

INTERIM PERFORMANCE REPORT
“Object of History” [Grant LG-24-05-0061-05]
May 1, 2006

During the first six months of this grant we have made significant progress in the planning and development of the project.

Because the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) received another IMLS grant for our Firefox Scholar project at the same time as this project, and because of a number of additional grants that have placed demands on our staff’s time, we have shifted the timeline for the project. We began work on the planning and development at the beginning of January 2006 rather than October 1, 2005, as originally plan. This will create a small adjustment in the work plan and the budget period, though all of the deliverables will remain the same. Thus, we will launch the first object lesson in February 2007 (rather than October 2006 as anticipated), completing three lessons during the spring of that year. Then over the summer, we will do additional recruiting of teacher and student participants and make adjustments to the lesson materials in anticipation of launching the remaining three object lessons in Fall 2007. Finally, we will do the bulk of our template distribution and follow-up assessment in Spring 2008. This will bring the project to completion on May 31, 2008. Based on these shifts in the work plan, we anticipate requesting a one-year no-cost extension to complete the project.

Consultation and Development:

After making this adjustment to our schedule, we began work in earnest in January. Our first task was to hold a series of planning meetings with the curators from the National Museum of American History (NMAH) and with our *Planning and Advisory Committee*.

NMAH Curators: In January, Sharon Leon (Project Manager, CHNM) and Allison Meyer O’Connor (Online History Associate, CHNM) joined Judy Gradwohl (Associate Director, Office of Public Programs, NMAH) and James Gardner (Associate Director, Office of Curatorial Affairs, NMAH) for a meeting with ten curators. During the meeting the curators discussed the larger goals of the project. This discussion fruitfully revealed some constructive ways to think about teaching students to analyze material culture while delivering significant amounts of content from the standard high school U.S. History curriculum. The each curator provided a number of suggestions of objects from their areas of expertise and a discussion of associated themes for the project. As a result of this discussion, we developed a list of 30 potential objects to use in the project—in a number of cases, this list departed from those indicated in the proposal, not surprising since the proposal listing was always intended to be tentative and subject to further discussion with advisers.

IMLS Outcomes-Based Assessment Workshop: In February, Sharon Leon, Allison Meyer O’Connor and Julia Garcia attended the two-day IMLS Outcomes-Based Assessment workshop.

We found the sessions very helpful as we approached our development process, and as we look ahead to evaluating the impact of the project for museums, museum educators, teachers and students.

Planning and Advisory Committee: Also in February, we convened a full meeting of the *Planning and Advisory Committee* to discuss the development of the project materials. This meeting brought together historians and multimedia specialists from CHNM, experienced high school history teachers and education specialists, and NMAH curators and staff. First, this group reviewed the work plan for the spring, focusing on the development of the Woolworth Lunch Counter from Greensboro, North Carolina, as a prototype for the subsequent object lessons. Second, the Committee reviewed and discussed the objects suggested by the NMAH curators, focusing on the ways that curators might present the objects and the pedagogical issues associated with teaching the material. From the larger list, the Committee narrowed the array of possible objects to ten. Third, the group offered suggestions for website information architecture and design, based on their needs and expertise as historians, educators, and curators.

Based on the results of our consultations with the *Planning and Advisory Committee*, the staff at NMAH investigated the availability of the selected objects for photography, and whether or not there were ample research materials to support the development of an object lesson and its attendant multimedia components. After reviewing this research, we selected six objects on which to focus. The selections allow us to deal with a range of themes and analytical skills in our materials for students and teachers, but they are not meant represent a full and comprehensive coverage of the themes in U.S. History or of the diversity of the American peoples. The first three objects will be presented to teachers and students in the spring semester of 2007. The second three objects will launch in the fall semester of 2007.

Selected Objects:

Thomas Jefferson's Desk: In 1776, Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence on this portable lap desk of his own design. Featuring a hinged writing board, a locking drawer for papers and pens, and an inkwell, the desk was Jefferson's companion as a Revolutionary patriot, American diplomat, and president of the United States.

1984 Gold Nugget: James Marshall found this gold nugget at Sutter's Mill, California on January 24, 1848. The nugget bears evidence that Marshall bit it to determine if it was actually gold. And, there is significant evidence that its discovery was the impetus for the Gold Rush of 1849. In focusing attention on the West during this time period, the gold nugget opens a window up on issues of foreign relations and the concept of Manifest Destiny, not the least because at the point of its discovery, California still belonged to Mexico.

Mary Todd Lincoln's Dress: This dress belonged to First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, who wore it at a White House event in 1862. It was probably made by Elizabeth Keckley, Mrs. Lincoln's favorite dressmaker. This dress reflects the history of fashion and a First Lady's life in the social limelight. Behind the scenes, it tells the story of two nineteenth-century women who formed a close, unequal, and important relationship across the lines of race and class.

