label is clearly readable with black text on a white background and properly sized and spaced letters and lines. However, the label contains two similar sized paragraphs, and the first paragraph contains over 140 words. The label also contains several two, three and four syllable words, which may inhibit some visitors.

The first gallery exhibits black and white sketch prints of scenes of Venice life. The first is a portrait of Caneletto with some basic biographical information. The walls of the first gallery are a deep, striking red color. As with other object labels throughout the exhibit, the object labels of the art works mimic the wall color on the background color of the labels with black text. The labels for the objects in the first gallery were a lighter, yet still deep, red background with black text. This was hard on the eyes, and again the labels were a bit long. The average number of words per objects label, for didactic information, seems to be around 100-120 words. This does not include artist information, materials, dates, or sponsor credit information.

Case labels on vitrines holding objects such as ceramics and sculpture, however, were generally white text on black background. While not as easy on the eyes of older or sight-impaired individuals, the contrast was much more welcome than black text on red background. The font is an appropriate sized serif style that is easily viewed from the average vista distance of the objects. Again, case labels seem to be wordy, with over 100 words per case label.

The initially confusing area or topic panels were much less confusing once I was following the correct flow and chronology of the exhibit. The black text on white background panels again contained too many words, as well as too many words with multiple syllables and somewhat confusing words. However, they are very physically readable, despite the possible restrictions of content.

Lighting of objects and artwork comes from spotlight track lighting high in the ceilings, and is properly adjusted for optimal viewing while not causing destruction to the art. The flow of the exhibit is quite clear and directed by walls, cases and benches. There is plenty of space for visitors to move around without damaging himself, herself, or the art.

Cameras and docent are very visible in the galleries, and objects in vitrines seem to be secure and inaccessible. The paintings are in the open and subject to curious hands, but the docents and guards seem vigilant enough to prevent such occurrences.

The exhibit's end does leave a bit to be desired. After the visitor sees the paintings, sculpture and furniture the exhibit just ends at the stairwell. The last objects are not particularly remarkable or thought provoking. In addition, the last room contained no docent or guard, and the objects were more out in the open with only a small railing along the floor below knee level to prevent people from getting too close. However, it would be very easy for a person to lean forward and touch or possibly damage the objects, particularly since there is no guard presence noticeable in this gallery.

Based on the content of labels and panels, I would judge the projected audience to be high school or college students. The syllable ratio to the word count may be too high for anyone below high school level. The content of the exhibit may also be marketed towards the older audiences. However, the family guide provided at the beginning does offer questions and activities to engage younger children.

Katie Stringer
Final Research Paper
Museum Exhibits

The exhibit that our class developed and produced throughout the spring semester of 2010 is titled *Sogo Bò: The Animals Come Forth*. The exhibit includes a collection of African puppets and masks from the Segou region in Mali. Many of the masks and puppets were made by the Bamana group of people. The major themes that our class focused on were public performance, youth societies, societal and cultural meanings behind the masks, puppets and performance, and the cultural context of the masks and puppets. Each graduate student was responsible for a segment of information that would provide the text for wall panels. This will be further discussed below.

The class came up with a concept statement that includes the goals, purpose, content, and audience that the exhibit hopes to reach. The statement is as follows:

Sogo Bo: The Animals Come Forth showcases a collection of authentic African masks and puppets made by the Bamana people and nearby groups of the Segou region in Mali. These puppets and masks are used by Bamana youth groups in public performances to instruct and to encourage dialogue about shared community values in their society. The exhibition will explore the societal and cultural meanings behind these objects and the youth societies, known as the *kamalen ton*, which create them and relate these performances to a broader cultural context. In so doing, it will also touch on related historical, religious, artistic and creative aspects of these objects. The masks and puppets will be displayed in standard casework, and each object will have an associated 2-D object label. The exhibit will also utilize interpretive panels, graphics and spatial organization to reveal the connections between Sogo Bo and specific aspects of Bamana life in each section of the exhibit. A performance video on view in the New Media Gallery will show Sogo Bop performances in action. The objects in this exhibition are from the collection of Mary Sue and Paul Peter Rosen of New York City. A catalog of the Rosen Sogo Bo collection with interpretative essay by Smithsonian Institution anthropologist, Mary Jo Arnoldi, is also available. This exhibition is geared toward the greater Memphis area audience with an emphasis on the local African-American community and University of Memphis students, faculty and staff.⁴²

The main goals of the exhibit, as shown in the concept statement, are to exhibit the history, religion, art, and creativity of the people who use the puppets and masks through the showcasing of the objects and text related to the topics. We chose these topics as a class because we felt that

⁴² Museum Exhibits Students. *Exhibit Concept Statement*. March 2010. Accessed on eCourseware.

they were some of the more important aspects of the culture and essential to understanding the Bamana people and the objects on display. As stated in the class concept statement, the main audience the exhibit intends to reach is the Memphis community and those associated with the University of Memphis, with an emphasis on the African Americans within those groups.

