Introduction
Historians’ Public Roles and Practices

The past is a very popular topic of discussion. Marks of popular interest take various shapes, such as visits to museums and historic sites, historical books, magazines, websites, movies and documentaries, festivals, commemorations, genealogy, and many other fields. In 1998, Robert Rosenzweig and David Thelen conducted a survey on the presence of the past in American everyday life (1998). One reason for the popular interest in the past has been, according to them, that people turn to the past “as a way of grappling with profound questions about how to live” (1998, 18). The past can help us interpret who we are and why we do things. We use the past to shape our identities, but for other purposes as well, such as, for instance, a source of entertainment. The past has been one of the main sources of games (e.g., Trivial Pursuit) and television quiz shows (e.g., Jeopardy; Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader?). Given this popular interest in the past, one might assume that the public widely acknowledges the authority and expertise of historians.

Actually, the situation is quite different. For instance, in a post on the 2013 commemoration of the March on Washington and Martin Luther King’s speech in August 1963, Jason Steinhauer regretted “the absence of any historians, public or academic, from the day’s list of speakers” (2013). Steinhauer makes a powerful argument and distinguishes between the numerous and vibrant examples of public “remembrances” and the absence of historical reflection. People may be interested in the past, but they do not necessarily trust professionally trained historians.

The misunderstanding comes from the distinction between history – as an interpretation of the past based on critical analysis of primary sources – and the past as built on multiple sources such as oral traditions, popular culture, and commemorations that fulfill diverse social and political needs. Rosenzweig and Thelen argued that people “preferred constructing their own versions of the past to digesting those prepared by others” (1998, 178). Certainly, historians serve a role in teaching and training students, but their role outside the classroom seems more limited. Historians may be seen – and more importantly may see themselves – as experts, but we must face the truth that representations and interpretations of the past in public often come from non-historians. For instance, millions of people study their family history through genealogy software and websites with which historians do not collaborate. The point here is not to discuss the historical validity of these activities, but to argue that historians may be completely absent from the most popular representations of the past. Why is this so and why should we be concerned?

The absence of historians from public debates and public representations of the past is purposefully overstated – a large number of historians have public activities – but it remains true that their number is not proportional to public interest in the past. This discrepancy raises questions not only about the role of historians in our societies, but also about the sort
of history we have been proposing to our audiences. The limited links between trained historians and the public partly come from historians themselves. Since the 19th century, some professional historians have seen themselves as entirely devoted to the discipline, working merely for the sake of history. On the one hand, this devotion allowed the creation of more professional practices and organizations. On the other hand, this isolation from popular audiences – with internal peer-reviewed systems, academic conferences, and academic journal publications – meant a limited presence in public debates. Although this isolation was, at first, mostly seen as providing a safe place to search for objectivity, it has increasingly become the symbol of historians’ limited impact and contribution to our modern societies (Wiener 2004).

This textbook aims first to re-assert the need for history – and historians. People should not forget that the past is reached through sources and interpretation. In the *Introduction to Public History* that she edited in 1986, Barbara Howe reminded us that “the validity of any history rests upon the historian’s ability to evaluate evidence from the past and to put it in a comprehensible narrative” (Howe and Kemp 1986, 1). Critical analysis and contextualization of sources distinguish history narratives from mere opinions. Because representations and interpretations of the past are public and popular does not mean that they should be devoid of historical understanding. This is particularly important in a context in which, thanks to the spread of new media, information is, today more than ever, easily – and without intermediaries – available to the public.

This textbook also aims to show how historians can participate in public understanding of the past. Historians have a role to play, but this role comes with a set of obligations. Historians should accept that they do not work for the sake of history only, to advance historical research, but also for and with others. As public historian Patricia Mooney-Melvin puts it, “All historians should remember that they are citizens as well as scholars and they possess some responsibility to the larger civic community” (2006, 17). Through an introduction to public history practice, the textbook contributes to the re-assessment of the traditional role for historians as well as their relations with the multitude of actors involved in the production of historical narratives.

**The Role of Historian: A Short History**

An introduction to public history must primarily deal with the changing definitions of the historian’s role. While the public history movement in the United States emerged during the 1970s, historians’ public role and activity are much older. Historian Ronald Grele – who has written several studies on the links between oral and public history – rightly points out that “from its earliest times, the study of history has been a public act, although different historians at different times have had different publics” (1981, 41). It is, therefore, important to explore the history of historians’ role in the public space.

**Professional Historians**

*The Rise of Scientific History in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries*

Although Herodotus in Ancient Greece can be considered the father of historical methodology, scientific and professional history did not emerge in Europe until the second half of the 19th century (Porciani and Lutz 2010). Rigor and scientific methodology were first introduced in Germany. As Peter Novick wrote in his history of the American historical
profession, “the United States remained (in the 1880s) a net importer of ideas” (1988, 21).
The first honorary member of the American Historical Association (AHA), Leopold von Ranke was an inspirational model for 19th century American historians. The German historian was, with other French scholars like Charles Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, at the origin of a new quest for objectivity and professional methodology.

The search for historical objectivity and professional methodology relied on historicism, primary sources, and factual analysis. Historicism relies on historical awareness, in other words, on the faculty to comprehend the difference between the present and the past. Professional history also resulted from a “scientific” methodology to recover facts and avoid opinions. Langlois and Seignobos argued, in their *Introduction aux études historiques*, that “historical construction has … to be performed with an incoherent mass of minute facts, with detailed knowledge reduced as it were to a powder” (Novick 1988, 37). Professional history was utterly fact-oriented. Historians’ subjectivity had to be suppressed.

Primary sources emerged as the foundational elements of the new scientific history. The need to focus on primary documents had two direct consequences. In order to access and use primary sources, historians became increasingly interested in preservation. New professional historians encouraged – and sometimes participated in – the creation of local, state, and national archives. The other consequence was the need for appropriate training. Critical analysis of sources was necessary to determine the reliability of the document. Most American research universities adopted the German model of the seminar in the late 19th century. Universities introduced students to techniques for “ferreting out and verifying the historical fact; palaeography, numismatics, epigraphy, sphragistics, and many more” (Novick 1988, 23).

The rise of scientific history also induced the professionalization and institutionalization of the discipline. Previously part of the American Social Sciences Association (ASSA), historians could then join the AHA. Founded in 1884, the AHA became the symbol of the institutionalization of history in the United States. Robert Townsend explains in his history of the history profession in the United States that the number of historians employed in academia increased by 10 percent every year from 1885 to 1910 (2013, 14). The new professional academic historian – holding a PhD, teaching in universities, and writing factual history – became dominant in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Academic historians were the model of the new professional history, and the adoption of scientific practices had important consequences for the relations between historians and their audiences.

**Historians in Ivory Towers**

The concept of the “ivory tower” was developed in the 19th century and referred to a supposedly “disconnected world of intellectuals” (Suny 2012). Associated with a pejorative description of academic elites, the term ivory tower implies that academic scholars – among them historians – have lost sight of popular audiences. It is true that some aspects of the professionalization of history have affected the relationship between historians and their audiences. Historians’ capacity to communicate with each other, with other scholars, and ultimately with public audiences was affected by the specialization of the discipline. The amount of work – under the common joke, a scientific historian must be ready to cross oceans to check a comma in an archive – requested by the new scientific methodology triggered specialization. As Townsend writes, from the late 1930s, “the various professions
of history set off on distinct trajectories – firming up their own networks and identities in increasing isolation from each other, while embarking on separate processes of specialization and technical refinement of their own.” He concludes that “after 1940 it is hard to find anyone actively trying to articulate a common vision of the historical enterprise that embraced all areas of work in the discipline” (Townsend 2013, 181). The process of specialization in sub-fields had an impact on the overall process of historical production.

By the early 20th century, academic historians published their PhD as original pieces of history. Historical journals became crucial actors of dissemination. French historians Gabriel Monod and Gustave Fagniez created the *Revue Historique (Historical Review)* in 1876. The *American Historical Review* was founded in 1895 and was soon associated with the AHA. Academic audiences became the natural audience for professional historians. In order to convince their peers, professional historians also adopted a very specific writing style.

Two prerequisites of any scientific knowledge were, first, that scholars must prove their assertions, and second, that readers must be able to build upon the published results. Professional history writing, therefore, resulted in the multiplication of footnotes as evidence and sources. In addition to the format, the contents changed as well. A benchmark of scientific history was to suppress any subjective and partisan comment. Scientific history was based on facts. As a result, academic historians’ writing tended to be extremely factual, sophisticated, and dry. Professional historians celebrated the factual historical narrative as the “instrument of liberation from the suffocating temperature and humidity of overarching systems” (Novick 1988, 43). The high specialization of the research topics, the peer-review systems, and the fact-based writing style contributed to the creation and development of a gap between professional historians and popular audiences.

The gap between professional historians and popular audiences has recently been the subject of public discussion. In a recent article, Jonathan Zimmerman, Professor of History at New York University, invited historians to come out of the ivory tower. He wrote “Historians, The Public Needs You! But you need the public, too. Don’t turn away from it, as so many of us have been taught to do. The job you save may be your student’s. Or your own” (2014). To some extent, this call results from the previously mentioned professionalization of history. However, Zimmerman’s vibrant call forgets that many other historians, with non-academic jobs, have had a public role in the 20th century.

**Diversity of Public Profiles**

The emerging gap between some professional historians and popular non-academic audiences in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had many exceptions. Thinking that historians have acquired public roles only recently is misleading. The concept of the ivory tower is itself somehow overstated. In a recent blog post on the historical relations between the AHA and public historians, Robert Townsend demonstrates the long history of bridges between professional historians and non-academic audiences (2015). He explains that “even some of the more traditional academics, such as J. Franklin Jameson at Chicago and Lucy Salmon at Vassar, were actively promoting documentary editing, historical societies, and other activities now widely recognized as public history” (Townsend 2015). Townsend demonstrates that the isolation of professional historians in ivory towers was actually much more complex. For instance, he shows that the disconnection between professional historians and public institutions also came from the fact that the latter – such as archives and historical societies – developed new professional practices and standards “in ways that even the most attentive scholars found difficult to track or understand.” As a result, “the
academics were increasingly shut out of conversations that were growing esoteric in their own ways” (Townsend 2015).

Another misconception is the idea that historians’ public practices only developed in the last three or four decades. Chris Hilliard notes in his history of public history in New Zealand that there has been a “prehistory of public history,” in other words, something we now call public history but that was simply called history before (2001). Likewise Ian Tyrrell underlines about the United States, “scholars tend to see public history as something new” but “the roots run much deeper … historians have long addressed public issues” (2005, 154). In her article on the pragmatic roots of public history, Rebecca Conard usefully reminds us of the pioneer historians in public activities. Those historians belonged to two main fields: local history and government policy (Conard 2015).

Local Historians

One main common point between historians working outside academic circles before the 1970s was their interest in local history and local institutions. Ronald Grele explains that “prior to the emergence of public history, it was the local history movement which offered the most thoroughgoing alternative to the historical work done in the academy” (1981, 43). The local history movement partly developed in opposition to the academic institutionalization of history. While some academic historians lost track of popular audiences, local – academic or not – historians remained connected with local actors.

The creation of the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) in 1940 was symbolic of the strength of local history. Local historians working in archives and historical societies greatly increased in number in the 1920s and 1930s. The creation of archives – and archival jobs for historians – was part of a wider growth of historically-related institutions.3 The number of historical societies recognized by the AHA increased from 215 in 1905 to 375 in 1916 (Townsend 2013, 49). Archives and historical societies symbolized the rise of local history and the growing possibilities for historians to find jobs outside academia – as archivists, documentary editors, and curators in historical societies – in relation with popular audiences.4

Government, Military Historians, and the Concept of Applied History

In her book on Benjamin Schambaugh and the roots of public history, Rebecca Conard demonstrates how historical figures such as J. Franklin Jameson (at the Carnegie Institution of Washington), Herbert Friedenwald (at the Library of Congress), and Benjamin Schambaugh (at the State Historical Society of Iowa) embodied the utilitarian aspect of history and saw “the value of using history to explain contemporary issues, to make history relevant to the present” (2002, 10). This trend materialized in what Schambaugh called “applied history.” He stated in 1909: “I do not know that the phrase ‘Applied History’ is one that has thus far been employed by students of history and politics … But I believe that the time has come when it can be used with both propriety and profit” (Conard 2002, 33).5 Schambaugh linked history with political applications and public policy. It was actually representative of some historians’ involvement in policymaking in North America and Europe before World War II.

The links between historians and politics are very old.6 Historians have worked for or advised various governmental agencies for generations. The U.S. Department of Agriculture established a history office in 1916. Likewise, Samuel B. Harding from Indiana University
was hired to work for the Committee on Public Information during World War I. Along with the rise of federal political power in the 1930s, historians’ involvement in the federal government became particularly visible during the New Deal. The U.S. government was looking for expertise to stimulate the economy in every field. This gave birth to governmental interest in historic preservation and the management of National Parks. Created in 1916, the National Park Service (NPS) obtained full responsibility for national historic sites, parks, and memorials in 1933. This resulted in an unprecedented need for trained historians who had to locate, identify, evaluate, and research possible historic sites. The creation of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1949 and the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966 provided for an Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to coordinate state, local, and federal effort (Jones 1999, 23). Although the links between historians and the federal government tended to decrease after the 1960s, they never disappeared, as attested by the creation of the Society for History in the Federal Government in 1979. This involvement in policymaking was not specific to the United States. In the United Kingdom, government departments created historical sections and programs of official histories right after World War II (Beck 2006).

Likewise, many historians have worked within military organizations. In the United States, Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck – commander of the Union Army – initiated a project to collect and publish Civil War military records in 1863 (Reuss 1986, 294). As Rebecca Conard explains, World War I transformed isolated military history initiatives “into a more serious effort to document various aspects of the war as it was taking place” (2002, 149–150). In the United Kingdom, historian Alix Green demonstrates how official war histories were the foundation for the British experiment in history in government (2015b).

**Historians under Contract**

Another aspect of applied history was, according to Schambaugh, about historians working under contract. The emergence of historians in the private sector took place during World War II. For instance, in 1943 Firestone hired a historian (William D. Overman) to preserve and archive the papers of Harvey Firestone and his sons. Professionally staffed archives in corporate sectors developed in the 1950s with historians working for Coca-Cola, Bank of America, Texaco, Ford Motor Company, and many others (Conard 2002, 161).

In addition to corporate archives, wealthy sponsors also contributed to the creation of historic places. In 1929, Henry Ford opened a museum in Dearborn, Michigan, “celebrating the triumphs of industrial capitalism” as well as “Greenfield Village, an outdoor assemblage of restored historic buildings replete with Americana celebrating the folkways that industrial capitalism was erasing.” Similarly, in the 1930s John D. Rockefeller Jr. “invested nearly $80 million in restoring, researching, and reconstructing buildings in Williamsburg, Virginia, to re-create a tidied-up version of the village as it appeared circa 1790” (Conard 2002, 161). Those sites proposed new opportunities for historians to work outside academia.

By the 1960s, academic historians working in universities were, therefore, only one category of historians, although they dominated historical organizations. Many historians were working outside of academia in archives, historical societies, national parks, museums, federal government agencies, or in corporate societies. Historians working outside academia had their own associations organized by fields. In addition to the AHA, the American Association of Museums (AAM), the Society of American Archivists (SAA), and the AASLH were created in 1906, 1936, and 1940 respectively. These activities did
not go unnoticed within academic circles. Some universities established training programs that focused on specialized historical practices. For instance, the history department at the American University in Washington, DC created a program in archival administration in 1939 (Conard 2002, 163). However, there was no agreed-upon common denominator for historians working outside the academy. As Arnita Jones highlights in an article on the history of public history:

> there were few opportunities to discuss how these efforts did or did not fit within the graduate curriculum in history departments or how a younger generation could learn to use historical analysis as an important tool for solving problems outside higher education institutions.

(1999, 24)

It was in this context of a general need to create cohesion among historians working outside universities that the public history movement emerged.

**The Emergence of a Public History Movement**

**Local History, Social Engagement, and Activism**

Local and public history practices shared common roots (Kyvig and Marty 2010; Kammen 1987). For most of the 20th century, public practices of history mostly came from local history. Both public and local history practices felt the consequence of the new professional history in the late 19th century. In his history of American historiography, Ian Tyrrell demonstrates that, as a consequence of the rise of scientific history, academic historians have gradually attempted to link local events to the production of national history (2005, 208). While national history became increasingly important for academic historians, local historians, according to academic standards, became associated with amateurism. For most of the 20th century, local history remained in the field of the public practice of history and accordingly disconnected from academic works. Due to its connection with non-academic audiences, public history practices have had privileged relations with local history.

New approaches and new fields emerged in history and other social sciences in the 1950s and 1960s. Minority rights and discrimination issues had an impact on some historians. The development of black history and feminist history shed light on the links between historians and contemporary activism. In other words, history could be used to address injustice. More generally, the rise of social history in the 1960s played a major role in the redefinition of the purposes and practices of historians. The Annales School in France was symbolic of a move from political to social and later cultural history.

One of the main consequences of the rise of social history was a new interest in ordinary people. Oral history was perhaps the most symbolic example of the interest in ordinary people. Studs Terkel in the United States and Alessandro Portelli and Luisa Passerini in Italy brought to light the experiences of people historians had ignored. In the 1960s, the new interest in ordinary people, and the move away from the elite-oriented national history, encouraged the development of both local and public practices. This focus on the local was adopted by the Micro-History movement in Europe. Micro-historians reduced the scale of their research to local contexts, communities, families, and other networks. As a consequence of this new interest in local history and ordinary people, historians’ interest in oral history rose. In the 1980s, Alessandro Portelli analyzed collective memories
through oral testimonies gathered in the community of steelworkers in Terni, Italy (1985). Oral history provided a way to study, convey, and work with local audiences and is now a well-developed field of history (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013). The bottom-up interpretation resulted in new investigation and the creation of new primary sources for historians and public historians. Oral history is symbolic of the way historians have adopted a micro-history approach to local pasts. In this context of re-evaluation of the relations between local, national, and international frameworks, the public history movement emerged.

Until recently, the term public history was unfamiliar in Britain (Boniface 1995). It does not mean that historians did not have any public activities. Instead of public history, British historians have preferred using terms like heritage or people's history. Comparing historical practice in the United States and Britain, Ian Tyrrell stresses that “the British tradition facilitated popular and working class recording of their own historical experiences and involved important contributions to this process by trade unions, workers’ education, and local history groups” (2005, 157). The creation of the History Workshop movement by Raphael Samuel at Ruskin College (Oxford, England) in 1967 symbolized this British tradition. The History Workshop movement was a process of democratization of history through participation-led seminars that involved large non-academic audiences (History Workshop Online 2012). Some other experimental projects developed in Europe. For example, in 1969, students and teachers from the University of Leuven (Belgium) organized “Clio 70,” which aimed to spread historical narratives outside schools to broad audiences through new media (Zelis 2013, 157). As a result, the group created the Fonderie (Museum of Industry and Labor for the Brussels Region) in 1980.

In the United States, the New Left and its attacks on the alliances between historians and the federal government contributed to a new focus on ordinary people in the 1960s. The New Left's main criticism was not about the use and application of history by policymakers, but rather about the fact that “historians had become prisoners of a very political and conservative view of the world” (Tyrrell 2005, 246). The New Left supported activism in favor of feminism, civil rights, African American culture, and trade unions.

Historians’ new interest in people’s history coincided with a general increase in public access to culture and education. Types of audiences changed after World War II. Better-educated citizens, the rise of the middle class, and increased vacation time encouraged access to and consumption of historical production. The development of transportation facilities and road networks and the increasing number of cars helped the public access historic sites and historical institutions. For instance, visitors to national parks in the United States increased from 6 million in 1942 to 33 million in 1950, to 72 million in 1960 (Meringolo 2012, 164). The economic and social context brought about new opportunities for historians to work outside the academy.

