

Undisciplining The Victorian Classroom

Peer-Reviewed Assignment

Peer Reviewer: Jacqueline Barrios

Date: 2025

License: [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Victorian Histories for Today: Project Instructions

Europe in the Nineteenth Century

Dr. Taylor Soja

Illinois State University

Your final project is to research, plan, and write a detailed pitch for a public history project related to something from the long nineteenth century in Europe and/or its empires. To complete this assignment, you will become a public historian! Think about your pitch as an application for funding to a major foundation or institution with the power and finances to make your ideas happen in the real world. Your public history project could be a digital database of primary sources or historical artifacts, a monument or memorial, or an interactive website, podcast, blog, social media account, television series, graphic novel, or public syllabus that dives deep into an important moment, person, or theme from the nineteenth century. It could also take a different format; let's talk about your ideas.

This project is a chance to be creative and to think critically not just about *what happened* in the past but to also think about *why we care*, and *how we remember and encounter history* today. You should choose to share with the public **something you think matters**, and you should be able to explain **why** it matters and **to whom**. Sometimes, we assume that topics unrelated to our local history are irrelevant, but I disagree and I hope you will come to as well. There are other reasons for members of the public to care about the Victorian world, and I challenge you to think through them as you work on this project. When we write about, read, or teach history, we ought always to be thinking about our intended audience and how to get them invested in our work. By asking you to design an explicitly public-facing project this semester, I hope that *audience* will be your main focus.

I also encourage you to pick a topic/set of sources to work with that are not listed on our syllabus, and to use this opportunity to work on something that interests you and that we were not able to cover in class time.

Ultimately, your project will need to seek to share something *specific and particular* with the public. The public history projects we look at in class together are excellent models – they [document](#) Britain's Slave Compensation Commission or [memorialize](#) the Paris Commune. They seek to [bring together expert voices](#) on the First World War or to [recontextualize](#) the death of a famous revolutionary figure. They [make primary sources available](#) online, or they [call the world to pay attention](#) to the plight of the working class. They take a statue that has honored an enslaver for more than a century and [work to preserve](#) the way a community has interacted with it in the twenty-first century. These are all projects with a purpose.

Your project has several components:

1. **In Week 8, submit a proposal** laying out your in-progress thoughts on your project. (This is graded pass/fail, but you need to turn it in to get a passing grade on the final project).

This proposal should include:

- One substantial paragraph detailing the specific topic you want to work on and share with a public audience and your sense right now of what form your public-facing project might take. Be sure to explain *why* the history you want to share matters and *to whom*.
 - A list of 3 recent secondary sources about your topic (academic books or articles). These sources need to be scholarly, peer-reviewed sources that you find via the university library. We will talk about finding secondary sources in class together. Cite these using the Chicago Manual of Style.
 - A list of 2 primary sources relevant to your project or that might be incorporated into your project itself. Cite these using the Chicago Manual of Style.
 - Any questions you have or things you are worried about.
2. **In Week 15, we will do peer review** of a draft of the project; half of the class will meet on Monday, the other half will meet on Wednesday. I'll let you know which day you are assigned early in the semester; attendance is required.
You will need to submit your draft online **before class time** and bring to class (printed or on a laptop) a **good draft** of at least the General Intro and Who Cares sections of the final pitch. These are outlined below.

**Peer Review Instructions are attached below.*

3. **In Week 16, we will do lightning-round presentations** on your projects: each student will share their project with the class for 2-3 mins. Visuals are encouraged but not required.
4. Your **final project pitch will be due the Friday of the last week of class**.

Imagine you are writing your final detailed project pitch to a foundation or grant-making agency with the ability to fund your project and make it happen. Each section below should cite sources using Chicago Style Footnotes; you do not need to submit a separate bibliography.

The final pitch should have several sections included in one document, including:

1. **A general introduction** of 2-3 double-spaced pages. This section should do three things in whatever order you want:
 - Introduce readers to the events, people, or theme you are sharing with the public. These are the basic historical facts and context. Rely on peer-reviewed, scholarly secondary sources for information here.
 - Offer a description of your public project itself. What is it? Consider describing what it will look or feel like, how it will be encountered or used, etc.

- Describe at least one relevant primary source that will be incorporated into your project or that might form a research basis for your project. Devote one substantial paragraph to each primary source you discuss.
2. A **“who cares” statement** of 2-3 double-spaced pages justifying the project. In this section you should do two things:
 - Explain why academic historians think your topic is important (this is historiography) to the nineteenth century by citing at least 2 recent secondary sources on the topic. Of the three secondary sources you discussed in your proposal, choose the two that are most relevant to the goals of your project to discuss here. What are recent scholarly works arguing about the topic/theme/person/event/etc. your public history project is designed to share?
 - Explain why *you* think your topic is important and to who. Who needs to know about it, specifically? *Why* do they need to know about it? Who do you imagine interacting with your project and what will they gain from it? What contemporary issues might this help people understand? What will this make them think differently about? You might cite primary or secondary sources in this section, though you’re not required to.
 3. A **logistics statement** of about 1 single-spaced page or 2 double-spaced pages. This section might discuss software your project will use, materials it needs, location, timing, experts you will consult, a project budget, etc. It should include a thoughtful comparison or contrast to at least one comparable public history project (which can be from our syllabus). This section can take the form of a detailed list, chart, or bullet points, or a mix.
 4. **One creative element** such as a mock-up, set of images, sample aspect of the project, model, excerpt from a potential script or advertisement for the project, etc. We can talk about this in class. This section should be the equivalent work of, at a minimum, one of the short writing assignments we have been doing this semester. This part of the project is important – it is a chance for you to think beyond the bounds of history writing and beyond the genre conventions of grant writing. My hope is that here you will show us *how* your public project will engage your intended audience.

