



Community Organizing and Activism: Confronting Injustice in Public Spaces



Local History Storytelling

“It took struggle from a lot of people and a lot of movements to ensure that people could get the [right] to vote that was promised to them.”

– Glenn Perkins, Curator of Community History Greensboro History Museum

OVERVIEW

History is always in the making. When we investigate the past, we learn about why and how things evolved then to create the world we inhabit today. Sometimes, though, what we learn in textbooks or see in museums may be incomplete. That is, history is complex and contested. Not everyone’s stories are accounted for in historical documents or exhibits. The job of finding and telling more stories to create a full, true accounting of history is one of the many tasks of community historians. Today, there is a focus on fostering diversity and inclusiveness in history that was largely absent in the past. To do that work, historians may explore individual accountings of the past, or examine archives to learn more about events, festivals, and traditions for which a community took pride. Since history is always a product of many stories, experiences, and events, the more we share that rich heritage and knowledge, the more insight we have into one another. Finding out what others experienced, gives us the opportunity to understand them better. As we uncover more information about our community, we can better recognize and even appreciate why institutions and practices evolved as they did. Understanding our history helps us see and appreciate our own place in that history, as well.

Making history relevant and useful is the goal of local history museums. The more stories of our past that are incorporated into exhibits and events, the more all of us benefit and learn from one another. For more information on local history see the American Association for State and Local History, <https://aaslh.org/about/>.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stories in our history do you imagine have not been fully told?
2. Why do you think that some stories are left out of our historical remembrances?
3. What current events, festivals, and traditions define your community today? What values are espoused in those activities?
4. How can we seek out untold stories, and to whom should we turn for that information?