This was particularly important due to a job crisis in American universities. Alongside the 1970s economic crisis, the shortage of tenure-track jobs led many doctoral programs to decrease the number of students. There were too many historians for too few jobs in universities. By 1977, the crisis had reached such a level that major historical institutions established programs and committees to search for new answers – and hopefully new opportunities – for historians. The National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History was set up in 1977. Focusing on career issues, the Committee worked at building bridges between universities and the non-academic world. Public history practice came to be seen as one solution.
The Public History Movement in the United States

Some programs opened in the United States during the 1970s to offer new specific training. For instance, Auburn University opened an Archival Training program in 1972, and Middle-Tennessee State University opened a Historic Preservation program in 1973. However, those programs provided neither history nor public history training. Although historians' public practices were not new and not specific to the United States – Raphael Samuel had been operating the History Workshop for almost a decade – the rise of the public history movement challenged the overall definition and conception of doing history in public. Thinking back to the origins of the movement, Barbara Howe was convinced that “something happened thereafter that created a new way for us to identify ourselves” (Howe and Kemp 1986, 9).

There is now quite a large amount of literature on the rise of the public history movement (Johnson 1999; Jones 1999). The term “public history” was first coined at the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) by Robert Kelley in 1975 (Schulz 2006, 31). University professor, consultant, and expert witness for the state on matters related to water rights, Kelley was symbolic of the attempts to link academic and non-academic historians. With the help of G. Wesley Johnson, Kelley applied for a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to build a program that would encourage the links between history and policy (Meringolo 2012, xvii). He perceived the program as, first of all, targeting positions in government offices and public policy. In order to do so, he explained that:

the best method was to begin training small groups of graduate students in public history skills, imbuing them with the idea of a public rather than an academic career, and sending them out, one by one, to demonstrate their value by their work.

(Conard 2002, 164)

The first graduate program in public history opened in 1976 at UCSB. In addition to the first university program, Wesley Johnson received a grant from the Arizona Humanities Council to organize the first of several conferences about public history (Johnson 1999, 168–169). The conferences organized between 1978 and 1980 led to the creation of the National Council on Public History (NCPH), which would become the main association for public historians in the United States. Wesley also used the Rockefeller Foundation grant as well as a National Endowment for the Humanities to publish the first edition of The Public Historian in 1978, a journal entirely devoted to public history. By the early 1980s, the public history movement had new university programs, a brand new organization, an annual conference, and a journal.

The objectives of the public history movement were threefold. First, it intended to provide historians working outside the academy a forum to discuss the specificity of their activities. This purpose partly explains the lack of a strict definition for public history that initially served to gather a broad range of practitioners. The movement also aimed at offering university training for history students who wished to work outside the academy. Finally, the movement pressed for the recognition of the status of public historian (Howe and Kemp 1986, 9).

The movement rapidly spread to the United States and beyond. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were the first countries outside the United States where the public history movement developed. For instance, as early as 1983, the fifth annual meeting of the NCPH
was held in Waterloo, Canada. In September 1982, the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, in collaboration with the British Social Science Research Council, organized a conference on Applied Historical Studies (Knevel 2009). In 1992, the Australian Professional Historians’ Association launched the Public History Review that would become, with The Public Historian, one of the two main journals in the field.

After the 1982 conference in Rotterdam, Wesley Johnson undertook a tour of Europe to explain public history and to evaluate the connection with existing history programs. Johnson noticed the Istituto per la Scienza dell’Amministrazione Pubblica in Italy that was directed by historians to train practicing public servants for administrative responsibilities. Likewise, the Istituto Storico della Resistenza di Reggio Emilia (Institute for the History of the Resistance in Emilia), founded in 1965, has participated in multiple public projects. In spite of evidence of public practices, no specific training about public history emerged in Europe.

Public History: Approaches and Definitions

Defining Public History: A Difficult Task

From its creation in the 1970s, the movement in the United States went through intense debates and criticisms regarding the definition of public history. As Ludmilla Jordanova acknowledges in her book on historical practices, “we should concede from the outset that ‘public’ is a difficult term” (2000, 141). The definitions of the term “public” have varied in time and place. For more than three decades, conferences and forums about public history have attempted to provide a clear and shared definition of the terms. Making the definitions even more complex, the translation of the term “public history” does not always make sense. For example, in France the term *histoire publique* could oppose a supposedly “private history” and might be rather associated with the study of the public space and public institutions.

It might help to go back to the origins of the terms. When he invented the term in the mid-1970s, Robert Kelley defined public history as history practiced outside the classroom. He explained that “public history refers to the employment of historians and historical method outside of academia” (1978, 16). At first, the public history movement was considered as a process to gather people who were not working in the academy but were nonetheless doing history. The historians who first presented themselves as public historians adopted a defensive, and anxious, tone (Conard 2002, 172). Kelley, Johnson, and other historians at the origins of the movement defined public history in opposition to what they perceived as a traditional academic and isolated history that ignored the public. They made clear they were historians, although not working in the academy. Public history was loosely gathering practitioners in many different fields who were defined by what they were not, namely working merely in the academy. We should not forget that one purpose of the movement was to give a common identity to historians who were working outside the academy and who did not have official status in the overall historical enterprise. The loose definition resulted from a focus on the common aspect shared by those practitioners. In other words, public history was practiced, but not easily defined. Proposing a strict definition of public history might have been initially counter-productive.

Another drawback of the initial definition of public history as being history practiced outside the classroom resulted in a too strict division between public and academic historians. The differentiation between academic and public historians had some sense in the
1970s when the latter were in need of a common identity. However, in spite of specific public history practices, the opposition between academic and public historians may not be the best approach to the field. The frontier between academic and public historians is permeable. First, public historians are not second-rate historians. In order to explain “How Public History (is) Different From ‘Regular’ History,” the website of the NCPH states that “in terms of intellectual approach, the theory and methodology of public history remain firmly in the discipline of history, and all good public history rests on sound scholarship” (NCPH 2015). Doing public history requires as much methodology as any other kind of historical practice. Second, when can one consider that a historian becomes a public historian? Should any historian having a weblog or being interviewed on television be considered a public historian? Likewise, how many historians live in an ivory tower, whose works are read by academics only? Joyce Appleby wonders whether we (historians) should not all become public historians (1997).

This last point is developed by Alix Green in her post on what she calls “academic citizens” (2015a, 2015b). She points out that “the act of definition is problematic, however, for more important reasons than semantics.” She argues that any definition “sets ‘public history’ apart from ‘history’ in way that has never applied to other specializations, such as social, economic, Black or women’s history” (2015a, 2015b). By defining public history in opposition – it is not practiced in university classrooms – to academic history, public historians always have to re-assert their professional standards and practices. Like Appleby in 1997, Green proposes to redefine the concept of academy and academic practices. She states that “as historians, we are connected and have responsibilities to many people: to our colleagues; to our students; to our networks and audiences, now increasingly global” (2015a, 2015b). Public history is, in this case, a reminder (some historians might have forgotten) to historians – who may or may not have jobs in university and research centers – that they have, as citizens of broad communities, duties toward many different actors.

While all historians may be, at one point or another, in contact with large and non-academic audiences, that does not mean that doing history in public does not require specific skills, approaches, and practices. We may all become public historians, but it requires training and an awareness of the challenges we can face while working in and for the public.

