

Matthew Williams

HST 580

04/25/2021

Internship Reflections

This internship with the Journal of the Plague Year has been an enlightening experience. Before the internship, I had never been involved in any public history projects. All of my undergraduate and graduate school classes have related to traditional or academic history. Therefore, I had almost no context to base any expectations on when the internship started. I did know that my main interest in history is to help spread historical knowledge and passion to others, so my hope was that this internship would give me exposure to the practical methods that a digital public history project utilized to accomplish that goal.

For me, this was the best part of the internship. The goal of doing many different types of public history was exactly what the internship provided. From the experience, I will be able to move forward in public history in several different ways. The curation and organization of historical data was interesting, and if nothing else, provided me with a deeper appreciation for the resources that I have taken for granted for so many years in my education. The curation aspect gave me a glimpse behind the curtain about how digital archives are made to be so functional for historians doing research. The amount of effort that is required to properly curate something so that it is as usable as possible is impressive. I took quite a bit from the experience, even if it is not something that I will do for a career.

I also found it very interesting to do some of the public-based communication. A public history project is only effective if the public knows about it. This was really eye-opening for me especially because I have not participated in social media before. Writing things like a blog post was very foreign to me, as I don't believe I have ever really even read a blog before. But, I can understand its place in public history and how important the skill of public interfacing is to the success of a project. Again, much like with the curation, even if I do not do blogs for a living, I feel that my understanding of public history is more well balanced with the exposure to the social media side of the industry.

Finally, the oral history component of the internship was the component that I most see myself involved in with my future in public history. I am already involved in a different project at ASU that involves oral histories. The reading materials that we had for the oral history module were very informative and helped to contextualize many things that I had experienced in the oral histories that I had done. The materials will also help with any future oral history projects that I become involved in.

Overall, this was a great experience that I am confident will serve to frame any of my future involvement in history. Before this internship, I assumed my only real path in history was to teach high school history classes. This experience taught me that I should open my mind to different types of history and the opportunities to spread historical passion. For this, I will always remember this internship and the Covid-19: Journal of the Plague Year archive.