

# **Museum and Historic Site Interpretation: Principles and Practice**

**HIS 627/IAR627—Fall 2012**

Wednesdays 3:30-6:20

MHRA 2210

## **Professor Benjamin Filene**

office hours: Wednesdays 1:00-2:00 and by appointment: MHRA 2137

office phone: 336/334-5645

[bfilene@uncg.edu](mailto:bfilene@uncg.edu)

**Credits:** 3 hours

**Prerequisites:** none; open only to History and Interior Architecture graduate students pursuing concentrations in Museum Studies or Historic Preservation (required of Museum Studies concentrators).

## **Course Description**

This seminar explores the relationship between history and public audiences, focusing on the theory and practice of telling stories through museums and historic sites. It introduces you to the tools that public historians use to interpret the past, explores key dilemmas in public interpretation and community collaboration, and examines contemporary models for how to reach audiences in ways that make history resonant and meaningful to them.

## **Student Learning Outcomes**

Through a mix of classroom- and project-based work, you will gain a richer understanding of the role of history in public life and of how museums and historic sites interpret the past for—and with—public audiences. Successfully completing this course will build the skills that you will need to thrive in the workplace:

- **evaluating and analyzing primary and secondary sources** thoughtfully, with attention to argument and point of view
- **using a finely honed eye and ear to recognize rich stories**—in sound, image, object, or text—and their potential impact on diverse audiences
- **synthesizing multiple sources** and points of view into compelling, relevant, and historically sound public presentations
- **speaking** with passion, clarity, and respect
- **writing** clearly and persuasively
- **collaborating** with energy, sensitivity, and an awareness of how much you can learn from community members and your peers
- **experimenting** fearlessly to build your skills and find the best ways to reach audiences

## **Teaching Methods**

This seminar depends on active and engaged discussions that allow you and your classmates, individually and collectively, to wrestle with what it means to become a practicing public historian. The classroom will be a setting for engagement with multiple voices—not only the professor’s but those of the students, community partners, and historical “informants” revealed through a range of sources. You are expected to complete reading assignments before every

class meeting and arrive ready to share personal opinions on the material. Class sessions will regularly involve informal full-group discussions, oral presentations, small-group conversations, and on-the-spot analyses of primary sources. As detailed below, class participation is a significant part of your grade. In addition, you will engage with the course content through formal and informal writing assignments that invite you to apply the approaches we are discussing to original material in your own voice.

The course's core theoretical concepts you will try out in practice. This semester the class will participate in a multifaceted national initiative called the Guantánamo Public Memory Project (<http://hrcolumbia.org/guantanamo/>), which was launched by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. UNCG is one of a dozen public history programs nationwide that has been invited to contribute to a national traveling exhibition about the history of America's relationship to Guantánamo, Cuba military base (known as "GTMO") since the late nineteenth century and the complex contemporary issues it raises. UNCG will focus on the 1950s-'60s era at the base. Students will conduct original research, including recording oral interviews with former residents, will select images and write exhibition text and will collaborate with a professional exhibition designer in New York to create a large panel representing this Cold War-era story for public audiences. Students will travel to New York (funding permitting) and participate in the conference marking the exhibition's opening. The exhibition will travel to Greensboro will open in the International Civil Rights Center and Museum downtown from December 2013-January 2014.

### **Assignments, and Evaluation**

#### **You will be evaluated on**

##### **Class participation—15%:**

attending class, doing the reading assignments, writing thoughtful and on-time weekly responses to the readings and "reflection journal" entries (see below), speaking up in discussions, representing the class and the school professionally in the wider community, and helping to foster a sense of shared exploration within the classroom

***Weekly responses:*** Each week, short, informal reactions to that week's readings (roughly a couple of paragraphs) will be due. These must be posted on our class's Blackboard Discussion Board **by 8:00 a.m. each Wednesday.**

##### **Oral Interview Archival Package—10%:**

oral interviews, indexed transcriptions, duplicate cds, and permission forms, delivered to community and institutional partners—**due *September 26***

##### **Blog Postings—20%:**

thoughtful, honest, analytical reflections about your and your group's work on the GTMO project, engaging students in the other participating institutions—**due *September 28 and October 10***

##### **Exhibition Review—25%:**

an analytical assessment of a public exhibition—**due *December 5***

**Term Project—30%:**

an original, historically accurate, thought-provoking, visually attractive, professional-quality exhibition component that helps public audiences see contemporary resonance in historical issues—*work substantially completed November 14; opens to the public December 13*

**Grading scale:**

A=93-100; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-=80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76; F=72 and below

**If things go awry...**

...it's your responsibility to tell me—right away. If papers are late without direct, prior approval from me, I deduct ½ a letter grade per day—no exceptions.