See peer review workshop instructions rubric on pages 4-5.

See project rubric on pages 6-7.

Peer Review Workshop

This peer review workshop is designed to be a CONVERSATION with your partner. Don't just read each other's project in silence and correct things. Instead, go through each project together and talk about the different points outlined below.

1. TALK to your partner. Ask them –
 - How is your project going? How much work have you put into it so far? How are you feeling about it?
 - What are you still worried about? What do you want to pay attention to today?
2. LOOK at the **General Intro Statement** together. Ask –
 - What is the historical topic this project is about? Is it specific enough? Why or why not?
 - What is the public history project the person is proposing? Is there a way to flesh out this idea in more detail?
 - Does the person rely on at least two academic secondary sources for the info in this section?
 - Does this section describe at least one primary source that might be incorporated into the final history project? How can they make this connection clearer?
3. LOOK at the **Who Cares Statement** together. Ask –
 - Does this project use two recent academic secondary sources? What makes these sources secondary sources? What makes them academic/peer-reviewed?
 - If you have questions here – call Dr. Soja over to take a look or work together to find new secondary sources!
 - Does this section explain the argument of these two secondary sources? Does it tell a story about how historians' arguments about this topic have changed over time? (This is you doing historiography!)
 - Does this section explain *who* will care about the public history project the author has proposed in the General Intro Statement? Does this section explain *why* the audience will care?
 - Brainstorm ways to make the proposed audience more specific.
 - Brainstorm ways to make the *why* argument more specific.
 - If you have time, discuss ways to connect the author's argument about why this project matters to the historiography on the topic.
4. Now, SWITCH to the **other person's essay** and repeat steps 1-3.
5. MAKE A PLAN for how you're going to revise these first two sections. What are three things you're going to change or work on, and when are you going to do those things?

What I'm going to edit/change:	When I'm going to do it:
1.	
2.	
3.	

6. Now, **GRADE** *your own* draft. If these sections were being graded as the final version of your project, what grade would you give yourself? Why?

My grade right now (pick a number out of 100)	Why this grade?

7. **PLAN** together and **DISCUSS** your **Logistics Statement** and **Creative Element**.

- What are you going to include in the Logistics statement? How are you going to compare or contrast your project to another public history project we've looked at this semester?
- What is your creative element going to be? Have you started on it?

8. If you have time, **TALK** about the **little things**. Does the person use Chicago Style Footnotes? Do you have any grammatical or writing style suggestions?

9. **MAKE A PLAN** to meet with your partner sometime between now and when the project is due on Friday, May 5 at 5pm.

10. **CHECK IN** with Dr. Soja and show her this worksheet on your way out of class so you can get credit for your work today.

Public History Project Pitch Rubric (*subject to change*):

General Intro Statement	Excellent (A range)	Good (B range)	Needs Work (C range and below)
Has chosen an appropriately specific topic from history to share with the public.			
Introduces readers to the basic facts and historical context for the project using scholarly, peer-reviewed secondary sources.			
Has developed and can describe an exciting, creative public history project.			
Describes at least one relevant primary source that will be incorporated or that might form a research basis for the project. Devotes a substantial paragraph to the primary source.			

“Who Cares” Statement	Excellent (A range)	Good (B range)	Needs Work (C range and below)
Explains why academic historians think the topic is important (historiography) to the nineteenth century.			
Relies on at least 2 recent scholarly, peer-reviewed secondary sources for historiography.			
Explains why and to whom this topic is important – has a compelling “who cares” justification for the project.			

Logistics Statement	Excellent (A range)	Good (B range)	Needs Work (C range and below)
Describes in thoughtful detail the logistics for the project.			
Makes one meaningful comparison or contrast to another public history project.			

Creative Element	Excellent (A range)	Good (B range)	Needs Work (C range and below)
Includes one thoughtful creative element to the project. Has put work into this part of the assignment.			

Other (Grade)	Excellent (A range)	Good (B range)	Needs Work (C range and below)
Gives a compelling presentation of 2-3 mins in class during Week 16 – is prepared and has a plan.			

Other (Yes/No)	Yes	No	
Meets min. page requirements for each section.			
Uses Chicago Style footnotes to cite sources throughout written pitch documents.			
Turned in a proposal in Week 8.			
Participated thoughtfully in peer review in Week 15.			

Other comments: