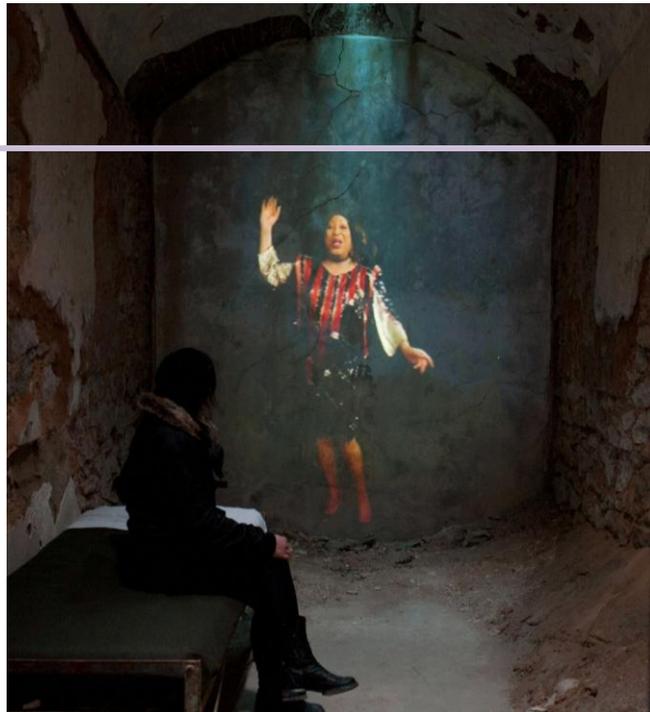


A Working Guide to the Landscape of Arts for Change

A collection of writings depicting the wide range of ways the arts make community, civic, and social change.



Beware the Lily Law by Michelle Handelman, one of Eastern State Penitentiary's Artist Installations. The installation is a series of videotaped monologues based on real stories which are acted and projected within the cells of this historic site. It uses the 1969 Stonewall Riots as a starting point to address issues facing gay and transgendered inmates, including how they are incarcerated in "protective custody," resulting in a form of solitary confinement. Photo: www.easternstate.org

History Organizations and Engagement

By Pam Korza and Barbara Schaffer Bacon for the Heritage Philadelphia Program

The past is indeed always with us, and historic sites, history exhibitions and programs, anniversaries and commemorations, and heritage tourism efforts offer great potential for examination of both the history of a community and its contemporary civic and social concerns. History helps people understand the sources and complexities of present-day issues. History organizations and their tangible artifacts and spaces bring great assets to the process of making meaning of contemporary life.

This paper adapts a report that Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, developed in 2007 and 2008 for the [Heritage Philadelphia Program](#) (HPP). The Heritage Philadelphia Program at the Philadelphia Center for Arts & Heritage is a think tank and funding organization in support of excellence and imagination in public history practice in the Philadelphia region.

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The paper aimed to provide a snapshot of the state of history organizations nationally at the time; looking at leading edge interpretive public programming models and directions that engage publics and communities in meaningful ways. It also served to inform the Heritage Philadelphia Program as it sought to renew itself in order to maximize the power of history and Philadelphia's many history organizations as vital contributors to the civic life as well as to the nation.

This paper is based on a synthesis of trend reports, articles and essays, and research of exemplary projects as well as interviews with history field practitioners, service organization leaders, and scholars. Field leaders provided perspective on trends; leading edge program activity and best practices; as well as opportunities, issues and obstacles facing history organizations nationally. Web research and a review of literature was conducted across several categories, including: national service organizations serving the history and museum fields; individual exemplary history organizations, including museums, historical societies, historic house museums, history service organizations, and history projects or initiatives; heritage/cultural tourism; non-history organizations and projects that have taken up history. (See Appendices 1, 2, and 3 for lists of individuals interviewed, references, and resources.)

Although the information was gathered in 2006 and 2007, the characterization of quality practices and strategies to link history and history organizations to contemporary life is still relevant and can inform how such activity can motivate people to become engaged in their communities, to inform and stimulate dialogue by linking past with present concerns, and to advance social change goals such as racial justice.

*Appendix 4 to this report profiles 17 history organizations and projects that reflect exemplary interpretive and program practice in the field. In addition, the "History as Catalyst" chapter from *Animating Democracy's* book, *Civic Dialogue, Arts & Culture: Findings from Animating Democracy*, may be of interest.*

[Appendix 1](#) — Interviews with National Field Leaders, Practitioners, Scholars

[Appendix 2](#) — References

[Appendix 3](#) — Resources

[Appendix 4](#) — Profiles of Exemplary Organizations & Programs

HISTORY AND ENGAGEMENT: NOTEWORTHY TRENDS AND DIRECTIONS

Exemplary interpretive and engagement strategies have been pioneered by leading institutions such as the Minnesota History Center, Chicago History Museum, Lower East Side Tenement Museum, Japanese American National Museum, among others. Their leadership and momentum is growing across a wider range of history institutions to connect history in meaningful ways to contemporary life and the public sphere. Strategies aim to build relationships and situate history organizations genuinely as civic and community institutions by relating history to personal experience and contemporary issues; including multiple “truths” and viewpoints; and sharing authority with community members as advisors, informants, and co-developers of exhibitions. The trends and directions that are noteworthy in achieving vital intersections between history and community and civic engagement are evident in: youth and teen programs; in programs and projects that link the power of arts with history; the integral use of story and narrative; the explicit use of collections, exhibitions, and public programs to foster civic engagement or dialogue; and tapping popular culture and technology.

Youth and Teen Programs

Some of the most imaginative and innovative work in history organizations (and the museum field in general) is happening in youth and teen oriented programming.

Deborah Schwartz, who has looked at teen-based programming in art and history museums across the country (*Museum News*, Sept/Oct 2005), notes a surge of teen programming in museums in the past decade. “Museum directors, educators, and marketing experts now increasingly recognize that this audience represents the pulse of contemporary culture. Their thinking will be at the forefront of society within the decade.” She observes that leading institutions, including the Chicago History Museum (CHM), the Henry Ford Museum, and the Field Museum are engaging adolescents and teens now, learning from them, and inviting them to actively participate in the transformation of cultural institutions.

The Chicago History Museum’s “Teen Chicago” program (see Appendix 4) sets a precedent in the history museum field by having invited Chicago teens to research a century of largely undocumented teenage history in Chicago. The project points out how genuine interest and trust in teen points of view and intelligence as well as a structured experience including training in museum methods, can reap exciting program innovations. Teens conducted and wrote oral history of 20th century teens, challenged curatorial orientations and created “Teen Point of View” labels to emphasize positive contributions of teens to society, and other ways to present history in a different light. Russell Lewis

considers Teen Chicago “a milestone” for CHM with lasting effects in terms of understanding how to share authority and in seeing the creative interpretation that can result from genuine collaboration with this generation. For example, teens have since created pod casts for CHM’s *Chicago Crossroads* exhibition, enabling “teens to talk to other teens” in experiencing the exhibition. (See also Appendix 4 profiles on Phillipsburg Manor’s *Pretends to be Free: Imagining Runaway Slaves*, and The Andy Warhol Museum’s *Without Sanctuary* project.)

Many interesting and well conceived intergenerational projects involving elders and teens were found and suggest the natural opportunity presented by elders as bearers and witnesses of history and teens as the next generation who will carry history into the future. (See Appendix profile on the Reading America partnership between the Timber Lake Historical Society and the local library.)

Arts and History

The arts are being integrated into the work of history organizations and history is a focus of artists’ and arts organizations’ work.

Thoughtful interdisciplinary efforts deepen the experience of both the arts and history. Art can offer history in a new form through story, theater, film, public art, and visual art and serves as a means for interpreting and reinterpreting history. Public art works and memorials often commemorate sites of recent or more distant past events and people. Artists in residence, such as Fred Wilson at the Maryland Historical Society, and various artists at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, have pushed the envelope in the recent past to relook at how collections are presented and interpreted. These early influences continue to be felt in such exhibitions as the New York Historical Society’s 2006 *Legacies: Contemporary Artists Reflect on Slavery*, and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum’s *Digital Artist in Residence* project (see Appendix 4).

Hidden City Philadelphia links artists and historians in the development of installations that lend creative interpretation and attraction value to historic sites that are less known and visited. Also in Philadelphia, Eastern State Penitentiary (ESP) has made its mark not only by virtue of its impressive facility, but also through the integrity and imagination of its programs. Artist installations are regularly featured and often take up issues related to the justice and prison system. Audio tours feature oral histories and artist statements that tap emotional as well as informational dimensions of the site. It is an organization that sees the unique assets and potential of the site, looks for and forms strategic partnerships, and reaches out to its neighborhood.

Theater has a regular place in many history museums. The Minnesota History Center has engaged actors and playwrights in a variety of ways to bring to life historic individuals in live or media-enhanced forms within the galleries. In Connor Prairie’s *Follow the North*

Star program, visitors are the “actors,” becoming slaves in a reenactment of the Underground Railroad. This program is still considered by field leaders to be “gutsy” in its strategy of “immersion” and because it is effective in the way it engenders empathy and provokes thought via debriefings that connect the immediate personal experience to history and current events. The New York State Archives annually presents a “lecture” in which a famous actor embodies a historic figure and delivers a significant speech made by that figure. The program, developed by a historian, often uses images as well as words to enhance the narration. Richard Dreyfuss has read the words of Ulysses S. Grant and Sam Waterston has portrayed Abraham Lincoln.

Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, has documented compelling intersections between history and art that linked past to present and fostered generative dialogue about history and contemporary concerns. Some are described in the following passages. (*Civic Dialogue, Arts & Culture*, Americans for the Arts, 2005).

Artists can offer new and potent interpretation of contested sites of history and historic sites of memory. Evoking History, the three-year program implemented in conjunction with the Spoleto Festival USA, connected historic sites in the city of Charleston, SC, to contemporary issues of race, cultural tourism, development, and gentrification. The program brought together artists, the festival, and the community to think deeply about the area’s heritage by re-examining a range of sites, from high-profile plantations to a parking lot unmarked and unnoticed for its past as the location for a slave market. Through dialogue stimulated by performances, public art, and other cultural projects, *Evoking History* sought to support a long-term process of reconciling competing views of the past and changing long-held attitudes. Heritage tourism, an important piece of the city’s economy, provided an impetus for reconsidering the meaning of historic sites and the possibility of finally acknowledging Charleston’s slave history. Mary Jane Jacob, who conceived and curated *Evoking History*, has seen change in interpretive practice at Drayton Hall, as a result of artist Lonnie Graham’s artistic intervention there, as well as at Middleton Place Plantation.

The restoration of historic artworks and architecture offers opportunity for interpretation. The restoration of the statue of King Kamehameha I on the big island of Hawai’i symbolized concerns about heritage preservation in the context of tourist development, and the need for local participation in related civic decisions. A collaboration between the conservator, local cultural and civic leaders, and the Hawai’i Alliance for Arts Education capitalized on the art object’s history and meaning to draw out these larger concerns and community dialogue around them. Another example (not part of Animating Democracy) is the Eldridge Street Synagogue in Manhattan.

Art can illuminate personal history, providing a potent entry point for connecting with larger historic moments, events, and related contemporary issues. Arts-based

projects may draw on more recent historical situations, connecting still-powerful memories to current issues. Through the efforts of Junebug Productions and founder John O’Neal, the *Color Line Project* collected stories from people who had experiences or memories of the civil rights movement to ensure that those stories not be lost or forgotten. In selected cities, O’Neal, a national organizing team, and local partners used Story Circles methodology as a democratic dialogue form to collect stories. Local artists then transformed these stories into public performance of, by, and for the community. In addition, presentation of Junebug’s Jabbo Jones plays and scholarly panels provided varied opportunities for public discussion about the Jim Crow era and current issues of race in each community.

Art can encourage empathy, give permission for emotion, and evoke visceral response that opens up people’s hearts to new ways of looking at history and its effects. In developing interpretive strategies for the slave galleries of St. Augustine’s Church on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, project organizers engaged storyteller/interpreter Lorraine Johnson-Coleman to lend her imaginative powers to filling in the human story missing from historic record. She wrote a creative piece for eventual use by docents or for silent reading in the space, in which the slave galleries themselves speak. The emotional and visceral effects of the story and space combined proved powerful in generating conversation among visitors to the space.

Story and Narrative

The use of story in the development of exhibitions, public programs, and interpretive strategies has become a fundamental approach.

Barbara Franco observes (*OAH Newsletter*, April, 2006) that, “While oral historians have long stressed the importance of narrative and stories in understanding history, historians, both public and academic, are rediscovering how powerful personal stories can be in engaging public audiences in serious historical analysis.” The field continues to refer to the groundbreaking work by David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig that underscores the value of the personal relationship to history. The Minnesota History Center was a forerunner that set a standard and now a wide range of organizations have discovered that stories can create a potent personal connection to history.

Telling a good story through exhibitions has proved challenging though for history organizations because it requires breaking out of the predominant mode of historiography and information driven interpretation. Barbara Franco believes that people use their visual senses in museums and tend to favor the emotional over the informational or intellectual. Interpretive practices are striving to achieve the best qualities of good story: an emotional connection, ambiguity and complexity that prompt thought, a strong arc, and the ability to make broader meaning in moving from the particular to the universal.

Civic Dialogue and Engagement

Some history organizations are using their collections, exhibitions, and public programs to foster civic engagement or dialogue.

Civic engagement is defined in various ways within the field. At the institutional level, the National Park Service and the Museums and Communities initiative of American Association of Museums have tended to define civic engagement as greater stakeholder involvement in institutional planning. Animating Democracy supported a handful of projects that deeply explored history as a catalyst for civic dialogue about contemporary issues. In this vein, a small number of history museums have begun to offer or create literal spaces as well as forums for dialogue among visitors. The Levine Museum of the New South (see Appendix 4), the NY Historical Society (in its presentation of the *Without Sanctuary* exhibition), the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, and the Underground Railroad Freedom Center make dialogue about contemporary issues a planned dimension of specific exhibitions.

The Levine Museum's 2004, exhibition, *Courage: The Carolina Story that Changed America*, marked the 50th anniversary of America's landmark school desegregation case. The exhibition made space for citizens of Charlotte, NC to examine issues of equity, race, and inclusion in

the context of the history of school desegregation. Through a civic dialogue effort called "Conversations on Courage," the museum invited executives and leaders from area businesses, government agencies, and nonprofits to tour the exhibit together. Then, facilitators from a local nonprofit that promotes equity and inclusion,



From the exhibition, *COURAGE: The Carolina Story That Changed America*, Levine Museum of the New South. Photo: www.museumofthenewsouth.org

facilitated discussion around the ideas brought up in the exhibit and their implications for race and education today. This kind of work represents a major shift for history organizations—from fostering relationship between visitor and exhibit, to fostering engagement between visitors.

Technology

Technology is facilitating new forms of engagement in history exhibitions and in multiple perspectives on history.

In the context of on-site interpretation, standard video technologies, object theater, listening stations, audio tours, and multimedia presentations are being employed with a good deal of polish and overall effectiveness. On the lower tech side, video booths, that enable visitors to comment on their exhibition experience and which may then be played back as part of the exhibition, have effectively enabled visitors to process a challenging or emotional exhibition, or to simply add their interpretation or evaluation of it. An interesting interactive video display called “Modern Oregon Issues” was produced by the Oregon Historical Society as part of its *Oregon My Oregon* exhibition. Visitors sat at a recreated lunch counter and selected from a list of contemporary issues on the countertop jukeboxes. Each selection launched a video presentation of real Oregonians discussing that issue. The lunch counter introduced controversial issues in an informal atmosphere while providing an outlet for a diversity of opinion.

In the quest for greater interactivity, pod casting has been employed to respond to new Internet learning modes in which people self-direct their learning and create their own lasting memories by what they save and bookmark. Pod casts enable a museum to offer commentary from speakers and experts that would be impossible to bring to the institution. Another possibility is to offer conversations with multiple points of view—as opposed to monologues. Alternative audio commentary need not undermine or replace the historian but it allows a way to engage that is not intimidating. In addition, pod cast tours and commentaries are relatively inexpensive to produce and distribute. Commercial companies are creating a niche for the use of this technology in museums.

In addition to official audio guides, unauthorized tours may become commonplace as well. The Museum of Modern Art in New York created a set of official pod casts, but a student group called Art Mobs at Marymount College is creating and distributing their own tours and commentaries and encouraging others to submit their own as well.

Internet exhibitions are extending the life of temporary exhibitions and deepening the experience of the actual visit with more and different ways of experiencing content, context, and objects. The award-winning website, *The Raid on Deerfield: The Many Stories of 1704*, provides an alternative, participatory dimension to Historic Deerfield’s permanent museum exhibit on the 1704 Raid. The website maximizes interactive features to allow the “visitor” to explore the contentions surrounding this historic event. Among other features, visitors can proceed through ten “scenes” which narrate the Deerfield Raid, its origins, and its consequences from 1550 to the present. Every event presents the perspectives of each of the French, English, and Indian cultures involved in the raid. Each scene encourages visitors to decide for themselves the events and their implications and, in doing so, effectively appeals to the visitor’s curiosity.

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE BEST WORK

Relevance

History organizations are increasingly aware that they need to find ways to become more “relevant” and “useful,” not only to survive, but to thrive as active contributors to the public good.

Becoming more relevant is both a central motivation and challenge. Emlyn Koster noted, “It isn’t that relevancy thinking is absent from the museum field, rather there needs to be a broader range of thinking in museums about *how to* become more relevant.” (*Museum News*, May/June 2006) Being relevant often means taking risks and tackling controversial topics and setting bold educational, civic, social or other goals that make a difference in how people see themselves, their community and relationship to it, and the world.

Best Historical Thinking

There is heightened consciousness about reflecting today’s best historical thinking rather than relying on the work of previous generations.

State of the art interpretation of history is commonly described as:

Embracing multiple truths and perspectives rather than a single truth or perspective.

Going for greater complexity in the telling of history, i.e. not underestimating the visitor’s capacity for complexity.

Responsibly confronting the negative or disturbing dimensions of history that have been suppressed by doing the necessary historical research, developing interpretation, and reorienting a history organization’s story toward the fuller truths.

Recognizing the essential role of the historian in the museum by bringing in outside expertise to expand the knowledge base and provide fresh perspective, but also to have historians on staff among or along side curatorial staff.

The emerging sub-field of “public history” is focusing on how to connect history in

relevant, meaningful ways with publics, applying theoretical frameworks to practical challenges. Historians who are interested in this connection—whether they call themselves “public historians” or not— are an increasingly valuable resource to be engaged.

Heritage tourism has potential to motivate a fresh look at history content within and across history organizations and historic sites. The state of Pennsylvania is considered a national leader in heritage tourism development with programs that have been replicated throughout the country. For instance, the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program and National Heritage Areas that capitalize on Pennsylvania’s unique industrial heritage are considered the best-established statewide heritage area programs in the country and serves as models for other states.

Collections

Collections pose opportunity and challenge as institutions assess, manage, exhibit, and interpret them in the context of changing values.

In interpreting and educating about history, Eric Foner believes that history museums have the advantage of “visual impact” via their collections. When they “do it right... exhibits allow visitors to encounter artifacts and documents of the past directly to see for themselves and get a visceral sense.” (*Museum News*, March/April 2006)

Some organizations have taken refreshed looks at collections. Maymont House, a historic house in Richmond, VA, has developed a new permanent exhibition exploring the life of servitude at the estate. The exhibition is integrated throughout the house, using the permanent collection to tell the story of the historic house and its full slate of inhabitants (see Appendix 4). Liora J. Cobin, a public historian in New York, has been thinking about the role of permanent and long-term exhibits at small local history museums. She observes that many such museums are attempting to reinvent themselves and break out of their reputations as “old-dusty-boring” by investing in new “permanent” exhibits. She wonders, “Do these investments pay off? Are ‘permanent’ exhibits an important framework for establishing a local story and an initial contact point for a museum and its visitors? Or do permanent exhibits drain resources and inhibit a museum’s ability to remain flexible, relevant and responsive to community needs?” (H-Public post, Oct. 27, 2006)

The Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia has given greater emphasis to documents and less to decorative arts. Engaging thoughtfully with advisors from the community, working with guest curators, brainstorming with interesting thinkers, and tapping the creative possibilities of the arts in relation to history programming has generated intriguing public program concepts.

While most organizations with collections adhere to a fundamental commitment to protecting, and preserving them, the primacy of collections has shifted somewhat as a result of focus on visitor “experience,” multimode approaches to exhibitions, use of technology, and expanded public programming. Some, however, have questioned whether collections are taking a back seat to elaborate public programs and interpretive strategies.

The African-American Story

Presenting the African-American story as integral to American history is a prominent concern.

Lonnie Bunch wrote that, “one of the challenges before us, whether we write, preserve, exhibit history or consume culture, is to do a better job of centralizing race.” (*Museum News*, Nov/Dec, 2005). While the field is still reckoning with this and it will continue to be an important dimension of work, evidence appears in a range of places—the opening of African-American history museums in Baltimore and Cincinnati, and with the creation of the National Museum of African American History and Culture; exhibitions about slavery and other dimensions of African-American history such as the New York Historical Society’s recent trio of exhibitions about Slavery; and historic sites reinterpreting their stories to include the full story such as Maymont and Phillipsburg Manor in Sleepy Hollow, NY (see Appendix 4).

Heritage tourism and growth in African-American tourism is an additional driving factor. In Pennsylvania, [Live & Learn Weekends](#) provide new focus to African American history there through a partnership between the Pennsylvania Department of Community and

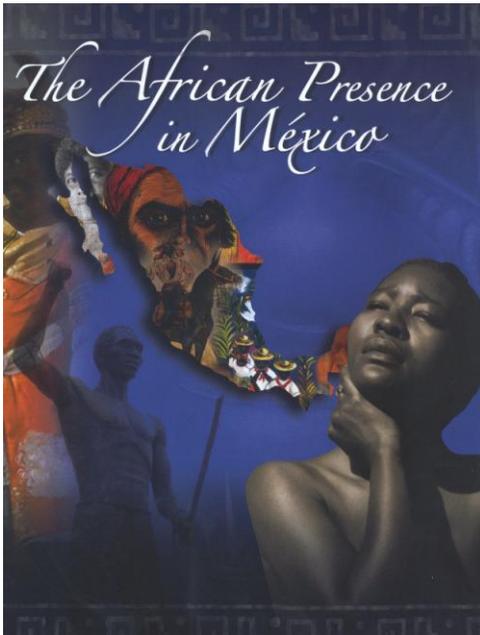
The screenshot shows a website interface for the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. At the top left is the logo with the text "pennsylvania quest for freedom". Navigation links include "ROADTRIPS", "STORIES", "RESOURCES", and "EVENTS". The main banner features a collage of historical figures, with Frances Harper in the foreground. Text on the banner reads "The story of FRANCES HARPER ABOLITIONIST ACTIVIST POET". Below this are two buttons: "READ HER STORY" and "TAKE THE ROADTRIP SHE INSPIRED". A "previous next" navigation link is also present. Below the banner, there is a "LIVE & LEARN WEEKENDS" section with a small image and text: "Join along with others and participate in the dialogue along the continuum from the early days of our nation, through the historic times of the Underground Railroad and the Civil War to the present day." A "VIEW DETAILS" button is located below this text. To the right, an "OTHER RESOURCES" section lists several links: "Freedom Journey Events", "Discover Appalachia", "PA Civil War 150", "African American Patriots", "National Underground Railroad", "PA Heritage Bookstore", "Google Earth", and "PA's Official Tourism Website".

Economic Development and the Pennsylvania Humanities Council. Learning weekends are intended to increase public understanding of the Underground Railroad and Civil War era as it played out across the state of Pennsylvania. People tour local historical sites, interacting with living history performers. They receive a copy of the weekend's featured book which may be nonfiction or fiction and that offers content to deepen the experience. They talk to a scholar about how the book ties into the larger national story and also engage in dialogues with each other led by actors in period costume and character. The dialogues are focused on race and culture from the time of the Civil War and Underground Railroad to the Civil Rights Movement to the present day. Related efforts have identified and preserved African-American artifacts, documents, cemeteries, and historical sites throughout the state and helped them become "tourist ready."

Changing Demographics

Changing demographics are forcing history and other cultural organizations to reassess their collections, programs, and responsibilities and relationships in community.

As a matter of moral responsibility as well as survival, history organizations along with civic, philanthropic, education and other community institutions, are making strides to understand and authentically address changing demographics.



African Presence in Mexico, a touring exhibition developed by the National Museum of Mexican Art

The African-American story is only one of many that need to be situated more centrally in the nation's story. First voice, community-based museums such as the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas and the Wing Luke Asian Museum are playing leadership roles developing innovative programs of the highest integrity that call forward untold histories. They are taking a fresh and critical look at cross-cultural concerns—historic and contemporary—in addition to their own community's concerns. As such, they are often playing activist and social roles in communities, in addition to honoring specific histories, arts, and culture. For example, the National Museum of Mexican Art's (Chicago) *African in Mexico* exhibition was considered groundbreaking in examining the unfamiliar history of Africans in Mexico and for its impact facilitating dialogue

between African and Mexican Americans in Chicago. The Heard Museum in Phoenix has used its collection as the basis for seminars that sensitize federal agents (who conduct

investigations within Arizona’s tribal communities) to the cultural norms of Native Americans. As community demographics continue to take on a more diverse complexion, these organizations are redefining what are and should be considered mainstream cultural institutions.

The broader range of history organizations is just beginning to take essential but important steps to embrace the whole of their communities, such as assessing gaps in collections as well as cultural norms concerning what can or cannot be exhibited; interpreting exhibitions in multiple languages; and forming advisory groups to incorporate the voices of diverse communities. Others (see examples in the subsequent Community Involvement and Collaborations sections) have developed programs that explore and compare the histories of various immigrant groups to a city or neighborhood; a common goal being to relate and understand contemporary experiences to historical precedents.

Community Involvement

History organizations are increasingly seeking community voice and involvement in their programs and institutions.

History and cultural organizations that represent specific cultures have been most committed and adept at ensuring the community’s voice in exhibition concepts and development as well as through public programs. In the 1980s, the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas was a forerunner (then called the Chinatown History Museum). Others like the Wing Luke Asian Museum and the Japanese American National Museum (see Profiles) have followed suit in authentic and sustained community-based practice. The New Dialogues Initiative at the Wing Luke Asian Museum, for example, adopts a dialogic approach to bring together community members, artists, and other professionals to jointly shape and implement programs. The goal is to develop exhibitions and programs that address community concerns about contemporary social issues and current news events. Innovative ideas surface by connecting diverse people in dialogue.

But how exactly community involvement is enacted and negotiated continues to raise questions for newcomers and veterans of the work alike. Public historians talk about the challenges of “shared inquiry” as well. Whose story gets told? What story is it? How are scholarly objectivity and community subjectivities balanced? Steven Newsome, former director of the Smithsonian Institution’s Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, said his institution respected community members’ expertise and trained them to become investigators. Staff facilitated and supported community “scholars,” double checked facts, and unified the narrative that emerged. Newsome explained, “An institution may have no place

in people's lives; it may make people truly fearful of coming in or sharing their belongings for display. ...However, when they engage, a sense of ownership of the program can extend to a feeling of ownership of the institution."

Collaboration

Collaboration is recognized as essential to exhibition, interpretation, and public programs that aim for relevance, share authority, and sensitively engage diverse audiences.

Liz Sevckenko, former director of the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, observes some shift in history organizations from the prevalent community "outreach" mode that tends to be one-way (although even community outreach is limited or nonexistent in many history organizations) to community partnerships in which there is a greater mutuality of purpose and a necessary willingness to let go of control in order to come to a shared path together with partners. Collaborations have been advanced by funding sources such as the Institute for Museum and Library Sciences and such partnership-based initiatives as Libraries for the Future's Reading American program (see Appendix 4) that recognize the value and the often needed resources to support planning time and the collaboration process.

But more often, when collaboration truly works, it is born out of an inevitable need or a realization of concerns shared by prospective partners. *Shared Journeys*, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum's collaboration with ESOL (English as a Second Language) programs in New York, represents a successful partnership between history and social service organizations. Specially designed free workshops for adult ESOL classes include a tour of the tenement galleries, followed by an educator-facilitated conversation around one of six topics related to pressing concerns of immigrants today. Individuals practice English in a relevant context and social environment. Social service agencies and newcomers themselves have been instrumental in co-designing the program. Not only does the museum broaden its audience to groups who would normally not visit the site but it fulfills its community activist goals. Participating newcomers gain a sense of community and a way to process their immigration experience by connecting it with immigrants of the Lower East Side in the early 20th century, using the exhibits at the museum as a catalyst for dialogue.

FACTORS THAT ENABLE OR INHIBIT EXCELLENCE, INNOVATION, AND ENGAGEMENT

Field leaders looking to understand what has enabled or inhibited the most adventurous, meaningful, creative, and lasting work in history and other cultural organizations commonly cite several factors.

Many history organizations are stuck in old mindsets valuing continuity over innovation.

Emlyn Koster names obstacles that typically get in the way of becoming more relevant: a traditional focus on collections and the historical subject matter of exhibitions that feature them; preoccupation with attendance that favors safe programming versus risk taking programs that might deter audiences; aversion to controversy; and private support that sustains traditional approaches (*Museum News*, May/June 2006).

Exhibitions and programs that have greater relevance to audiences go beyond intellectual appreciation of the subject matter toward mission realignment as well as exploration of emotional terrain and the possibilities of action and behavioral change.

This requires a new way of thinking and perhaps even a redefined mission for some institutions. Koster believes that history organizations have to get comfortable with controversy and skilled at fostering an atmosphere where difficult questions can be broached and a variety of opinions expressed. Historian David Thelen adds the willingness to listen in order to develop genuine partnerships, and an overall inquisitiveness and penchant for inquiry as a way of doing work.

Beverly Sheppard believes that the visionary and excellent programs at the Japanese American National Museum, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, and the Wing Luke Asian Museum are sustained because the institutions have all redefined themselves as “of” the community. They are authentic parts of their communities and their communities’ issues. They have learned to share authority by listening and giving voice to their audiences. Board and staff members reflect their communities and are brought on because they are skilled in negotiating and relationship building.

Institution leaders need to recognize and support the time, human, and financial resources required to facilitate more complex interdepartmental work and collaborations with community. They need to give permission to experiment and sometimes fail in order to advance institutional learning.

Most often, the characteristics needed to make history organizations more relevant are centered in visionary curators and educators (on staff or who are invited as guests). These characteristics, however, are often not widely held across the institution, including staff and board leaders. Shifting entrenched paradigms typically requires more than a dedicated and politically savvy individual. What moves institutional change may be crisis, staff change, and/or strategic planning. Serious audience research (targeted as well as ongoing) can provide convincing evidence to motivate change.

Institutional transformation, not simply calling out best practices and models, is fundamental to sustainable change in history organizations.

