

The background of the entire image is a sunburst pattern with rays emanating from the left side, creating a sense of energy and movement. The rays are in various shades of blue.

SEIZING YOUR CIVIC AUTHORITY



Showing the Millennials they ARE the Next Great Generation



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Nomenclature | 6 |
| Preface | 7 |
| Introduction | 14 |
| Civic Controversy | 16 |
| Disengaged Audiences | 21 |
| The Next Great Generation | 23 |
| Redirecting Millennial Focus | |
| The Political Drama | 31 |
| Digitally Informed Citizens | 37 |
| Becoming Self Aware | 42 |
| Design Application | 46 |
| Conclusion | 56 |
| Endnotes | 59 |

NOMENCLATURE

Civic:

1. Of or relating to a citizen, city, citizenship, or community affairs.
2. The combination, overlap, or intersection of the political, social, and moral (independently of religion)¹ spheres

Civic Engagement:

1. Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.²
2. Participation aimed at achieving a public good, usually through direct, hands-on work in cooperation with others.³

Mediated Citizenship:

1. When a population relies on media to filter and relate civic messages

Political Engagement:

1. Activity aimed at influencing government policy or affecting the selection of public officials.⁴

Social Capital:

1. A set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permit them to cooperate with one another.⁵

PREFACE

This project began as a search for truth in museums. I went to The Art of the American Soldier, an exhibition at The National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. The exhibition featured art created by artist-soldiers employed by the military to maintain the emotional records of war and peace-time military impact. It was beautiful. From WWI to present day, the exhibit chronicled both the horrors of war and the joys of humanitarian efforts. Chilling images from corpse-littered trenches in WWI and haunting views of Agent Orange strikes in Vietnam punctuated a time line of benevolent American intervention. Most of the images showed soldiers giving medical and humanitarian aid to local communities and showed soldiers in their daily barrack lives from the beaches of the south pacific to the Middle East. While the works on display were unbelievably striking, I was even more struck by what I didn't see.

I wondered where were the images of the not-so-good things? Sure, trench warfare and the atrocities of Vietnam are events the government has since admitted some of its many mistakes about. But where are the daily horrors? Where are the images of power struggle between foreign authorities and local ones? Where are the images of language barriers and culture clash between “invaders” and “invaded”? Where is the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that gets taken out on innocent people? Where are the images of soldiers who find their wives have left them while abroad? Where are the images from Abu Ghraib Prison? Or the images of Marines urinating on insurgent corpses? Or military personnel posing with dismembered parts of Taliban suicide bombers? Isn't that also art of the American soldier?

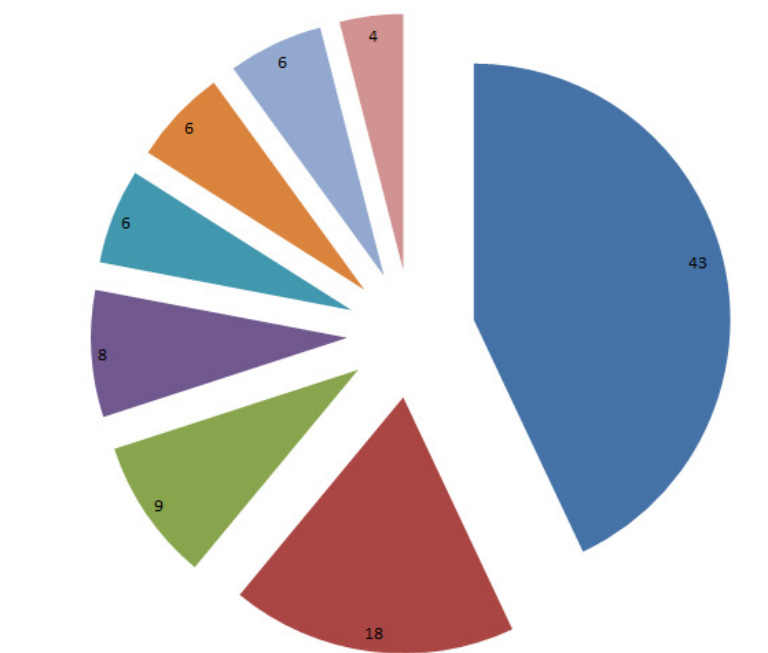
After reading about a study by UJMN Architects + Designers in Philadelphia found