**Historians and Popular Non-Academic Audiences**

A recent trend among public historians is to stop focusing on what public history is and rather explain what public historians do. It helps shift from asking what public history is, to what public history wants, and therefore helps consider the various contexts in which historians practiced public history. Public history has at its core a consideration for popular non-academic audiences. Kelley encouraged “the employment of historians and historical method outside of academia” (1978, 16). Jordanova agrees, and writes that “public history is popular history – it is seen or read by large numbers of people and has mostly been designated for a mass audience” (2000, 141).

The survey undertaken by Robert Townsend and John Dichtl in 2008 (Figure I.1) shows a variety of hosting agencies and institutions for public historians. The breadth of the field “outside of academia” explains why we can find public historians in public sites such as museums, historical societies, governmental agencies, archives, libraries, historic buildings, newspapers, or park services. We may read, hear, and see them on television, in movies, on the radio, on the Internet and in every new medium. Public history does not imply a single public audience, however. One critical challenge for public historians is to be aware and to
take into account the variety of audiences they have to deal with. As public historian Nick Sacco writes:

public historians are teaching and communicating with audiences – just like academic teachers – but they frequently work with people of all ages, many of whom are not enrolled in a school and who do not engage in historical thinking on a daily basis.

(2013)

Different audiences result in different knowledge, different interests, different interrogations, and different ways to learn.

Public or Applied History? The Uses of the Past

Coming from the debated definitions of the term “public,” historians have been arguing about the impact of working with a variety of non-academic audiences. Historians who, for instance, design exhibits for museums may have to deal with a broad range of visitor profiles such as families, school trips, tourists, scholars, military groups, and so on. But what about historians who work in and for specific communities, in government agencies, or private companies? Novick argues that, instead of public, most of what is done under the name public history is in fact “private history,” either in the service of political agencies, private companies, or organizations with particular agendas (1988, 513). It is true that
some historians work with non-academic but very limited and particular audiences. Those historical practices position history as a service used by different audiences.

In Introduction to Public History, Barbara Howe regrets that “traditional historians have rarely confronted the issue of utility, they have dismissed it from their vocabulary as irrelevant or commercial” (Howe and Kemp 1986, 14). Public historians put great emphasis on the ways in which the public uses the past. The concept of usability is at the core of public history. This concept is not new and was supported in the early 20th century through applied history.

Applied history refers to the history applied to present issues, interrogations, audiences, actors, and policies. It is, therefore, problem-solving oriented. History can be applied to specific projects in which historians work as consultants for various clients and agencies. The purpose is then not necessarily to touch a public as broad as possible, but rather to apply historical methodology to the production of narratives for a corporate demand and/or more specific audiences.

We touch here upon the controversial activities of historians as entrepreneurs. The corporate use of history was one reason why Peter Novick is highly critical toward public history. He defines public history as seeking “to legitimize historical work designed for the purposes of particularist current constituencies.” This definition of public history contrasts with the “noble dream” of what he presents as “the universalist ethos of scholarship” (Novick 1988, 471–472, 510). There is even greater criticism of historians working for private companies, such as Historical Research Associates and The History Group Inc. Novick wonders whether consultants, under the pressure of their clients, focus merely on the historical records that “support the case they were making, and did their best to sweep under the rug or trivialize discrepant findings” (1988, 514). This criticism reflects the argument that historians working outside the academy are subject to pressure and censorship from the different stakeholders or clients they are working with/for.

Conversely, in an article on historian-entrepreneurs, Shelley Bookspan regrets that the links between history and entrepreneurship “generally remains unexplored.” She argues for “history as a platform on which to build new businesses” because “it has been far likelier for non-historians to create history-based enterprises, or even history-based industries” (2006, 67). Dutch corporate historian Ries Roowaan explains how history can contribute to any corporation’s development (2009). What is more, arguing – as Novick does – that historians working in an academic environment are insulated from outside pressure is debatable. It is true that public historians collaborate with many different stakeholders whose roles challenge the omnipotent control that historians working in universities and research centers may think they have on their research. But although less direct than for consulting historians, for instance, pressure on academic historians exists through tenure requirements, peer assessment, private universities that want to increase their market, and public/private funding requests.

Historians are well aware that history can be used – and sometimes distorted – for many different purposes. Through the heritage industry, history has become a precious tool for marketing. Some historians have faced the impact of consumer culture through theme parks, leisure, and entertainment. While historians look for accurate representations of the past, other actors such as marketing departments may first and foremost want to attract visitors. The tension – noted by Mike Wallace in his book on American museums – is between historians’ interest in educating audiences and the commercial interest in providing leisure (1996). For instance, in 1994 the Disney Corporation proposed to open a “Disney’s America” in Virginia with a raft ride through “Native America,” a “Civil War village,”
and a recreated factory town with a high speed ride called the “Industrial Revolution” (Glassberg 2001, 14). Although the project was ultimately rejected by local officials, it raised questions about the use of the past to sell experiences to visitors.

Debates relate to the relations between past and present. Critics of the use of the past fear that the present dictates historical interpretation of the past. Public historians should not be naive and must consider this risk. Nevertheless, the distance put by some historians between the past and present may also be seen as naive. History is not the past; it is a present interpretation, no matter what historians believe. A more interesting position is to accept the present construction of history while encouraging audiences to think of the past as a period different from the present. By doing so, this complex relationship between past and present allows both historicism – the awareness of the otherness of the past – and public uses of the past for present-day purposes.

What is certain is that the past has and will be used by different for-profit companies. However, it does not mean that historians should remain in ivory towers instead. In the early 1980s, while reviewing public history and its possible development in France, Henry Rousso – who was not convinced by the public history approach – evoked the choice every historian had to make – either the historian is interested in the possible application of his/her work and takes it into consideration in his/her research, or he/she leaves any application and uses of his/her work to “men of action” (Rousso 1984, 107). Historical works are used anyway; the question is whether historians want to participate in the discussions about how their work is used. Public historians should develop coherent relationships between the academy, historical research, (new) media, and the different uses of the past to contribute to better representations of the past. The relations between historians and their partners are at the core of many controversies in public history. It is necessary to explore if, why, and how historians can share authority.

**Working “With” Audiences: Public Historians and Shared Authority**

Public history is based on collaboration. This is also why Bookspan compares historians to entrepreneurs. “Public historians like entrepreneurs, must be collaborators … So for example, a public historian curating a museum exhibit must collaborate with designers, donors, other historians, board of directors, interpreters, and audiences” (2006, 67). And collaboration is sometimes not an easy process, especially for historians whose training may not have encouraged collaboration. Historians are usually trained to choose individually their own topics, methodology, sources; they usually control the schedule of production.