If your project is dead-ending or peer collaboration imploding, I need to hear about it *before* it's too late to resolve the issues.

**LATENESS POLICY:**

If a paper or project is turned in late, I will deduct 1/2 a letter grade per day (e.g., A to A-) unless you and I have previously agreed upon an extension *in advance* or unless a dean's excuse is provided.

**Academic Integrity Policy**

All students have a responsibility to uphold the standards of “*Honesty, Trust, Fairness, Respect, and Responsibility*” detailed in the Academic Integrity Policy. Instances of cheating, plagiarism, misuse of academic resources, falsification of information, and facilitating of academic dishonesty are treated with utmost seriousness by the history department and dealt with severely by the University administration. The full policy appears in the *Student Calendar/Handbook* and at [academicintegrity.uncg.edu](http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu). Per university policy, you will be asked to sign a copy of the Academic Integrity Pledge for each major assignment in this class.

**Special Needs**

If you require accommodations for special learning needs, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Disability Services, located within the Elliot University Center (334-5770)—and please let me know!

**Books to Buy**

Falk, John H. *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, 2009.

*Learning Through Serving*. Christine M. Cress., Peter J. Collier, Vicki L. Reitenauer and Associates eds., 2005.

Lipman, Jana K. *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History between Empire and Revolution* (2009).

McLean, Kathy. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions*, 2005.

Miller, Janet. *Memories of Guantánamo Bay, 1960-1962*, 2009.

—**to be purchased directly from author via BF**

Ritchie, Donald. *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2003.

Rosenzweig, Roy and David Thelen. *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, 2000.

Schwarzer, Marjorie. *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America*, 2012.

Serrell, Beverly. *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, 1996.

Simon, Nina. *The Participatory Museum*—not available at UNCG bookstore. Can access or buy at <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/buy/> or buy at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 1995.

## CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

### SETTING THE STAGE

#### August 22: Introductions—Histories, Stories, Publics

##### *Before first class:*

Read about the National Council on Public History's debate about "What Is Public History" (including Cathy Stanton's summary) at the NCPH website:

<http://ncph.org/cms/what-is-public-history>

Read some of the actual Listserv postings about "What Is Public History" from May, June, and July 2007, archived here: <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=lm&list=H-Public>.

*Assignment:* Come to class with two comments that interested you.

Schlatter, N. Elizabeth. "Introduction: Why Work in a Museum." In *Museum Careers: A Practical Guide for Students and Novices*: 9-15. [**BF will hand out**]

Download and read the Guantánamo Public Memory Project's "Blueprint," available at <http://hrcolumbia.org/guantanamo/blueprint.pdf>

Explore the Guantánamo Public Memory Project's website:

<http://hrcolumbia.org/guantanamo/>

Dibble-Dieng, Meadow. "A Modest Proposal." *Brown Alumni Monthly* (September-October 2004): 30-33. [**BF will hand out**]

#### August 29: Whose History? Who's History?

Rosenzweig, Roy and David Thelen. *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (2000): Introduction, Chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, and Afterthoughts (everything *except* Chapters 2-3).

Conn, Steven. "Museums, Public Space, and Civic Identity." In *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (2010): 197-232.

Gardner, James B. "Contested Terrain: History, Museums, and the Public." *The Public Historian* 26 (fall 2004): 11-21.

Liz Sevckenko, "Sites of Conscience: New Approaches to Conflicted Memory," *Museum International* 62 (2010): 20-25.

Mason, Theodore K. Appendices A and B, In *Across the Cactus Curtain* (1984): 130-148.

Amy Kaplan, "Where Is Guantánamo?" *American Quarterly* 57 (September 2005): 831-858.

Lipman, Jana K. "Introduction" and "Prologue," In *Guantánamo*: 1-28.

Miller, Janet. "How It Was," In *Memories of Guantánamo Bay*: 1-30.

### **September 5: Looking at and Learning from the Local: Hearing Stories**

Cronon, William. "Why the Past Matters." *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 84 (autumn 2000): 3-13. [**BF will hand out**]

Thelen, David. "Individual Experience and Big Picture History." *History News* 55 (winter 2000): 10-13.

Jackson, Bruce. "Telling Stories" **and** "The Fate of Stories," In *The Story is True: The Art and Meaning of Telling Stories*, 2007: 3-15 and 16-39.

Filene, Benjamin. "Searching for Florence." *Minnesota History* 57 (fall 2000): 130-139.

*Learning Through Serving*, Christine M. Cress., Peter J. Collier, Vicki L. Reitenauer and Associates eds., 2005: 17-27.

Lipman, Jana K. "'We are Real Democrats': Legal Debates and Cold War Unionism before Castro, 1940-1954." In *Guantánamo*: 61-99.

Jonathan M. Hansen. "The American Dream." In *Guantánamo: An American History* (2011): 233-264.

Miller, Janet. "The Cuban People" and "Maids, Gardeners, and Friends." In *Memories of Guantánamo Bay*: 31-69.

*[In class: evidence as stories; stories as evidence]*

## **READING THE EVIDENCE**

### **September 12: Oral History**

Portelli, Alessandro. "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event." In *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (1991): 1-26.

Davidson, James West and Mark Hamilton Lytle. "The View from the Bottom Rail: Oral History and the Freedmen's Point of View." In *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (2005 [fifth edition]): 177-209.

Ritchie, Donald. *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (2003).  
Introduction and Chapters 1-4, 8, and Appendix 1

*Learning Through Serving*, Christine M. Cress., Peter J. Collier, Vicki L. Reitenauer and Associates eds., 2005: 72-78.

McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies." In *Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men*, Anne Minos, ed., 2000 [1988]: 30-38.

Miller, Janet. "Recreation and Passing the Time," "Beaches," and "Other Islands." In *Memories of Guantánamo Bay*: 70-148.

Lipman, Jana K.. "Good Neighbors, Good Revolutionaries, 1940-1958." In *Guantánamo*: 100-143.

**September 19: Objects and Images** [*Note: Will re-schedule this class for earlier in the week*]

Prown, Jules David. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method" (1982). In *Material Life in America, 1600-1680*, Robert Blair St. George, ed. (1988): 17-37.

Hebdige, Dick. "Subculture and Style." In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (2002) [1979]: 1-19.

Corrin, Lisa G. "Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves." In *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, Lisa G. Corrin, ed. (1994): 1-22. [**BF will send images of the exhibit**]

Davidson, James West and Mark Hamilton Lytle. "The Mirror with a Memory: Photographic Evidence and the Urban Scene." In *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (2005 [fifth edition]): 210-233.

Curtis, James. "'The Contemplation of Things As They Are': Dorothea Lange and *Migrant Mother*," In *Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth: FSA Photography Reconsidered* (1989): 45-67, 129-131.

Updike, John. "Personal Archaeology." In *My Father's Tears and Other Stories* (2009): 16-26.

Mason, Theodore K. Chapter One, *Across the Cactus Curtain* (1984): 11-24.

Lipman, Jana K.. "A 'Ticklish' Position: Revolution, Loyalty, and Crisis, 1959-1964." In *Guantánamo*: 144-190.

Miller, Janet. "Mail," "How It Became," "Epilogue" and "Afterword." In *Memories of Guantánamo Bay*: 149-201.

**Optional:**

Schwarzer, Marjorie. "The Collection." In *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America*: 69-119.

**September 26:**

O'Neill, Barbara. *STILL ON THE ROAD: The Life Of A Navy Dependant To a Navy Wife To A Construction Worker* (2004): iii, 15-40.

Sample selections (of your choice) in the GTMO “research packet”

**Work session, including discussion of blogging, “story mining,”**

*Oral Interview Archival Package due*

**Friday, September 28: First blog posting completed**

### **TELLING THE STORY**

#### **October 3: The Power of Interpretation; Interpretation as Power**

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995): xvii-xix, 1-30, 108-153.

Wallace, Mike. “Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at Disney World,” In *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (1996): 133-157.

Stanton, Cathy. “Performing the Postindustrial: The Limits of Radical History in Lowell, MA.” *Radical History Review* 98 (spring 2007): 81-96.

Kingsolver, Barbara. “The Spaces Between.” In *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from Now or Never* (1996 [1995]): 146-157.

Loewen, James W. “In What Ways Were We Warped?” In *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*: 1-10.

Schwarzer, Marjorie. “Introduction.” In *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals*: 1-27.

#### **October 10: Exhibiting History**

Luke, Timothy. “Politics at the Exhibition: Aesthetics, History, and Nationality in the Culture Wars.” In *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* (2002): 1-4.

Clifford, James. “Museums as Contact Zones.” In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997): 188-219.

McLean, Kathy. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions* (2005 [1993]): v-xi; 1-67.

Engelhardt, Tom and Edward T. Linenthal. “History Under Siege.” In *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (1996): 1-7.

McLean, Katheen and Wendy Pollock, “Conviviality” and “Being Alive Together,” In *The Convivial Museum* (2010): 1-12 and 103-158.



Rothstein, Edward. "To Each His Own Museum, as Identity Goes on Display." *New York Times* (December 28, 2010):  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/29/arts/design/29identity.html?\\_r=3&ref=arts](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/29/arts/design/29identity.html?_r=3&ref=arts).

Simon, Nina. "Open Letter to Arianna Huffington, Edward Rothstein, and Many Other Museum Critics." *Museum 2.0* (January 5, 2011):  
<http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2011/01/open-letter-to-arianna-huffington.html>.

Schwarzer, Marjorie. "The Exhibition." In *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals*: 121-169.

## **Second blog posting completed**

### **October 17: Learning in the Museum**

Falk, John H. *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (2009): 9-37, 56-65, 91-100, 129-185, 215-251.

Hein, George. "The Constructivist Museum." *GEM News* [Group for Education in Museums] 1995: 6 pp.

Ansbacher, Ted. "What Are We Learning? Outcomes of the Museum Experience." *The Informal Learning Review* 53 (March-April 2002): 1, 4-7.

Witcomb, Andrea. "Interactivity: Thinking Beyond." In *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Sharon Macdonald, ed. ((2006): 352-361.

Gyllenhaal, Eric D., "A Generalized Developmental Framework for Planning Cultural Exhibitions and Programs" (2006)

#### **Optional:**

Russell, Bob. "Experience-Based Learning Theories." *The Informal Learning Review* (1999): 6 pp.

**Send outline of panel with main ideas for content to national project hub and advisory group**

### **October 24: Exhibit Design**

McLean, Kathy. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions*: 92-114; 115-149.

Wagner, Sherry Kafka. "Telling Time: The Process of Communicating History Interpretation in Exhibits and Sites." New York Council for the Humanities conference paper (1984): 9 pp.

Braden, Donna, Ellen Rosenthal, and Daniel Spock. "What the Heck is Experience Design?" *Exhibitionist* 24 (fall 2005): 14-20.

Borun, Minda. "Why Family Learning in Museums?" *Exhibitionist* 27 (Spring 2008): 6-9.

*Fostering Active Prolonged Engagement: The Art of Creating APE Exhibits*, Thomas Humphrey and Joshua P. Gutwill, eds., (2005): ii-iii, 1-3, 129-135.

Serrell, Beverly. *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (1996): 1-36, 83-94, 112-114.

“Excellence in Exhibition Label Writing Competition 2011.” *Museum* (November-December 2011): 39-43.

“‘Experience’ vs. the ‘Big Idea,’” National Association of Museum Exhibition (NAME) Listserv discussion (August 2011): 4 pp. [***BF will hand out***]

Bruce Mau Design. “An Incomplete Manifesto for Growth” (1998): 6 pp.  
Available online at

<http://www.brucemaudesign.com/4817/112450/work/incomplete-manifesto-for-growth>.

### **October 31: Exhibit Evaluation—Class meets at Greensboro Historical Museum**

[***Note: Will try to re-schedule this class for earlier in the day***]

Yellis, Ken. “Cueing the Visitor: The Museum Theater and the Visitor Performance.” *Curator* 53 (January 2010): 87-103.

Serrell, Beverly. *Judging Exhibitions: A Framework for Assessing Excellence* (2006): 3-6, 17-29, 41-46, 52-60, 91-109.

Chambers, Marlene. “Critiquing Exhibition Criticism.” *Museum News* (September/October 1999): 31-37, 65.

McLean, Kathy. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions*: 68-80, 163-166.

Teller, Alan. “Assessing Excellence in Exhibitions: Three Approaches.” *Exhibitionist* (fall 2007): 69-75.

#### ***No Blackboard postings this week***

***Assignment:*** After completing the above reading, fill out Serrell’s framework (42-45) for Greensboro Historical Museum’s *Voices of a City*

### **By November 5: Send full content to designer and project hub**

### **November 7: Digital History**

Seefeldt, Douglas and William G. Thomas. “What Is Digital History? A Look at Some Exemplar Projects.” *Perspectives in History* (May 2009):

<http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2009/0905/0905for8.cfm>.

Schwarzer, “An Afterword from the Author,” In *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals*: 219-223.

Parry, Ross and Nadia Arbach. “Localized, Personalized, and Constructivist: A Space for

Online Museum Learning.” In *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage: A Critical Discourse*, Fiona Cameron and Sarah Kenderdine, eds. (2007): 281-298.

Tisdale, Rainey. “Do Museums Still Need Objects?” *History News* (summer 2011): 19-24.

Vogel, Carol. “The Spirit of Sharing.” *New York Times* (March 16, 2011): [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/arts/design/museums-pursue-engagement-with-social-media.html?\\_r=2&scp=4&sq=museums&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/arts/design/museums-pursue-engagement-with-social-media.html?_r=2&scp=4&sq=museums&st=cse) (also on e-reserve).

Huffington, Arianna. “Museums 2.0: What Happens When Great Art Meets New Media?” *Huffington Post* (December 27, 2010): [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/museums-20-what-happens-w\\_b\\_801372.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/museums-20-what-happens-w_b_801372.html) (also on e-reserve).

**Assignment:** Identify a website that has attempted to link users/visitors and history. Instead of a regular posting, write on Blackboard a paragraph or two evaluating, in light of this week’s reading, what works and doesn’t on this site. Does it offer us any clues about what makes a history-based website work (or not)?

**November 14: Looking at and Learning from the Local, part 2: Seeing Place  
--CLASS MEETS ON ELM ST.**

Jacobs, Jane. “Introduction.” In *The Death and Life of American Cities* (1961): 3-25.

Suarez, Ray. “Jane Jacobs and the ‘Battle for the Street.’” In *What We See: Advancing the Observations of Jane Jacobs*, Stephan A. Goldsmith and Lynne Elizabeth, eds. (2010): 15-23.

Stilgoe, John R. “Beginnings.” In *Outside Lies Magic* (1998): 1-19.

Clay, Grady. “Downtown.” In *Real Places: An Unconventional Guide to America’s Generic Landscape* (1994): 18-20.

Clay, Grady. “Epitome Districts.” In *Close-Up: How to Read the American City* (1980 [1973]): 38-65.

Perec, Georges. “The Street.” In *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (1997 [(1974)]): 46-56.

**No Blackboard postings this week**

**Assignment:** Walk Elm Street with “live eyes” and identify a story hidden in the built environment to share with your classmates.

**By November 14, final exhibition revisions submitted**

**November 21: No class (Thanksgiving break)**

**November 28: Visitors as Co-Creators**

Simon, Nina. *The Participatory Museum* (2010): i-v, 1-32, 84-180, 350-352.

Carson, Cary. “The End of History Museums: What is Plan B?” *Public Historian* 30 (November 2008): 9-27.

Zeitlin, Steve. “Where Are the Best Stories? Where Is My Story?—Participation and Curation in a New Media Age.” In *Letting Go? Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, Adair, Filene, and Koloski, eds. (2011): 34-43.

**Wednesday, December 5: Exhibition Review due**

***December 12-14—Extra class sessions:* Exhibition opening and conference in New York City!**