Image from http://www.history.army.mil/banner_images/focus/combat-art.html



<http://geekadelphia.com/2010/11/16/art-of-the-american-soldier-national-constitution-center-uses-ipads-in-awesome-exhibit/>



43% of Americans find museums to be most trustworthy source of information

18% Said books were most trustworthy

9% Said newspapers

8% Said internet

6% Said television

6% Said radio

6% said magazines

30% of respondents view museums as the most important cultural institution in society, second only to libraries (with 57%)

the general public find museums to be the most trustworthy source of information. Study participants chose museums as the most trustworthy source in more than double the numbers of the next most trustworthy sources, books. Museums have a lot of power to influence people. A lot.

Next I looked into whether museums know that they have this power. Considering museums began in medieval times as a venue for the king to display his wealth, spoils of war, power, might, and culture. These exhibitions were designed with the strict intent to create a physical space that reinforced the visitor's (typically wealthy, educated subjects who were fortunate or important enough to be able to visit) place in society. Objects were used to replace actual events and ideologies to create a cohesive understanding of the order of the cosmos, namely with the king at the top (beneath God, of course). So the fact

that museums have power to create a shared identity and visitors will believe it is not new information, and because of this, museums have an incredible responsibility to their visitors to be truthful and honest to their visitors.

When it comes to historical and cultural interpretation, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth is totally impossible. What can be displayed is restricted by what someone thought was important enough to keep in the first place, the amount of available floor space, stakeholder interests and the interpretive frame of scholars and exhibit developers, and then of course the visitor's frame of reference. Art of the American Soldier could never have been a complete exhibition that truly conveyed the emotional impact of war, but what it did show was undeniably moving. Had the museum pressed for more gritty images or ended up with a darker message, the United States government could have pulled all the art work,


and then there would be no exhibition at all. But I was rather unimpressed with the museum's effort to acknowledge their limitations, especially with a topic as important as creating a cohesive understanding of the machine that costs citizens billions of dollars a year and sends Americans far away from home to die.

I did some investigating into the stakeholder interests of major civic museums, The NCC and The Newseum in Washington, D.C. The NCC derives most of its revenue from admissions, making the general museum goer its primary constituency. The Newseum on the other hand, a museum that touts its lack of direct government funds (though they do receive tax breaks as a result of non-profit status) in their mission, in an attempt to promote their civic ideal of free press. But the money for their ever-changing and high-tech interactive exhibits must come from somewhere: private and corporate

sponsors and donors. While this keeps the press of the Newseum free from government influence, what about the goals and aims of their corporate and private sponsors? While those sponsors have little say what is put on display in their galleries and how, each gallery sponsor gets a wall to promote themselves, and their name headlines the exhibit, regardless what it is about. I was particularly interested in the patronage of The Bancroft Family Ethics Center, a gallery devoted to helping visitors understand when getting the story matters and how easy it can be to cross the line into impropriety. This gallery is prominently sponsored by The Bancroft Family, the founders of Dow Jones and Co. and publishers of The Wall Street Journal, until 2007 when they sold their family brand to NewsCorp, owned by Rupert Murdoch. In 2011, NewsCorp and several of its high-ranking officials, including Murdoch and his son, and a few News of the World editors were arrested or otherwise



Image from The Newseum's display addressing the NewsCorp hacking scandal from November, 2011. Photo by Megan Stillman



investigated for hacking cellphones of murder and terrorist victims and the British royal family, in one case obstructing an on-going missing persons investigation, and for bribing police officers for more salacious details. Since the scandal busted wide open, the US Attorney General has begun investigating allegations of hacking 9/11 victims' cellphones. While The Newseum has addressed the hacking scandal in their History of News Gallery that prominently features The NewsCorp brand, there was no mention of the ethical debate or patronage in The Bancroft Family Ethics Center. What this says about how money talks in civic museums is an investigation for people with more time, money, and accounting know-how than myself

