

When the thought of public history comes into mind there can be many interpretations. Such as the ideas that history should be for a public audience, by offering insight and discussion into a broad array of topics. These topics can range from the most mundane to the most controversial within our history. Most importantly public history has the obligation to try to present in natural stance while also giving a whole truth. Even if these topics consist of a very grim/dark record, such events we are not entirely proud of discussing within our nation's history. That public history still should try to present such topics to keep the public informed so that we can hopefully learn from such mistakes, so we're not doomed to repeat them again.

On the contrary, these "interpretations" could be in jeopardy due to the rising political climate within the United States. The field of public history has slowly been enveloped into political talking points over this course of time. For instance, one such example can be seen at the National Archives Museum located in Washington, D.C. Where many of its exhibits have drastically been altered or changed due to U.S. Archivist Colleen Shogan who was appointed under Biden. Such as removing references pertaining to Japanese internment, birth, control, union organizers, and even Martin Luther King Jr. These exhibits in return are being replaced by more "right-wing" narratives to better appeal to a white conservative audience. The most notable changes seen was a photo of Martin Luther King Jr. being replaced by a photo of Richard Nixon meeting Elvis Presly. Then there were instances where mentions of topics relating to civil rights and environmental hazards caused by the coal mining industries had to be toned down as well.

With what has been shown so far, the field of public history is swayed every which way due to leadership and or censorship of certain topics as seen with today. This greatly affects what the public interprets of our history and how narratives can be controlled to achieve that within museums. Lastly, for a question to ponder on, are these changes in narratives and leadership only prevalent now or is this something that has occurred throughout all of U.S. history?



National Archives Museum, Washington, D.C.



U.S. Archivist Colleen Shogan



Photo of Richard Nixon and Elvis Presly