
Institutional Identity and the Role of the Museum? American Museum Staff Perceptions of Museum Aims and Contested Confederate Statuary

1 February – 1 September 2020

Information sheet for Museum Staff Participants

Who is conducting the research?

My name is Allison Clark and I invite you to take in part in my research project, “Institutional Identity and the Role of the Museum? American Museum Staff Perceptions of Museum Aims and Contested Confederate Statuary.” I am a Master’s student in Education at the University College London (UCL) and currently work as the Exhibit Specialist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. Although I am not affiliated with an independent museum, I am a member of the National Council on Public History, the Texas Association of Museums, and the American Alliance of Museums. This research will fulfil my Master’s dissertation requirement for UCL’s Institute of Education, which is at the forefront of education and social science teaching and research.

This research focuses on museums’ institutional identities and their relationship to the ongoing public conversation surrounding Confederate monuments across the U.S.

I very much hope that you would like to take part. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don’t hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know.

Why am I doing this research?

Through this project, I hope to better understand perspectives of museum staff (educators, curators, and leadership) on museums’ institutional identities/roles and the implications of these perspectives on the future of housing Confederate monuments. The research will attempt to address the following areas: The purpose of museums; whether museum staff consider their work “neutral”, political, and/or advocative; and if differences exist between history and heritage.

Why am I being invited to take part?

While media commentary suggests museums are appropriate “neutral” spaces to house contested monuments, museum-affiliated organisations have been vocal critics of housing and interpreting them. This research is intended to give voice to museum staff, individuals who make interpretive decisions in museums and better understand their perspectives on museums’ roles and purposes.

Participants will be recruited from major museums of differing types (i.e. art, history) across Dallas, Texas. As the research aims to understand perspectives from those who participate in interpretation, only those in Education, Collections, or Leadership teams will be asked to participate, though this may include unpaid docents.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

Participants will be encouraged to share in one scheduled focus group in Dallas, which will last between 60 to 90 minutes. While the student will take audio recording of the session, participants will not be required to disclose their name, institution, or position title during this session. For those unable to participate in the scheduled focus group or who would prefer to speak privately,



participants may take part in 30 to 60-minute one-on-one in-person interviews with the student. These interviews may take place over the phone, on site at the participant's workplace, or in a publicly accessible place (i.e. library conference room) in accordance with the participant's schedule and comfortability.

Research questions will include demographic information (i.e. participants' workplace departments, years in the field), personal perspectives on museum's institutional roles and purposes, and perceptions of the ongoing debate surrounding Confederate monuments. Both focus groups and interviews will include audio recording. Audio files will remain accessible only to the student and her UCL Institute of Education supervisor Beth Stiasny, and any participant identifiers will be removed during reporting to preserve anonymity.

Will anyone know I have been involved?

The purpose of this research is to encourage individual museum staff participation rather than identify institutional opinions and perspectives. While participants will be recruited through museum team leadership, participants will contribute individual perspectives independent of institutional affiliation. Because of this, participants will not be expected to identify their employer or job title and any personal identifiers mentioned during data collection will be removed during reporting. All data will remain accessible only to the student and her UCL supervisor, and the names of participants will not be shared. Participants may choose to disclose their participation to colleagues.

Could there be problems for me if I take part?

Due to the contested nature of this topic, be reassured that participants are acting as individuals within a field, not representatives of their institutions. In addition to participating anonymously, participants are entitled to stop at any point during data collection and analysis. While opinions regarding contested statuary may differ in a group setting, the goal is collegial dialogue among museum colleagues to understand to what extent individual perspectives are shared across the field.

What will happen to the results of the research?

This research is intended for the student's dissertation project and will data will not be reproduced or published. While references to museum institution names and generic staff roles may be referenced for context (i.e. "Collections team member"), participants' names and other identifiers such as job titles will be removed in reporting to ensure privacy and anonymity. Audio, Microsoft, and Adobe files will be stored on the student's password-protected personal laptop and uploaded to UCL's encrypted OneDrive. Only the student and her UCL Institute of Education supervisor will have access to personal data storage during data collection. Data will be retained only through dissertation submission, marking, and review. It will be destroyed after final marks are published. All participants will be given the opportunity to read the study findings once the study is completed. Final reporting will be limited to UCL dissertation faculty and Ethics committees, for review and grading.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to take part. If you choose not to take part, there will be no negative repercussions; your choice to participate will not be disclosed to your institution or colleagues. We hope that if you do choose to be involved then you will find it a valuable experience.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you would like to be involved, please complete the following consent form and return to a.clark.18@ucl.ac.uk by May 8, 2020.

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at a.clark.18@ucl.ac.uk / 765-541-1325.

Privacy

In carrying out this project I will take great care to protect your privacy. This means I will take care to store information and data that you provide safely and also that I will only use your data for the purposes that you have agreed to. If you have any concerns about how I might process or use your data, you can contact data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacynotice>