Digital History Review Guidelines
All questions regarding review proposals, submissions, editing, and publication should be
directed to the Assistant Reviews Editor at
hist-publichistory@ucsb.edu

BACKGROUND:

The digital history project review section of *The Public Historian* was established to report on
and evaluate current digital history projects, including digital exhibits, online archives, digital
scholarship, online teaching resources, and apps. Our goal is recognizing excellence in this
important new format for scholarship and public engagement and helping to foster critical
dialogue among public historians about the uses of technology in our work. We encourage our
reviewers and other interested historians to suggest projects for review. Review essays can
compare two or more projects, treating the relevant subject matter in more depth than would be
possible in a short review. Reviews will be assigned to reviewers by *TPH* staff.

REVIEWING DIGITAL HISTORY PROJECTS:

In reviewing digital history projects, it is especially important that reviewers understand the
intended purposes and audience of the work and the context in which it was produced (e.g., large
or limited budget, time constraints). Digital history projects are quite diverse, and projects should
be evaluated on their own terms. *The Public Historian* recognizes the following categories of
digital resources:

- **Online Archive:** A website that provides access, whether free or otherwise, to a body of
  primary source documents.
- **Digital Scholarship:** An online monograph, essay, or journal aimed at disseminating
  history scholarship to either fellow practitioners or the general public.
- **Digital Exhibit:** A digital exhibit aimed at presenting historical topics and/or knowledge
  to the general public.
- **Teaching Resource:** A website that provides online syllabi, assignments, teaching tools,
  and other resources specifically geared toward using the Web for pedagogical purposes.
- **Apps:** Software for a mobile device that either is an extension of a public history website
  or project or that stands alone, facilitating activities such as digital storytelling, tours, and
  location-based experiences.

As with reviews of history in other forms, digital history project reviewers should briefly report
on the subject matter and main themes presented before evaluating the work itself. Evaluation
should take into consideration accuracy of content and effectiveness of presentation (design,
navigation, etc.) Reviewers should evaluate both a project's content and its form.

Content: Reviewers should emphasize the digital resource's significance to public historians.
Please consider such questions as:

- What was the purpose of the work?
- Who is the intended audience of the work (a client, the general public, professionals in
  the same field, in other fields)?
- Was the work produced under special conditions (under contract, in the course of public
  agency employment, as part of an educational program)?
- Does it fit within a body of scholarship? If so, how?
- In what ways are the developer's sources, methods, analysis, and interpretations
  remarkable and especially instructive for public historians?

Form: As with the organizational logics of monographs and journal articles, digital resources ought to be organized in an intuitive, easy-to-navigate manner. Reviewers should ask the following questions:

- Is the digital resource easy to navigate?
- Does it function effectively, or are aspects of its functionality cumbersome or confusing?
- Does it have a clear, effective, and/or original design?
- Does the digital resource's organization and structure further or hinder its declared objectives with respect to its service to either practitioners or the general public?
- Does it make effective use of new media and new technologies? Does it provide new functionalities that traditional media, such as print/exhibition, cannot?
- Does it take measures to provide accessibility for users with sensory impairments?

Please avoid passive-voice constructions, overly complex sentences, jargon, and redundancies. We may return for revision any review in need of severe editing, and we reserve the right to reject any review submitted for publication.

All reviews are edited to conform to *TPH* house style and standard literary usage to achieve greater economy of space and clarity of meaning. Please consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* for guidance.

FORMAT OF REVIEWS:

1. Please submit your review as a Microsoft Word document, and please use 12-pt. font and double-space the review.

2. Unless otherwise agreed upon between reviewer and editor, reviews should be about 1000 words long. We will shorten, or return for revision, any review of excessive length. Length restrictions vary in the case of review essays, but are generally 2000 words.

3. Provide the following information in your introductory heading: title of project; name of creator/s; sponsor/publisher; URL; year of creation; access date, and any further information that would help to identify or credit responsible parties. Please limit the heading to three full lines of text.

   Heading examples:

   The Joseph Smith Papers. Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press. *LeGrand R. Curtis Jr.*, Executive Director; *Kyle S. McKay,* Assistant Executive Director; *Matthew J. Grow,* Managing Director. https://www.josephsmithpapers.org. Created 2010; Accessed December 2019.

   National Park Service's Official Smartphone Applications. *National Park Service*, Creator. Available for iPhone, iPad, https://itunes.apple.com, and Android, https://play.google.com. Created 2012–16; Accessed July 10, 2016.

4. Illustrations, such as screenshots, are strongly encouraged, and will be included whenever possible. Please supply images as electronic jpg or tiff files sized at 4" wide, with a minimum 300 dpi. Please do not place them directly in the text; instead, label your images by your last name (Smith image 1, etc.) and indicate image placement within the text. Use brackets: [Insert Smith image here]. Please provide image captions in a separate Word document.

   Place files too large to e-mail in a Dropbox folder and invite the assistant reviews editor to share. All images must be accompanied by captions, credits, and a statement (letter or e-mail message) of permission from the holder of the copyright.