Progressive Era Ballot Box: In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the electorate of the United States roughly doubled. Immigrants flocked to the nation's cities, and women in the western territories received the right to vote. Election officials worried that such large numbers of votes would make voting fraud easier. They looked for a solution in the introduction of the Australian or blanket ballot and in new ballot counting machines.

Woolworth's Lunch Counter, Greensboro, NC: On February 1, 1960, four African-American college students sat down at a lunch counter at Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, and politely asked for service. Their request was refused. When asked to leave, they remained in their seats. Their passive resistance and peaceful sit-down demand helped ignite a youth-led movement to challenge racial inequality throughout the South.

Short-handled hoe: The Bracero program (1942 through 1964) allowed Mexican nationals to take temporary agricultural work in the United States. Over the program's 22-year life, more than 4.5 million Mexican nationals were legally contracted for work in the United States (some individuals returned several times on different contracts). Many growers thought short-handled hoes made workers more careful and kept crops from being damaged. Workers despised the short handled hoe because it forced them to stoop over to work.

Website Structure and Design:

While we were making our object selections, we were also moving along in the process of designing the structure of the website. In doing so, we had a series of meetings between our design staff and Matt MacArthur (Director of the New Media Program, NMAH) to lay the groundwork for the site as well with Judy Gradwohl and Julia Garcia of NMAH. (MacArthur also held consultation meetings with other NMAH staff.) The result was a series of wireframe documents that carefully describe the information architecture for the site.

Though the wireframes include much more information than can easily be contained within this report, the basic layout of the site includes a homepage that displays the six objects on which we will focus. Those objects are each linked to a section that will include an orienting movie, a collection of media that provides contextual information, supplemental documents and curator interviews about the object. The user will be able to explore this information on their own, or by way of three scripted tours through the material. Finally, the user will be able to access all of the material in the object lesson to create and annotate a tour of his or her own. In addition to these object lessons, the homepage will contain links to a section with a guide to learning about history using material culture, and a teacher site with lesson plans and supplemental materials. Finally, during the launch periods for the object lessons, there will be access to a portion of the site for the live "Chat with the Curator" events. Upon the completion of those events, the transcripts of those interactions will be archived to serve as further resources for the object lessons.

Based on this basic architecture, we are now in the process of exploring design elements and color schemes for the construction of the site. This work will continue through July, when we expect to have a working prototype for the main elements of the site, and one object lesson. Then our designers and multimedia staff will produce the templates that we will use for the remaining five lessons.

Greensboro Lunch Counter Prototype:

The development of the site's content is moving apace with the design. Since we selected the Greensboro Lunch Counter as our prototype, historians and researchers at CHNM (with active support from NMAH) have been working to gather a field of supplementary sources and contextual materials for this object lesson. We have had a series of meetings with the NMAH curators responsible for the acquisition and display of the lunch counter. Hence we are familiar with the research and materials in their records.

To supplement those materials we have made contact with the librarian for North Carolina history at the Greensboro Public Library about accessing their vast oral history collections. These oral histories contain rich material about the Civil Rights movement in Greensboro and about the sit-ins lunched at Woolworth's store in February 1960. Combined with the other documentary and visual sources we have gathered, the oral histories will allow us to fully engage students in learning about the lunch counter and its context by making good use of the multimedia capacities of the web.

Curator Interviews:

Curator interviews are key to the success of the object lessons. The curator's expertise provides the secondary and contextualizing perspective for students and teachers, situating the object both in the museum and in history. Thus, we have been involved in careful preparation for conducting interviews with the curatorial staff at NMAH. We have arranged to talk to at least two curators for each object. Our hope in interviewing more than one curator is to capture multiple perspectives of interpretation. In preparation for these interviews, we have developed a list of general questions that address the acquisition of the object, the decisions surrounding its display, and its historical significance. Additionally, we are doing preliminary research on each object in order to develop a set of specific questions that highlight the particular objects.

We have solicited bids from three filmmakers for the interview taping, and we selected Paulson Productions. John Paulson is an experienced producer/director who has worked with NMAH and other museums in the Smithsonian complex. He will provide digital audio and video recording, as well as lighting for the interviews, which we have scheduled for the end of May.

Since January 2006, the staff at CHNM and the staff at NMAH have made tremendous progress on *Object of History*. We are poised to move ahead in the coming months with our curator interviews and the construction of our prototype. We welcome further input from and discussion with the IMLS staff as our work continues.

Sincerely,

Roy Rosenzweig
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