

For as long as I can remember, museums and artifacts have always been a part of my life. One of my first memories from when I was young is of going to the local museum where my father worked to have lunch with him. While my parents ate, I would look at all the exhibits, understanding what was in each exhibit but not the stories each piece could tell. As I got older, I became more aware of the story and the history of the artifacts that were on display. I understood that each artifact had a story from someone's life to tell, each one building on the next to create a narrative of what life was like in Tallapoosa, Georgia. As I began to understand this more, my love for history grew. I love learning about new topics, periods, and events, especially when I can learn about the everyday lives of those from the past. Even though these items were behind glass, where I could not touch or interact with them just by knowing their story, I felt connected to the object and the person in the past.

In 2017, I started work at the Antonio J Waring Jr. Archaeological Laboratory. At Waring, I interacted with and learned about many different types and kinds of artifacts. Interacting with and holding these objects made me feel even more connected to their history. As well as working with artifacts, I got to work with the public and educated them on what went on in the lab and the best practices for curating these items. Through this, I learned that I enjoyed engaging with the public and helping them understand the importance of the lab and the history of the objects that are stored there. It was through my time at Waring that I was introduced to the field of public history. As a public historian, it is that feelings of empathy and connection? that I hope to be able to instill in people.

To me, Public History is about bringing history to the public in a way that they can understand. My duty as a public historian is to educate the public on not just the main overarching historical narrative but also give a voice to the people and communities that have

had their stories left out of the main narrative. The question then becomes how do we provide these stories with a voice and tell the ones that have to remain untold? The answer to this question is not straightforward and is different for everyone.

One way these stories can be told is through artifacts. Artifacts can be interpreted in many different ways to tell many different stories. In Laurel Ulrich's book *Tangible Things*, Ulrich states, "We want to argue here that just about any tangible thing can be pressed into service as primary historical evidence. Our purpose is not to offer comprehensive accounts of each field to which these sources might relate, but to demonstrate that attention to singular, physical things can reveal connections among people, processes, and forms of inquiry that might otherwise remain unnoticed."¹ By strategically placing objects, the museum encourages its visitors to make new connections between the objects that might otherwise go unnoticed. These connections allow the visitors to bring their own stories and experiences to the museum. For these experiences to be shared, museums must create a space where visitors feel comfortable discussing their interpretation of the objects on display. The museum can start a dialogue with its visitors on what the object means to them by creating this space. This helps the visitors feel connected to the museum as well as the history of the object. Ulrich states, "Tangible things are inseparable from the stories people create about them as they find them, make them, use them, and then use them again in different ways. One of the complex uses of objects is their identification and collection, often followed by further refinement of their initial categorizations."²

¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich et al., *Tangible Things : Making History through Objects* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015),2.

² Laurel Thatcher Ulrich et al., *Tangible Things : Making History through Objects* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015). 164.

Bringing an object outside of its initial interpretation allows stories and connection that might have otherwise gone unmade or untold to have their chance to join the narrative. In his book *In Small Thing Forgotten*, James Deetz states, “For, in the seemingly little and insignificant things that accumulate to create a lifetime, the essence of our existence is captured. We must remember these bits and pieces and use them in new and imaginative ways so that a different appreciation for what life is today and was in the past can be achieved.”³ In this statement, Deetz argues that no matter how small or insignificant an artifact may seem, there is always a story for that artifact to tell.

As a public historian, it is my job to help to be the voice for the stories that would otherwise be untold. It is also my job to interpret history in a way the public can understand. As a public historian, I aim to instill a sense of connection between the history being interpreted and the museum visitors. From this interconnectedness, I want to create discussions in the museum space and for visitors to explore the history, objects, and other topics in their way. To inspire the visitors and the community to take ownership and feel like they are part of the museum. In Deetz’s *In Small Things Forgotten*, Deetz concludes, “Don’t read what we have written look at what we have done.”⁴

³ James Deetz and Amy Elizabeth Grey, *In Small Things Forgotten an Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor, 1996), 259–60.

⁴ James Deetz and Amy Elizabeth Grey, *In Small Things Forgotten an Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor, 1996), 260.

Bibliography

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