5. Your name and institutional affiliation should appear on a separate line at the end of your review.

6. *The Public Historian* uses the footnote style, spelling, and punctuation format of *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *The American Heritage Dictionary*.

7. E-mail your completed manuscript to hist-publichistory@ucsb.edu.

8. Once your manuscript has been submitted, you will receive an acknowledgement, then later a copy-edited version of the review. Please promptly approve or request changes in the typescript. Approximately one month before publication you will receive proofs e-mailed directly from UC Press. Please review and make any further changes within three days of receiving proofs, then return to the managing editor, shcase@ucsb.edu.

NOTE: Please keep *TPH* up-to-date with your e-mail and affiliation.

Thank you for your contribution to *The Public Historian*.

SAMPLE REVIEWS

National Park Service's Official Smartphone Applications. National Park Service, Creator. Available for iPhone, iPad, https://itunes.apple.com, and Android, https://play.google.com. Created 2012–16; Accessed July 10, 2016.

Developed steadily since 2010, there are currently fourteen iOS and nine Android smartphone applications officially produced by the National Park Service (NPS) that offer introduction to a wide range of sites, historical and natural, including the National Mall, Independence Park, Manhattan, Yellowstone, the Grand Tetons, and the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site. As official NPS productions, the apps stand in competition with dozens and dozens of third-party offerings. They provide a combination of way-finding information about the sites, descriptive content—some of it historical—, a collection of attractive media, and some semblance of interactivity for the user. The apps are not solely focused on historical content or questions, but the historical content that is included is of uneven quality and depth. For the most part, the disappointment resides not in the technological infrastructure, but rather in the failure of the content creators to develop materials that take advantage of the capacity of mobile devices to deliver sophisticated, layered, historical interpretation and primary sources.

Though the applications are not completely uniform in design, they do have a common set of features. Each includes some sort of map that allows a user to view and select individual locations within the general vicinity of the park. Then, the sites are also available through a browse list. The interface for each individual site provides an overview description, a set of related media with captions, and a selection of general logistic and way-finding information. Most of the applications also include a selection of thematic tours that link together individual sites. In addition, they incorporate a listing of current programming and special events, so that visitors can plan to participate in onsite programming. Finally, the applications provide a combination of accessibility information.

Some application functionality suggests that NPS was interested in using the applications to allow users to have experiences that they could not have otherwise, but other features make it clear that the designers have not thought through the ways this functionality could be used to enhance engagement with history. For example, perhaps hoping to capitalize on the "selfie" craze, the applications provide users the ability to send a postcard-like image from their smartphones, with a "Greetings from" the park overlay—not at all related to history, but fun nonetheless. In another example of a missed opportunity, the application for the National Mall in Washington, DC, includes a feature called "Park Lens," which uses the mobile device's camera to offer an augmented reality experience. Unfortunately, rather than offering a juxtaposition of historical imagery on the contemporary landscape (such as the Museum of London's Streetmuseum application or the community-generated work available through applications like HistoryPin),[1] the Park Lens simply reads the landscape to identify existing sites and monuments. In the end, the user experience is not dissimilar to the 3-D view from Google Maps, offering little more than the flat map of site pins in the basic geolocation function.

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[1] The Museum of London's Streetmuseum application, https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/museum-london-streetmuseum; HistoryPin, https://www.historypin.org.

More disappointing than the unfulfilled promise of the mobile technology is the approach to history that is embedded in the content development and delivery across the collection of applications. For a user who is interested in exploring a park, the applications for individual sites mostly provide orienting information and physical descriptions, rather than an exploration of historical questions. The narratives of site creation and significance offer no sense of contingency or conflict. For example, the National Mall application includes twelve paragraphs of framing content for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial but barely gestures at the controversies surrounding Maya Lin's design, noting only in a single sentence that the figurative sculpture of servicemen was an addition to the original. The associated media include fifteen contemporary images of the memorial and the original Lin design proposal. While each item includes short label text, the application provides no citation information. Users cannot enlarge the media to fully examine them. The application's coverage of the Korean War Veterans Memorial has similar issues. Though it includes several more historical photos, the captions provide no sense of the Korean conflict's place in a larger containment strategy. Furthermore, the introductory text does nothing to situate the monument's authorization in the political context of the waning days of the Cold War.

The application tours also offer an opportunity to communicate sophisticated historical content, but in most cases the results disappoint in their lack of depth and source integration. This lack of depth is particularly glaring in contrast to the range of excellent local history work that platforms such as Curatescape are making possible in sites around the country.[2] For example, the tours for the National Mall application group sites thematically, but there is no specific supporting content to explicate the themes, so users move from site to site, oriented only by the general site descriptions. On the other hand, the application for Independence Hall in Philadelphia includes five tours that use audio to deliver interpretation and that do a better job of

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[2] Curatescape, http://curatescape.org.

thematic groupings around the Revolution and the Early National period. One of these tours, titled "In Pursuit of Liberty," is about the presence and position of enslaved persons in the new nation while the founding fathers were struggling to articulate and fight for a political philosophy framed in terms of liberty and equality—though this is somewhat unclear from the tour's title and abstract. Because all of the content is delivered via short audio, the tours miss the opportunity to incorporate primary sources or other linked content that would deepen the ability of users to dig into the questions about unequal civil and political rights embedded in the founding documents. These kinds of missed opportunities exist in many other instances across the applications, making them less than satisfying for the history enthusiast visiting the national parks.