Collaboration is not limited to other scholars and other professionals. More radical is the collaboration with non-academic audiences. Public history is, indeed, not only working for but also with non-academic audiences. In 1990, oral historian Michael Frisch presented a new concept that would be very important for the conceptualization of the relations between historians and audiences. He argued that history was based on “shared authority” (Frisch 1990). Shared authority relates to the democratization of the knowledge-building process. In other words, audiences are never passively consuming knowledge produced by expert historians. Many public historians would today accept that public history is not doing history for the general public but with them. The participatory construction of history results in a major redefinition of the role and authority of historians. Historians cannot see themselves as missionaries who bring truth to non-academic audiences, but they should be prepared to collaborate, and to share authority. Shared authority comes from the conviction that historians do not own history, but that it is rather a sort of public domain. As we will see
through the different chapters of this textbook, public collaboration influences every step of
the construction of historical narratives and representations, from the collection and con-
struction of sources, through the presentation and storytelling, to the various uses of the past.

Collaboration and shared authority create new challenges for historians. Writing about
the concept of shared authority, oral historian Linda Shopes acknowledges that “collabo-
rative work is personally and intellectually demanding, requiring an ability – even the
courage – to deal with people and situations that can be difficult” (2003, 37). Historians in
contact with audiences may have to deal with public emotions regarding sensitive issues,
and may also have to deal with their own emotions, for example while receiving uncom-
fortable and offensive comments. While historians who communicate mostly by journals,
books, and academic conference may very well avoid direct emotions and out-of-control
situations, public historians hardly can. A mortal sin for professional historians, emotions
have returned to the foreground through public history practice (Tyson 2013).

Emotions actually belong to broader interrogation about the consequences of public
practice to the role of historians. Public historians must be ready to share authority. Debates
no longer focus on the need to share authority, but rather on the extent to which it could
be done. Public historian Jim Gardner argues that the concept of “radical trust” is one of the
crucial current challenges for public historians. According to him, “looking to the public for
content and direction” has become the next step in public history, and forces public histori-
an to “giving up control … in other words, radical trusts means letting the public (via com-
munities) determine the future of public history” (2010, 53). What he argues is that shared
authority is not synonymous with relativism – the sense that one interpretation or vision of
the past is just about as acceptable as another. The challenge for public historians is to both
share authority and defend historical analysis of the past as mediator or as “communicator”
as Jason Steinhauer recently advocated (2015).

History, Memory, and Audiences
In the last three decades, public history has been a vibrant subject of discussion among his-
torians, academic or not. One major reason was a new interest among historians and other
academics in memory and memory studies. The development of oral history participated in
a broader discussion about the links between memory and history. Memory studies – and
the focus on memory – has made the public history approach more palatable to academic
scholars.

During the 1980s, many works were published in Europe and in the United States about
the concept of memory and its use for historians (Nora 1996; Lowenthal 1985; Connerton
1989). These publications took place in a broad context of public anniversaries and com-
memorations such as the Bicentenary of the French Revolution in 1989. Commemorations
were perfect occasions for historians to enhance their public roles. In order to do so, his-
torians increasingly had to take a position regarding the use and study of memories. The
development of public history and memory studies was not only simultaneous, but it was
based on common interrogations and practices.

A watershed in memory studies was the shift from individual to collective – or group –
memories evoked by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s (1925). Collective memories became
a social object that could be studied by scholars. For example, French historian Henry
Rousso studied how the memories of World War II – and in particular the French col-
laboration with the Nazis – changed after 1945 (1991). Historians were very careful to
distinguish between memory – the topic of their research – and history. David Lowenthal
opposes historians who “while realizing that the past can never be retrieved unaltered … still strive for impartial, checkable accuracy, minimizing bias as inescapable but deplorable” and those – he does not call them historians – who “see bias and error as normal and necessary” (1997, 32). In other words, history would tend to objectivity, while memory would be subjective. Memory was defined as present-oriented, composed of emotions, non-universal since supported by social groups, and therefore constantly changing. Memory was seen by historians as the opposite to the scientific, professional, and academic history. Some of these arguments were similarly used to criticize historians’ public practices.

Public historians are more careful and consider that memory is not a form of blindness while history is about objective “truth” (Noiret 2011, 9). The strict opposition between memory and history is not convincing. Public history is a very good example of how history and memory influence each other. The scholarship on memory offers a new way to think about public history as well. In 1996 and 1997, David Glassberg led a discussion in *The Public Historian* about the links between public history and memory (1996). As Robert Archibald points out in this discussion, “the new memory research is especially important because it is audience-focused and recognizes that examining how humans receive information and construct memory is critical to our work” (1997, 64). The different uses and interpretations of the past by the public are not something historians are usually trained for – since professional history avoids personal involvement – but it is crucial for public historians who intend to understand how audiences make “sense of history,” or as Glassberg puts it, as evidence of the intersection of the intimate and the historical (2001, 6). Individual and collective memories can be part of the public history production. For example, it is very important for public historians involved in historic preservation to ask local residents during public meetings what they think of and what their experience of the site under consideration has been. Public memories of sites may help discover divergence between popular and official memories and interpretations of the past.

The public involvement in the various steps of public history raises new questions about the role of historians. In line with the works on memory studies, public historians are now aware of the fact that interpretation differs according to audiences. Historians no longer doubt that they cannot fully control how historical narratives are interpreted and used by audiences. Individuals and groups not only interpret the past differently, but they also use it according to their personal needs and experiences. Since memories and interpretations of the past may vary from individual to individual, it is necessary to discuss Carl Becker’s famous phrase – everyone his own historian – and the possible consequence of historical relativism in which every interpretation is equally valid.

Without denying the right of free speech, historians must strive against relativist interpretations of the past. As Jim Gardner rightly points out in an article about “Radical Trust,” we should not confuse knowledge and opinion (2010, 54). This is especially relevant in the context of the democratization of expression issued from the rise of the Internet. It is increasingly possible to express one’s views through personal blogs, websites, comments, and social networks. Although the process of democratization is necessary, public interpretations of the past seem to be more and more associated with personal memories that do not always support critical study of the past. Gardner was right when he juxtaposed opinion and knowledge. The rise of public memories should not hide the fact that interpreting the past is never an easy process. This is where historians and, more precisely in engaging communities, public historians can play a role by providing critical analysis of sources and helping people to set individual and group memories in the broader context of interpretation. Situating oneself in relation to audiences and their interpretation of the past has become
one of the most difficult tasks for public historians. The civic and public role of historians is not to hide behind the myth of equal validity for personal interpretations of the past. There is a gap between the need to foster participatory construction of public history and the absence of any critical interpretation of the past.

Institutionalization and Internationalization of Public History

The strict distinction between academic historians and public historians faces a different reality. Numerous historians have been both academic and public historians. Robert Kelley himself had an academic position at UCSB. Other founding members of the public history movement had academic positions too. The Organization of American Historians (OAH) as well as the AHA include and encourage public history. Every year, their conferences give voice to public historians and public history projects. Every few years, the OAH and the NCPH share their annual conferences. Instead of making clear-cut distinctions between academic and public historians, it might be more valid to stop seeing public history as a separate track and to see public history as a central component of what all historians could do.