As the class developed the exhibit, we put together a formative evaluation that would help us to understand what our audiences want or need from the exhibit, as well what would work and not work with the essential parts of the exhibit such as label text and color palettes. The questions I came up with for the evaluation are as follows:

1. Are you Male or Female?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your race?
4. Do you know where Mali is?
5. What do you know about African cultures, particularly those in Mali? (If you are unsure, that is fine!)
6. What colors would you associate with the information we are presenting?
7. What colors would you like to see us use within the exhibit?
8. Are the text labels clear and understandable?
9. What is the overall message of the exhibit?
10. Is the topic we are presenting relevant or interesting to you?
11. Will you visit this exhibit once it opens?
12. Why or why not?
13. Have you learned anything about the Bamana or Mali performance art from our presentation about the exhibit? If yes, what have you learned?
14. What can we do to improve the exhibit?
- 15.

The formative evaluation is an integral part to the design process. Without feedback from our intended audience, we could possibly have designed an exhibit that was only for us that would have no meaning for those who we were attempting to serve.

For this exhibit, my portion of the exhibit included the presentation and providing of information about the Hyena puppet from the collection. In addition, I was responsible for the text panel about the history of the performance along with Emily Schwimmer.

The hyena puppet, as I discovered in my research, is integral to the performance of the Bamana. The first draft of my object label included the following information:

Name of Object: Hyena, *Nama*

Artist Name: Unknown, possibly Bamana group of Mali

Materials: Wood, paint, metal, string, rubber

This puppet represents the hyena, which is a prevalent wild animal in Mali. Hyenas represent tradition and elders in the community. The lower jaw is moved by a rubberband.

Date of manufacture: Unknown

Donor Info: Mary Sue and Paul Peter Rosen Collection

As we continued the design of the exhibit, however, we decided that the hyena would be in a separate gallery from the rest of the objects. To make room for everyone's' objects, the hyena

was placed in the media room which will play a video of a performance in Mali. The hyena was chosen for the darkened room because of his dramatic features, and also because of the hyena's role in the performance. I acquired the information for the object label from Mary Jo Arnoldi's *Sogo Bo: The Animals Come Forth*.⁴³

Along with changes to the design, the class also decided which information should be included in each object label, and how those labels should be formatted. Because of the changes in the gallery design, I redrafted my label to include the following information:

Hyena (*Nama*) Puppet

Mali

Wood, paint, metal, string, rubber

Late 20th Century

30 5/8 inches x 5 1/2 inches

Collection of Susan and Paul Peter Rosen

The hyena puppet is usually the first figure to appear in the Sogo Bo performance, which takes place at night. Hyenas represent tradition and the elders of the community. In this example, the rods used by the puppeteer are visible. A rubber band manipulated by a puppeteer moves the lower jaw of this puppet.

The new object label includes information that authenticates the placement of the hyena in a different gallery from the other objects. Because the video room is darkened, the hyena is presented in a more realistic environment that represents the night-time performance. Another interesting aspect of the display of the hyena is that the mechanical aspects of the puppet are visible. Because the rods are visible, a line was added to explain what they are and how they are used to the visitor.

The installation of my object was somewhat different from the rest of the masks or puppets. Because the hyena was to be installed in a separate gallery, the decking and base of the case were different. While the objects in Gallery B were houses in cases with bright white bases and white decking, the hyena's case was painted a dark grey to match the walls and darkness of the media room. The base required only minor touch ups around the bottom.

The decking posed a few problems because of the material used to cover the decking. Rather than the tough linen white fabric used in the other gallery, the dark grey material contained more polyester and stretched more easily. With the help of classmate William Devore, however, the decking was properly secured and matched quite well with the base and the dark video gallery.

Because the hyena was to be displayed with visible rods and mechanical aspects of the puppet visible, a special mount was built to hold the hyena securely as an angle that would allow the visitor to view the hyena easily. The mount was painted the same color as the base and walls of the gallery. I used a hot glue gun to affix a section of foam to the mount to protect the puppet from any scratches or damage. The puppet was then securely affixed to the mount using Velcro straps.

In addition to my object label, I researched the history of the Bamana performance culture using the Mary Jo Arnoldi book, again. The task of writing a topic panel for the exhibit was divided between myself and Emily Schwimmer. We each took an aspect of the history to research and combined our label for the final product. The process of writing, drafting,

⁴³ Mary Jo Arnoldi, *Sogo Bò: The Animals Come Forth*, 2009.

redrafting, and collaborating took several attempts. In addition to researching the information to be included in the label, I applied both the Fry Test and Readability tests to the label to ensure that there was not an excess of syllables and that the label would be readable by the general public.

My first draft of the topic panel stated:

According to local historians performance began in fishing communities, particularly the Boso community. Oral traditions claim that by the 1850s farm villages in the Segou region had adopted the performances as well. Bamana villagers believe they are latecomers to the tradition of performance as they only adopted the practice in the late nineteenth century. Oral tradition states that the performance started when "wokulow" or bush spirits took Toboji Centa, a Boso hunter, into the woods and taught him the performance. Bamana and Maraka farmers have no tradition of beginning of the performance but they know that the fishermen began the tradition.

Because the label was already 101 words long and did not yet include Schwimmer's information, my next draft was somewhat shorter. The second draft of my history text explained: Local Malian historians believe Sogo Bo began in the Boso fishing village. Oral tradition claims that by the 1850s Segou farm villages had adopted the performances. Bamana villagers adopted the performance in the late 1900s. Villagers think the performance began when wokulow, or bush spirits, took Toboji Centa, a Boso hunter, into the woods and taught him.

This label was a bit more concise, and also worked well with Schwimmer's label:

Sogo Bo has traditionally been performed in individual villages in the Segou region. However, this performance has gained recognition as an important part of the cultural heritage of Mali. Sogo Bo troupes have increasingly performed at regional, national, and international festivals. Many still regard the local performances as the only *real* Sogo Bo.

Though the panel was shorter, it still did not fit on the available paper for the topic panels. In addition to this problem, once the topic panels were all posted in the gallery, the graduate students began to realize that many of the labels contained overlapping information.

Because of the overlap of information, the graduate students collaborated to rewrite and edit the labels, which were almost all too long anyway. The result of this final drafting included the work of both myself and Schwimmer:

Boso fishing villages are the acknowledge birthplace of Sogo Bo. According to tradition, Sogo Bo began when the *wokulow*, bush spirits, took Toboji Centa, a Boso hunter, into the woods and taught him the masquerade. Sogo Bo first spread among the fishing villages on the Niger and Bani Rivers and then east and west among farming villages. Farming villages in the Segou region began adopting Sogo Bo by the 1850s. The Bamana, an ethnic group of farmers, which

contributed most of the pieces in this exhibit, were latecomers, having adopted Sogo Bo in the late nineteenth century.

This concise label contains all pertinent information without being repetitive.

This exhibit sought to present the masks and puppets of the *Sogo Bo* performance so that our intended audience could view and draw their own conclusions about the exhibit. Objects were placed in standard free-standing cases with a variety of bonnets to protect the objects, per the donor. The gallery was organized so that each student could work on their own object and have it displayed in the exhibit.

One problem that the class did encounter in the construction of the exhibit was the display of the cow. Because the cow included both a mask and a tail and incorporated a textile piece, innovative construction was required. The museum did not have a case which would be of sufficient size to contain the cow once fully constructed, so a barrier was built around the cow. The boundary created by a frame covered in raffia was not only a protective measure for the object, but also represented the way that the cow may look during a performance.

Because each object was included in the exhibit, space was somewhat of an issue. Several similar objects were able to be grouped together to conserve space in cases. As mentioned before, the hyena was placed in a separate gallery. After much maneuvering and changing around, each case and object was fitted in the gallery with space enough for visitors and a comfortable flow throughout the gallery.

The experience of producing an exhibit from beginning to end was a very interesting and eye-opening event. While the class provided information that will help me in my future career, I was also able to appreciate the time, effort, and work that goes into exhibit production.

Bibliography

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National Civil Rights Museum
Memphis, Tennessee
September 2009 – November 2009

Intern

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My internship at the National Civil Rights Museum was quite short, but in the time I was there I was able to gain much more experience in the collections field. I began to help with the accreditation process by the American Association of Museums by cataloguing resources throughout the museum and in the employee resource center. I also received training in the PastPerfect program, which is the collections data program used by the NCRM. I did location and condition reporting on loaned collections on display throughout the museum. I assisted the full-time staff with daily collections duties such as research in the repository for private individuals, cleaning exhibits and artifacts, and collections care.