Independent curator Mary Jane Jacob believes that group process is necessary to spark imagination and that learning based in practice allows overwhelming concepts to be made real and the learning to be internalized. “Getting staff to buy into what’s meaningful to their practice, in an organic way, so that it comes from them, not some external source—this is what’s interesting and critical.” Jacob advocates ways that people within organizations can experiment and question together. “You have to get to fundamental roots that may not start with the institution but with the staff people as individual people; then who are they in their neighborhoods, their community, their institution. Learning comes from deep sustained attention and inquiry that is guided and nurtured.”

When history is viewed as active relationships among people and as a series of choices that continually effect change, history itself seems inherently dialogic. Whatever the particular endeavor, as these many examples demonstrate, history can be a potent catalyst for meaningful intergenerational, interracial, and cross-cultural understanding; it can inform action, and even lead to reconciliation and reparation.

Pam Korza and **Barbara Schaffer Bacon** are [co-directors of Animating Democracy](#), a program of Americans for the Arts.

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For more information, visit: animatingdemocracy.org

Appendix I: INTERVIEWS WITH NATIONAL FIELD LEADERS, PRACTITIONERS, SCHOLARS

Leslie Bedford, consultant in exhibition development and museum education for history organizations and director of the Leadership in Museum Education Program, Bank Street College. Ms. Bedford previously provided professional development training within HPP.

Barbara Franco, executive director, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

David Glassberg, professor of Public History, University of Massachusetts, Amherst and author of *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life*

Mary Jane Jacob, independent curator whose site and community-based programs include: “Places with a Past,” “Evoking History,” “Culture in Action,” and “Places with a Future” among others. Jacob is Chair and Professor of Sculpture at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Russell Lewis, Executive Vice President and Chief Historian, Chicago History Museum

Steven Cameron Newsome, executive director, Prince George’s County Arts Commission. Former director, Smithsonian Institution’s Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture

Liz Sevckenko, director, International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, former program director, Lower East Side Tenement Museum

Beverly Sheppard, director, Institute for Learning Innovation, Maryland; former President and CEO of Old Sturbridge Village; former Deputy Director and Acting Director, Institute of Museum and Library Services. Pennsylvania experience includes: Associate Director of Chester County Historical Society and President of the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations

David Thelen, distinguished professor, History, Indiana University, Bloomington and co-author of *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*

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Appendix III: RESOURCES

Organizations and Web Sites

Facing History and Ourselves

www.facinghistory.org

Facing History and Ourselves is a national educational organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in civic education that encourages the skills, promotes the values, and fosters the ideals needed to sustain a democratic society. By studying the historical development and lessons of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the choices they confront in their own lives.

Facing History provides interdisciplinary programs, resources and speakers for middle and high school educators that relate the past to the world today. Through resources books, and study guides and lesson plans (for books and films such as Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*); Facing History provides conceptual context in order to deepen classroom conversation around historical themes. In addition, through its Online Campus, teachers are able to exchange ideas and strategies for teaching about history and ethics. Facing History also offers a wide-range of professional development offerings including workshops, online courses, and in-service training tailored to the needs of individual schools and school districts.

History News Network

www.hnn.us/

Housed at George Mason University, the History News Network is a vibrant web site that aims “to expose politicians who misrepresent history. To point out bogus analogies. To deflate beguiling myths. To remind Americans of the irony of history. To put events in context. To remind us all of the complexity of history.” The site includes history in the news, hot topics among historians, a weekly round-up of articles from various sources, blogs, book reviews, and more.

Top Young Historians

hnn.us/roundup/49.html

The Top Young Historians website features profiles of interesting historians who are making their mark on the profession. Each historian on this list has made outstanding contributions to the discipline in their area of research through their commitment and achievement in scholarship and teaching. They are also highly regarded outside academia for their expertise and many are consulted by the popular media. All historians are nominated and undergo a review process before they are chosen.

H-NET: Humanities and Social Sciences Online

www.h-net.org

H-Net is an international interdisciplinary consortium of scholars and teachers dedicated to developing the educational potential of the web. Primarily, H-Net creates and coordinates Internet networks with the common objective of advancing teaching and research in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. H-Net is committed to pioneering the use of new communication technology to facilitate the free exchange of academic ideas and scholarly resources. In addition, the site contains an edited collection lists and websites which feature peer reviewed essays, multimedia materials, and discussion for colleagues and the interested public.

H-Net: H-Material Culture Discussion Network

www.h-net.org/~material

The H-Net Network on Material Culture and Vernacular Landscapes and Artifact Preservation works to promote and support the study of buildings, sites, structures, objects, landscapes and other material cultural productions as part of the visual record of life and work, particularly in the Americas. The first of its kind, the H-Material Culture Discussion Network provide a space for consistent and timely communication about ideas and resources relevant to material culture scholars, professionals and enthusiasts.

Institute for Learning Innovation

www.ilinet.org

Established in 1986 as a not-for-profit learning research and development organization, the Institute for Learning Innovation is dedicated to changing the world of education and learning by understanding, facilitating, advocating and communicating about free-choice learning across the life span. The Institute provides leadership in this area by collaborating with a variety of free-choice learning institutions such as museums, other cultural institutions, public television stations, libraries, community-based organizations such as scouts and the YWCA, scientific societies and humanities councils, as well as schools and universities, striving to better understand, facilitate and improve their learning potential by incorporating free-choice learning principles.