The reconsideration of the opposition is also due to the rise of public history programs within universities. The roots of the public history movement lay in universities. Public historians with academic positions have been extremely visible and powerful in the rise of the public history movement. In Britain, Raphael Samuel created the History Workshop at Ruskin College, Oxford, which is one of the highest ranked academic places in Europe. Although many historians had worked outside universities for decades, the historians who were at the origins of the movement had positions in the academy. It seemed as if North American universities discovered in the 1970s and 1980s that history could be produced and used outside of the classroom.

There is a growing academic interest in public history training. More and more history departments propose courses. Originally located in North America, public history programs are now present worldwide. The NCPH’s Guide to Public History Programs listed 220 university programs around the world in 2013. Among others, public history centers have been created in South Africa, Ireland, Germany, China, and Brazil. Today, history@work – a blog sponsored by the NCPH to serve as an online “commons” – includes an international section. The Public Historian journal has “International Consultants” on its board of editors. Those examples encapsulate the increasing attention paid to what is done outside the United States. The growing discussion on international issues not only raises questions about the definition of public history, it also forces us to consider the extent to which the emergence of new centers has affected public practices and contributed to the creation of international public history networks and practices.

Nevertheless, the disagreements and dissimilar definitions of “public history” make difficult – but not impossible – international discussion and projects. In a review of public history in Britain, Priscilla Boniface underlines that the British remain unfamiliar with the term public history and stresses the “difficulty in the UK in understanding exactly the meaning of the American term” (1995, 23). In 2013, when experienced North American public historians participated in a seminar at Chongqing University (China), intense discussions focused on the concept of public history and its meaning in China. Other historians have reacted to what they perceive as the North American model of public history. For instance, public history in Australia developed “partly as a critique of the US public history movement.” In an article on what public history is, Jill Liddington argues that “involved
in city-planning, courtroom, community battles, and other public commitment, Australian public historians have been much more radical in their criticism of university historians luxuriating in their tenure-induced languor” (2002, 86). Besides, more than in the United States, public history in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada has focused on battles for ethnic minorities, especially regarding native populations.12

Another approach has been proposed in France. During his tour of Europe, Wesley Johnson visited France and noticed the “lack of opportunities outside of the state-dominated employment system for historians, curators, and archivists” (1984, 91). Public practice in France has been closely associated with public service. In France, as for many other countries, state-sponsored projects have been at the origins of public practices. Likewise, federal government initiatives participated heavily in the development of public practices in Canada. Projects such as the Museum of Civilization or the Canadian Museum of Science and Technology came from former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s wish to enhance pride in national Canadian culture to compete with the French Canadian independence movement (Dick 2009, 8). State-sponsored history has also become a major field in New Zealand where the War History branch of the Department of Internal Affairs is home to the massive official history series of New Zealand’s involvement in World War II (Dalley 2012, 77).

The rise of state-sponsored public history in some countries has fostered suspicion regarding the uses of history. The links between public history and the private sector have certainly been the subject of the most aggressive criticisms toward the field in Europe. For instance, in 2005 three French historians founded the Comité de Vigilance face aux Usages Publics de l’Histoire (Watchdog Committee Against the Public Uses of History) to distinguish between history, memories, and their political uses.13 The Committee’s Manifesto made a clear distinction between academic history and public memories; the uses of the past being part of the latter.

In spite of the disagreement on the definitions and approaches of public history, some historians have created international structures and networks.14 An international committee was formed within the NCPH during the mid-1990s to assess the need for, and how to start, an international discussion on the public practice of history (Warren-Findley 1998, 11). Likewise, the International Federation for Public History was created in 2010 “to bring together international public historians, to promote the development of a growing worldwide network of practitioners, and to foster national public history programs and associations” (Noiret 2014). The first and second International Symposia of Public History were organized in 2012 and 2014 in Brazil based on the Rede Brasileira de História Pública (Brazilian Network of Public History) (Almeida and Rovai 2011). The symposia and other international conferences demonstrate that, in spite of sometimes-dissimilar definitions of public history, historians can discuss and explore across national contexts the skills and practices – like oral history, digital media, historic preservation, advising – used to communicate with non-academic and popular audiences. The internationalization of media – best exemplified by the development of the Internet – gives historians new opportunities to work for and with international audiences (Noiret and Cauvin 2016).15

A Textbook of Practice

Why a Textbook on Public History?

As previously mentioned, the public role of historians is not new. However, the rise of public history movements since the 1970s has contributed to better preparing historians
to face work in public, for and with various partners. Training is necessary because public historians are engaged in collaboration and may face situations barely covered in traditional history training. Doing public history is not a simple shift of the communication framework. Doing public history requires particular skills and has consequences for the overall production of historical narratives. Historians are not born but become public historians.

*Public History: A Textbook of Practice* covers the many challenges historians face while teaching, learning, and practicing public history. The broad and debated definitions of public history result in the existence of several sub-fields. Although they may overlap, each one of these sub-fields raises specific challenges for historians. Historians who work in historic preservation, in museums and archives, in government agencies, as consultants, as oral historians, or who manage crowdsourcing projects, need very specific skills. This textbook provides an introduction for most of the sub-fields and can be used by graduate and undergraduate programs in public history. Because public history is an approach that any history course can adopt, the textbook can help instructors enrich the conception and practice of history training at large. This textbook can also allow public historians to learn about alternative practices and media – film and documentary, virtual reconstruction, blogs and websites – to produce history. Public practitioners are usually so submerged by the amount of work to be undertaken for their projects that they lack the time to reflect on issues at stake in their practice. The textbook can help such practitioners further develop the links between theory and practice.

An immense amount of literature is available for anyone interested in the different fields such as archives, museums, historic preservation, oral history, digital history, documentary editions, and so on, and it is extremely difficult for public historians and instructors to cover the many different fields. What is more, fields and practices such as archives and collections management often lack discussion of the role of history and historians. For instance, there have long been programs in historic preservation, oral history, archival management, museum studies, and public policy, but some of those programs may have no historical training at all. This may result in students in historic preservation or public policy, for instance, considering themselves as more closely aligned with architecture, urban planning, and legislation. Instead of merely providing introductions to the different practices of public history, the textbook explores what historians can bring to the related fields and how the public practices and applications affect historical methodology.

Historians have, since the 1980s, used some important collective resources on public history. Public history journals such as *The Public Historian* and the *Public History Review*, blogs – *Public History Commons* from North America, *Public History Weekly* from Europe, and other related journals – *Rethinking History*, the *Journal of Historical Review*, or *History & Memory* – have participated in intense discussions on the field. A few collections of essays provided rich overviews of public history as well. Barbara Howe and Emory Kemp edited *Public History: An Introduction* in 1986. Even though it is now partially outdated – especially regarding new technology – this collection is one of the most exhaustive works. More recently, Jim Gardner and Peter LaPaglia, Paul Ashton, Hilda Kean, and Paul Martin edited similar introductions to the field (Gardner and LaPaglia 2006; Ashton and Kean 2009; Kean and Martin 2013). The only example of a single-author public history textbook is, so far, *Public History: A Practical Guide* published by Faye Sayer in the UK (2015).

Students as well as public history practitioners must be aware of the need for self-reflectivity, and should address the tensions between theory and practice in the field. In his overview of public history practice in Europe and North America, French historian Henry Rousso argued that “pragmatism is not a French quality (or impairment)” (1984, 114).
implied that American scholars are—perhaps too eagerly—more driven by practice than the
theory of public history. Before any application of public history, French historians would
need, according to Rousso, more theoretical debates about the pros and cons of developing
the field. Rousso was right to some extent. In the United States, Rebecca Conard consid-
erers practice as “where one begins to understand what sets public history apart” (2006, 11).
However, public history has increasingly been self-reflective. Introductory courses on public
history need to provide both an overview of the multiple public practices and theoretical
discussions on the field. Instructors need to balance theoretical readings and applications
outside the classroom through public history projects, internships, and collaboration with
non-academic stakeholders. Self-reflectivity is not limited to the application of theory to
practice, but reflects examples when practice can inform theory as well. It is not uncom-
mon for instructors in public history training programs to ask students to write final papers
discussing how their projects and other practical experiences could help re-assess public
history theoretical works they have previously read. This assignment embodies how public
history is designed on constant dialogue between theory and practice, or as Katharine
Corbett and Howard Miller argue in their article on shared inquiry, on “reflective practice”

**From Practice to Practices**

The textbook is divided into three parts that reflect the different steps in public history.
Every chapter offers an introduction to the history, debates, practices, necessary skills,
and literature relevant to comprehend the field and collaborate with the various possible
partners. Instead of having specific chapters about them, key issues such as public partic-
ipation, digital tools and media, and internationalization of public history are discussed in
every chapter. For instance, the use of digital tools affects the management of collections
and cultural resources, documentary editing, or oral history sources, public writing (through
blog and websites), exhibit design, and preservation (through virtual reconstruction).

Since historians may work for and with a variety of actors, flexibility is often one of their
key qualities. Due to the great variety of sources, sites, and collaboration, public historians
are often confronted with unforeseen situations. Shelley Bookspan notices that more tradi-
tional historians show “discomfort with uncertainty, a reluctance to deviate from a chosen
path … there is a kind of safety working with the confines of the past,” but she underlines
that “uncertainty is a desirable ally” (2006, 37). Flexibility and adaptation are certainly two
of the main qualities of public historians. And in order to be flexible, public historians must
be “polyglot.” While knowing different languages may become more and more important
for public historians due to the internationalization of the field and audiences, the term
“polyglot” also refers here more to the variety of technical languages.

Doing history in public requires historians to be able to communicate with the many
different partners involved in the project. History for popular non-academic audiences may
require, for instance, the use of reader-friendly writing styles (Chapter 4). Various other
types of collaboration invite public historians to know the basics of technical languages
to work with exhibit designers, architects, computer scientists, marketing officers, film
directors, policymakers, or lawyers. The use and impact of new techniques and skills are
developed throughout the first part of the textbook.

Part I focuses on public history sources, and offers an overview of the creation, collec-
tion, management, and preservation of public history materials (archives, material culture,
oral materials, or digital sources). Chapters cover sites and institutions such as archival
repositories and museums, historic buildings and structures, and different practices such as collection management, preservation (archives, objects, sounds, moving images, buildings, sites, and landscape), oral history, and genealogy.

Part II deals with the different ways in which public historians can produce historical narratives through different media (exhibitions, movies, writing, digital tools, and so on). As public historian Philip Scarpino explains, “all historians conduct research; all historians analyze and interpret what they find; and all historians communicate their findings to others.” However, the difference for public historians is “found in the area of communication, in the audiences with whom we communicate, and in the methods that we use to communicate our scholarship to those audiences” (Sacco 2013). The media to produce and convey historical representations of the past are key elements in public history. Chapters of this textbook cover different media such as writing (Chapter 4), editing (Chapter 5), exhibiting and interpreting (Chapter 6), radio and audio-visual production (Chapter 7), as well as digital public history (Chapter 8).

Technology has been a key component of the links between historians and their audiences and partners. Ian Tyrrell rightly explains that “at each new development, new technologies raised anxieties about the role of academics and popular history making” (2005, 251). It is even truer about the consequence of the latest technological advance. The rise of the Internet and the digital tools has been revolutionary for some public historians. Through the Web 2.0 and participatory process, historians have been increasingly able to engage with audiences. Web 2.0 is a perfect embodiment of shared authority in public history, and raises questions about the role and practice of historians.

Finally, it is important to evaluate the consequences of collaborative practice on the historian’s role. Throughout Part III, chapters focus on issues such as teaching, shared authority, civic engagement and social justice, consulting, and public history ethics. Although every historian must deal with ethics and self-reflectivity, public history raises specific issues coming from the multiple collaborations public historians are committed to. In one of the first issues of *The Public Historian*, Robert McKenzie asked how historians could “maintain objectivity without the traditional protection of distance from the subject under study?” (1979, 4). Codes and debates about ethics cannot prevent historians from being wrong, but can prevent them from being unethical.

Notes

1 See for instance public debates about the historical adaptation of Lincoln’s life by Steven Spielberg in 2012.
2 For example, Herbert Baxter Adams played a major role in the development of modern and scientific research practices at Johns Hopkins University (Townsend 2013, 13).
3 Three percent of AHA members were already working in archives in 1900 and the U.S. National Archives were created in 1934 (Townsend 2013, 39).
4 One major and constant popular use of archives is for the purpose of genealogical practices.
5 Similar arguments in history’s public purpose could be found in Europe too, for instance, John Robert Seeley (1834–1895) in Britain (Tosh 2014).
6 See Chapter 13.
7 See Chapter 12.
8 See Chapter 2.
9 Ernest May at Harvard, Joel Tarr at Carnegie Mellon, Noel Stowe at Arizona State University, Anna Nelson, then at George Washington University, Barbara Howe at West Virginia, Patricia Mooney-Melvin at the University of Arkansas, or Dick Kirkendall at Indiana University.
10 Although it does not mean that those history departments prepare historians to work in the public
environment. Courses and programs are sometimes merely created to limit the decrease of history major in universities. See Chapter 10.

Although non-exhaustive, the list demonstrates the extreme predominance of English-speaking countries. Of the programs, 193 were located in the United States, 8 in Great Britain, 7 in Canada, 5 in Australia, 2 in Ireland, 1 in India, 1 in China, 1 in Belgium, 1 in Holland, and 1 in Germany. However, the list was not exhaustive, other programs exist in South Africa, Switzerland, and Germany, for instance.

See Chapter 12.

See Chapter 13.

See for instance the international examples of international collaboration for exhibit design in Chapter 6, as well as the International Sites of Conscience in Chapter 12.

See Chapter 8.

Gardner and LaPaglia's first edition was published in 1999.

The author translated from French to English.

See Chapter 10.

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Introduction


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Introduction


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