

HIS 627/IAR627—Museum and Historic Site Interpretation: Principles and Practice

Tuesdays 3:30-6:20

HHRA 2211

Professor Benjamin Filene

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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, explores key dilemmas in public interpretation and community collaboration, and examines contemporary models for how best to reach audiences in ways that make history meaningful.

All of the course's theoretical concepts you will try out in practice. The centerpiece of our work this semester will be an original exhibit project—student-researched, student-designed, and student-fabricated with community informants, community collaborators, and community audiences. In partnership with the Rosetta C. Baldwin Museum and the High Point Museum, class-members will work together to create an exhibit that will open in May 2006 for a three-month run at the High Point Museum and then will move for long-term installation at the Baldwin Chapel School. The exhibit will take a microcosmic approach to history, focusing on the lives of the school's Class of 1963 as a way of illuminating the story of the Baldwin school and, more broadly, of African Americans in High Point.

How you'll be evaluated

The skills that you need to succeed in this course are ones that you will need to thrive in the workplace:

- **reading and analyzing** thoughtfully and with an eye for new ideas
- **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

You will be graded on

Class participation—15%:

attending class, doing the reading, writing thoughtful and on-time weekly responses to the reading (see below), speaking up in discussions, representing the class and the school professionally in the wider community, pitching in on the group project, 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 Tuesday.

Analytical Essay #1—15%:

a close reading of a single object or image—*due February 20*

Narrative Biography and Compendium of Research Sources—15%:

a biography of one member of the Class of 1963 and appendices of primary source research materials—*due February 27*

Analytical Essay #2—15%:

an historical analysis of issues revealed by the class's original research into the Class of 1963—*due March 13*

Exhibition Review—15%:

an analytical assessment of an exhibition of your choice—*due March 27*

Final Project and Presentation/Program—25%:

a completed museum exhibition and public program—public opening *May 1!*

Grading scale:

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

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.

LATE PAPERS:

No extensions on papers or projects will be granted without a dean's excuse. If a paper or project is late without an extension, I will deduct 1/2 a letter grade per day (e.g., from A to A-).

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. 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. and Lynn D. Dierking. *The Museum Experience*, 1992.

Handler, Richard and Eric Gable. *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*, 1997

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

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

Schwartz, Marjorie. *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America*, 2006.

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

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

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

SETTING THE STAGE

January 9: Introductions

Cronon, William. "Why the Past Matters." *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 84 (autumn 2000): 3-13.

Weil, Stephen E. "From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum." In Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (2002): 28-52.

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

January 16: Memory and Meaning, Story and Community

Corbett, Katharine T. and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry," *The Public Historian* 28 (winter 2006): 15-38.

Archibald, Robert. "Common Ground." In *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community* (1999): 87-108.

Hayden, Dolores. "The View from Grandma Mason's Place" **and** "Rediscovering an African American Homestead." In *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (1996 [1995]): 138-187.

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

Filene, Benjamin, "Open House Journal" series:

"Meeting at the Doorstep," *Minnesota History* 58 (fall 2003): 366-67.

"Telling Their Story," *Minnesota History* 59 (winter 2004): 153-57.

"A Vision of History," *Minnesota History* 59 (summer 2004): 72-73.

"The Ones We Left Behind," *Minnesota History* 60 (winter 2005-06): 335-339.

"Catching Up with 'The Ones We Left Behind,'" *Minnesota History* 60 (summer 2006): 77-78.

READING THE EVIDENCE

Thursday, January 25: Public Documents—Class meets in High Point

"We the People: Records of Families and Citizenship." In *The Public Vaults Unlocked: Discovering American History in the National Archives* (2005): 56-84.

Brown, Joe. *Racial Integration in High Point*, 1997.

Macedonia Community Oral History Project, 2004.

“African American Gallery Guide.” High Point Museum. **[BF will distribute]**

“African American Heritage Guide,” High Point Convention and Visitors Bureau.
[BF will distribute]

Chavis, Glenn. “Athletics History Told in Black and White.” *High Point News and Record* (October 1, 2006): 15, 26. **[BF will distribute]**

Chavis, Glenn. “Local Schools Once Offered Bible Study.” *High Point News and Record* (May 21, 2006): R1-2. **[BF will distribute]**

January 30: Oral History—Visit to University Graphics?

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.

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.

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

[In class: writing exercise]

February 6: Objects and Images

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.

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.

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.

Willumson, Glenn. “Making Meaning: Displaced Materiality in the Library and Art Museum.” In *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds. (2004): 62-80.

Schwartz, Marjorie. “The Collection.” In *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America* (2006): 69-119.

Assignment: After reading the above, find a photograph that interests you and bring it to class along with some ideas about how to “read” the image. You could try the library at around call # TR650, where books on photographic history are located.

TELLING THE STORY

February 13: The Power of Interpretation; Interpretation as Power

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

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

February 20: Exhibiting History

McLean, Kathy. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions* (2005 [1993]): 1-68, 81-91.

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

Kimmelman, Michael. “Museums in a Quandary: Where Are the Ideals?” *The New York Times* (August 26, 2001, Section 1, p. 1): 4 pp.

Schwartzter, Marjorie. “The Exhibition.” In *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America* (2006): 121-169.

Handout: “The Process: What You Can Expect” [**BF will distribute**]

5-page artifact/image essays due

February 27: Taking a Stand? Controversies

Luke, Timothy. “Politics at the Exhibition: Aesthetics, History, and Nationality in the Culture Wars.” In *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* (2002): 1-18.

Luke, Timothy. “Memorializing Mass Murder: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.” In *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* (2002): 37-64.

Linenthal, Edward T. “Anatomy of a Controversy.” In *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds. (1996): 10-62.

Schwartzter, Marjorie. “Introduction.” In *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America* (2006): 1-27.

Biographies of Class of 1963 (and appendices of research materials) due

March 6—no class (spring break)

March 13: Learning in the Museum

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

Falk, John H. and Lynn D. Dierking. *The Museum Experience*, 1992.

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

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

McCracken, Grant. "CULTURE and Culture at the Royal Ontario Museum, **Part 1.**" *Curator* 46 (April 2003): 136-157.

AND

McCracken, Grant. "CULTURE and Culture at the Royal Ontario Museum, **Part 2.**" *Curator* 46 (October 2003): 421-432.

OPTIONAL:

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

Analytical essay about Class of 1963 due

March 20: Exhibit Evaluation—Meet at Greensboro Historical Museum

Serrell, Beverly. *Judging Exhibitions: A Framework for Assessing Excellence* (2006): 3-6, 17-29, 41-69, 91-109.

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

Assignment: Fill out Serrell's framework for Greensboro Historical Museum's *Welcome to the Gate City*

March 27: Exhibit Design:

McLean, Kathy. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions*: 92-161.

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.

Exhibition review due

April 3: Exhibit Text

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

April 10: Exhibit Text Work Session

Handler, Richard and Eric Gable. *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*, 1997.—Chapters 1-5 (pp. 1-124)

No Blackboard postings this week.

April 17: Historic Sites/Living History

Handler, Richard and Eric Gable. *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*, 1997.—Chapters 6-9 (pp. 125-235)

Sevcenko, Liz. "The Power of Place: How Historic Sites Can Engage Citizens in Human Rights Issues" (The Center for Victims of Torture, Tactical Notebook Series): 17 pp.

Thompson, Ginger. "Reaping What Was Sown on the Old Plantation." *New York Times* (June 22, 2000, section A, p. 1): 17 pp.

April 24: Exhibit Installation Session

May 1—Final Tweaks

Thursday, May 3—Evening Exhibit Opening/Program at High Point Museum