Who owns history?

Public History: Theory, Method, and Practice
HIST 506: 301 (3 credits)
Dr. Kristin O'Brassill-Kulfan

Offered annually — and fulfills the core course requirement for the Certificate in Public History

How do the histories that we learn in the classroom differ from those we learn on the street, in the museum, and in government documents? How does one explain the history of the women’s suffrage movement in a 100-word statement on a plaque in a town square that would be understandable by an eight year old? What can Spielberg’s Lincoln and Broadway’s Hamilton tell scholars about how the public consumes history? Who controls the narratives of those histories, and what does that mean for who is and is not included in our retellings of the past?

Studying public history involves considering these questions and exploring a variety of possible answers through the lens of the theory and practice of the field. By investigating a variety of public history institutions, from archives to museums to podcasts to parks and beyond, we consider how various practitioners craft and disseminate historical narratives and why. This course will explore a variety of definitions of the term “histories” as they exist within and without academia, providing students with the intellectual and practical tools to put history to work in the world by creating and sharing history in ways that can enhance community and civic engagement and shape shared cultural memory.