The Institute for Learning Innovation:

- Investigates free-choice learning in multiple settings and across generations through evaluation and research and major studies documenting learning from free-choice learning activities.
- Supports and documents efforts to create effective free-choice learning

experiences such as working on exhibition development teams at museums around the country and world.

- Helps professionals develop and build their skills and capacities in free-choice learning through personalized learning workshops and organizational training/strategic planning to assist professionals and institutions in their lifelong learning pursuits.

International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience

www.sitesofconscience.org

The International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience is a network of historic site museums that believes that it is the obligation of historic sites to assist the public in drawing connections between the history of the site and its contemporary implications. The coalition views that stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting humanitarian and democratic values is a primary function of historic sites of conscience. The Coalition has an e-newsletter, *Matters of Conscience*; a biannual conference, and training programs and learning exchanges.

National Council on Public History

www.ncph.org

The National Council on Public History (NCPH) works to advance the professionalism of public history and to advocate enhanced public and governmental support for historical programs. NCPH was organized to encourage a broader interest in history and to bring together those people, institutions, agencies, businesses, and academic programs associated with the field of public history. NCPH members include: museum professionals, government historians, corporate and business historians, historical consultants, archivists, teachers, cultural resource managers, curators, film and media producers, oral historians, policy advisors, professors and students with public history interests, teachers, and many others.

H-Public

www.h-net.org/~public

Affiliated with The National Council on Public History, H-Public is devoted to the promotion of public history both within the profession and among assorted public audiences. NCPH provides the means for professional development and networking among practicing public historians through online discussion, educating and advising students about careers in public history, and working to advance the cause, awareness, and appreciation of the use of history in daily life.

The Public Historian

www.ncph.org/tph.html

The Public Historian—the journal of the National Council on Public History—provides the results of research and case studies, and addresses the broad substantive and theoretical issues in the field. Among the features of the journal, the Museum and Exhibit Review section discusses issues of historical exposition, presentation, and understanding through exhibits and museums mounted in the U.S. and abroad. Reviewers assess the scholarly content of the exhibit and/or space, the extent, variety, and appropriateness of the objects displayed; the function of design in the exhibit; and issues of funding and institutional support.

Pennsylvania Humanities Council

www.pahumanities.org

Since 1973, the Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC) has been a leader in making the humanities accessible to every Pennsylvanian. With PHC help, hundreds of organizations—many with little humanities experience and few resources—offer high-quality public programs that affect the everyday lives of people in their communities.

Among its programs, the Pennsylvania Humanities Council offers a variety of grants to arts and humanities organizations across the state. Through grants for public programs on the arts, projects receive funding that uses the humanities to increase public understanding and appreciation of the arts in Pennsylvania, especially among traditionally underserved audiences. Through the Humanities-and-the-Arts Grants initiative (a partnership between the PHC and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts), historical societies, museums, and sites may receive grants of up to \$5,000 for projects that increase public appreciation of history, and to strengthen their performance as community learning centers and tourist attractions.

From 1992-2002, the PHC worked with over 20 institutions through *Raising Our Sites*, a project designed to help historic organizations produce new programs and attract new audiences. Local scholars collaborated with sites to tell the stories of individuals and groups—such as women, laborers, servants, and other underrepresented groups—that have not been included in the narrative of Pennsylvania history. Sites connected their research with their outreach efforts, including audience evaluation and promotion. These activities led to better exhibits and programs, and helped the sites grow as learning centers.

Website Reviews

A collaboration of the *Journal of American History* and *History Matters*

www.historycooperative.org

The *Journal of American History*, in collaboration with *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, publishes regular reviews of websites. The reviews appear both in the printed journal (and online) and at *History Matters*, which provides an annotated guide to more than eight hundred Web sites for teaching U.S. history. *History Matters* strives to offer a gateway to the best websites and to summarize their strengths and weaknesses with particular attention to their utility for teachers.

Studies

Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education

www.digitallearning.macfound.org/site/c.enJLKQNIFIG/b.2029199/k.BFC9/Home.htm

In October, 2006, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation announced a \$50 million, five-year commitment to fund research and projects focused on understanding the impact of widespread digital media use on youth. The initiative will focus on how digital technologies affect youth in formal and informal learning environments, and will test the theory that youth assimilate knowledge, play, communicate, and create social networks in new and different ways through their use of digital tools.

In conjunction with the initiative's launch, the foundation has released the first in a series of papers on digital learning, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, by MIT professor Henry Jenkins. In addition, in 2007 the foundation will publish six books, online and in print, devoted to a range of digital learning topics. Online conversations, already underway, will inform the books' content. The foundation has also created an Internet hub for information on digital media and learning, digitallearning.macfound.org, where visitors can share their views and interact with guest bloggers.

Pennsylvania Heritage Tourism Study

www.dcnr.state.pa.us/recstudy/finalreport.pdf

The Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program is a catalyst for regional planning focused primarily on the protection, development and promotion of Pennsylvania's industrial heritage. In 2001, the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program launched a study to examine the marketing needs and economic impact of heritage tourism in Pennsylvania. The resulting research is currently being used to redevelop and refine the marketing strategies used throughout the state in order to further enhance the economic impact of heritage tourism, and to gain information on traveler perception and interest in Pennsylvania's Heritage regions.