Sharon M. Leon, George Mason University

This Land Is Your Land: Parks and Public Spaces. *Clemson University Libraries* and *South Carolina Digital Library*, Creators; published by Digital Public Library of America; *Susan G. Hiott*, Curator of Exhibits; *Joshua Morgan*, Digital Projects Manager. https://dp.la/exhibitions/exhibits/show/this-land. Created 2013; Accessed August 2016.

This Land Is Your Land: Parks and Public Spaces is a digital exhibit created by the Clemson University Library in South Carolina, using images from Clemson's own archives as well as from other institutions. Despite its more general title, it actually focuses specifically on US national parks and is intended as a general overview of the parks' genesis, construction, and interpretation. Appearing under the aegis of the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), it is one of thirty DPLA history exhibits that make use of the Omeka platform and are intended for general and student audiences.

Overseen by a Clemson committee working on a larger digital archive of national park materials, with the text and image selection undertaken by an archivist, a doctoral student in Clemson's Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management program, and a member of the digital project team, *This Land Is Your Land* is one of the weakest of the current DPLA exhibits. Its

thematic and chronological structure is murky, and it displays a striking lack of even the most basic familiarity with current thinking about nature, culture, and park development in both the academic world and the National Park Service (NPS). Although the exhibit notes in places that the US National Park System encompasses historical and cultural sites as well as natural ones, the photographs, themes, and text continually reinforce the popular image of the NPS as primarily a steward of spectacular wilderness landscapes and of park visits as an opportunity to commune with "untamed" nature for the good of people's souls. There is an attempt to acknowledge parks as having been constructed in large part by humans, but the text never quite finds its way out of the old natural/cultural binary. For example, text on one of the two pages devoted to park signage reads, "Whether a sign outlines park rules for your safety or points out a landmark, they are the secondary source for primary knowledge, right after the wilderness, history, and beauty of the place itself." Meanwhile the "Wildlife and People" section uncritically displays photos from different eras that depict the problematic practice of people getting out of their cars to photograph curious bears drawn by potential food sources. Captions and metadata contain little factual or contextual information, particularly about dates, making these resources potentially unhelpful for researchers or students.

Somewhat offsetting this critique is the fact that the other DPLA exhibits display many of the same characteristics to various degrees. Visually appealing and generally stronger in their details than *This Land Is Your Land*, they nevertheless stay within a "just the facts" approach that is at odds with the more question- or problem-centered approaches to history exhibits that have become far more common in public history and history museum practice in the past two or three decades. Many of the DPLA projects suffer from the same problems of inconsistent fit between text and images, gaps in basic information about the photos, and little or no contextualization of either visual or textual information. Most feel collection-driven, and indeed DPLA staff contacted for this review confirmed that topics were chosen, at least in part, as a way to

showcase strong visual and archival content from partner institutions. Like Clemson's, about half of the exhibits were created by partners either within the DPLA's network of "hubs" (large state, regional, and other libraries that aggregate materials to feed into the DPLA collections) or at other public libraries; another third are the work of classes and students in library and information services programs who chose from a list of topics suggested by the DPLA; and the remainder were curated in-house by DPLA staff. All of the exhibits, according to staff, were rigorously reviewed before being posted.

The shortcomings noted above, then, may be largely a reflection of the fact that few public or academic historians and others with up-to-date content knowledge and/or interpretive planning skills seem to have been centrally involved in most (or all) of the projects. The exhibits show library professionals and graduate students working outside their own core skill sets, something that can also be seen in some of the content being created in similar online exhibit templates like those at Google Arts & Culture or Europeana.[3] The increasing ease with which a digital history exhibit can be mounted may be encouraging more non-historians to attempt it without having a real sense of what historians can actually bring to the process: an ability to craft texts that are narratively and visually straightforward while also being intellectually complex and solidly grounded in strong recent scholarship.

The good news is that another digital history project, undertaken in partnership with the National Park Service, plays much more to the strengths of Clemson's archivists, librarians, and programmers. The Open Parks Network (openparksnetwork.org), unveiled to coincide with the NPS centennial in August 2016, makes available a fascinating range of images and documents (350,000 at launch, including 1.5 million pages of NPS "gray literature") from the deep vaults of the collections at twenty national parks, with more to follow. Students and others looking for easily digestible overviews will not find them here, but the carefully catalogued treasure trove

will be very welcome to public historians, perhaps inspiring new collaborations that can enrich

the rapidly expanding digital public history sphere.

Cathy Stanton, Tufts University

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[3] Google Arts and Culture (Europeana), https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/ and
http://www.europeana.eu/portal/en.