

# PSF

PARKS STEWARDSHIP FORUM

## Humanizing the Seas

A Case for Integrating the Arts and Humanities  
into *Ocean Literacy and Stewardship*

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**Plastic Catch** • Susan Schultz  
porcelain and wood sculpture



# Introduction:

## *The Inclusive Historian's Handbook*

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**In 2020, the world is contending with a singular confluence of events:** the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the massing of protesters in streets all over the world who are demanding that their societies reckon with histories of racial injustice, and the global spread of the novel coronavirus, made more lethal by structural inequalities, a deepening economic crisis, and the specter of global warming. The audiences of historic sites, museums, parks, and cultural organizations look to these institutions to interpret the present situation, but also demand that these organizations commit (or recommit) themselves to pursuing equity. The circumstances make the urgency of this work clear, but today's demands for equity and inclusivity rest on the work of generations of thinkers and activists, work that inspired public historians to create *The Inclusive Historian's Handbook*.

There is no shortcut to becoming a more inclusive, culturally responsive organization. Quite the opposite: the inclusive practice of public history, which orients interpretation, administration, and programming around equity, is an ongoing process. Further, inclusive history practice requires humility, an ability to ask for and accept help, and to reflect on successes and failures. It is often time-consuming, long-term work, and the benefits may

not be immediately apparent. The fundamental errors that non-inclusive cultural organizations make are too many to list. For example, the first encounter that some museums and historic sites have with “the community” is when the organization wants to create an exhibition or an advisory board. However, the museum hasn't done the work of building relationships in the community first. The staff may not be aware of how the museum is perceived by the people they are inviting and may convey a sense of arrogance. The museum staff hasn't shown up at other organizations' meetings (particularly those led by people of color) or attended social events; or when they show up, they draw attention to their museum and their work. They haven't read organizations' newsletters or social media, and, most important, they haven't gotten to know people first as individuals and neighbors. It may take years to cultivate successful working collaborations. Nevertheless, the benefits nearly always outweigh any institutional or personal costs, and this work is fundamental to any community-building process.

The authors of the essays in *The Inclusive Historian's Handbook* offer practical-minded advice about how individuals and institutions can approach equity and inclusion-oriented work. They provide



## THE INCLUSIVE HISTORIAN'S HANDBOOK

This dynamic reference source supports inclusive and equity-focused historical work in public settings by sharing a knowledge base that invites more people to engage in history projects. This handbook provides concrete examples of how to make history work more relevant. It centers on equity, inclusivity, diversity, and public service while offering accessible windows into the many ways public historians work.

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historical context, definitions, and examples of museums, historic sites, parks, and other institutions that are doing good work. The entries do not promise easy steps toward inclusive practice, but rather provide multiple avenues for rethinking the topic in an inclusive framework. As experienced history professionals, each author defines “inclusion” in their own way and shares perspectives and insights from their work and the field. Chris Taylor’s essay, “Diversity and inclusion,” provides an entry point for the meaning of these terms in the context of history organizations. In his essay on “Collaborative practice,” Bill Bryans lays out key ethical and practical considerations for working with a range of types of partners. He notes the value of a well-crafted Memorandum of Understanding, discusses core principles of effective collaboration, and analyzes thorny questions of authority. COVID-19 has made the future of travel to historic sites uncertain, but Cordell Reaves’s essay on “Heritage tourism” provides insights that can be applied to numerous aspects of historical interpretation and audience engagement. In her essay on “US presidents,” Cynthia M. Koch probes the central tensions at the core of efforts to memorialize presidents and suggests several lenses through which public historians might craft interpretation that resonates with contemporary audiences and contributes to an informed democratic citizenry. In “Reconstruction,” Jill Oglie Titus briefly summarizes how historical interpretations of this critical

era in US history have changed significantly in recent decades. More important, she examines how historic sites and other cultural institutions have begun sharing these new interpretations with public audiences. In a closely related essay on the “Lost Cause myth,” Christopher A. Graham defines this pernicious ideology, which characterized the Old South as a harmonious place of kind masters and contented slaves, and he enumerates its various manifestations from the Civil War to the present. Like Titus, Graham also showcases sites and initiatives that debunk the Lost Cause and lead the way in advancing more historically accurate, anti-racist, and inclusive interpretations of the legacies of the Civil War. In “Memorials and monuments,” Seth C. Bruggeman tackles similar issues of commemoration, delving into the complex social, cultural, and political processes that swirl around monument making—and removal.

These essays are a small sampling of the content of *The Inclusive Historian’s Handbook*, and we hope readers of *Parks Stewardship Forum* will be inspired to visit the website ([inclusivehistorian.com](http://inclusivehistorian.com)) to check out other entries like “Accessibility,” “Historic preservation,” and “Sexuality.” The site also includes reflections from public historians about their work, such as Marian Carpenter’s essay, which draws on her long experience as a collections manager who has had responsibility for objects that belonged to African Americans and has faced

the challenge of interpreting racist, anti-Black objects. The *Handbook* continues to grow and we are actively recruiting authors for a wide range of new entries. A free, online resource, the *Handbook* is sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History and the National Council on Public History. Its goals are to: (1) share a knowledge base that invites more people to engage in

history projects; (2) provide concrete examples of how to make history work more relevant; (3) center equity, inclusivity, diversity, and public service; and (4) offer accessible windows into the many ways public historians work. We hope you find it to be a valuable resource and encourage you to share it with colleagues and collaborators.

**About the authors**

Modupe Labode and William S. Walker are editors of *The Inclusive Historian's Handbook*.