Next in my investigation, I looked for instances where museums do admit their limitations. Anthropology museums that originally went into minimized cultures to raid their cultural artifacts and human remains are

now actively trying to rectify past insensitivity through repatriation efforts; but in these cases, the cultures must petition for their artifacts back and make a convincing case why they deserve it, even though it was theirs first and stolen. The National Museum of the American Indian promotes the fact their scholars and curators may not be of the culture they exhibit and incorporates representatives of the culture in a collaborative curation model. But all their efforts appear to be an attempt to be “more truthful” than other anthropology museums while admitting the limitations of the discipline, rather than being forthright to visitors about the impossibility of complete truth don’t go far enough for visitors.

While anthropology museums create a unified identity of the cultures on display for those who may or may not be part of that culture, I found this need for transparency to be more relevant and important in a civic context;

where the culture on display is not only our own, but for where visitors are meant to act on the messages presented to them, and shape the course of history. When this is the end goal, as participation and activity is a necessary part of citizenship, and the missions of these institutions often encourage government participation, truth, honesty, and transparency are pivotal to creating an informed citizenry that acts on the most comprehensive information to make the best decisions for society on a grand scale.

If museums admit that they may be wrong, will they lose their credibility? Actually, no, not at all. In fact, it can make them more credible. But how? And to whom? When investigating the audiences of civic museums, I found an overwhelming majority of visitors to be wealthy, educated white folks who have already established their civic identity and are looking to hear stories of the great America they helped



By Alejandro Gonzalez for USA Today from <http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/story/2012-03-11/millennials-young-adults-religion-morality/53490916/1>

build. The next biggest constituency includes school children on field trips looking to satisfy school civic requirements. These children typically have yet to separate their social and civic identity from their parents. The in between crowd, however, tend not to visit museums at all, much less history or civic museums. This crowd, young adults, are the newest crop of

voters, they are in the process of establishing their independent civic identity, and soon they will become the political leadership of America. Civic museums are missing an opportunity to hook an audience that needs them the most. Furthermore, having grown up under the auspices of post-modern individualism, young adults are more apt to accept faults and quirks as a sign of truth and humanity, while a monolithic body with no faults is big, scary, disconnected, and untrustworthy; much like our government purports itself to be.

When looking into young adults and civic engagement, it's easy to discount them as disinterested and apathetic, as young adults have always been. They are invested in their appearance, their friends, their stuff. Authority, education, and politics are lame and boring, they don't vote, and they don't go to museums. Is it because they don't care about politics and museums, or is it because politics

and museums have not cared about them for so long? Further investigation into Millennial civic engagement showed that millennials are civically engaged, just not how previous generations have been.


This project started out as investigation on how museums can admit "my bad" to their audiences and in so doing became an investigation into how to get Millennials to realize their authority and power in government. It is not only beneficial for the civic museum, but their duty and unique niche to promote and foster the informed citizen to think critically and make honest decisions for the benefit of America as a whole. For any museum, but civic museums in particular, being honest about one's biases and agenda will give visitors the tools to think critically and act responsibly, and will only strengthen the institution's credibility. While I and this paper focus on this impact in the civic discipline, and the Millennial

generation, it can in fact apply to disengaged audiences at museums of nearly any discipline. Even more so, museums shouldn't be afraid to be wrong or controversial because unwavering safety has become a false notion in a post-school-massacre, post 9/11 society, especially as those who can barely remember a life before become the new decision makers. To deny the tumult of social issues and the audiences who seem least interested in them will do more to damage the museum's credibility than when someone finds an oversimplified, inaccurate, or otherwise offensive fact.

I am a liberal from Tennessee, and I am constantly reaffirmed that my liberal vote in a red state is a waste of screen pixels in the voting booth and my time in line, but I am still there every election day, early if can. I am the political "other" in Tennessee and still find myself being on the side that must err caution to offending the conservative

majority. I am painfully aware of the necessity of bipartisanship and the need to be open and understanding of everyone and where they come from and how that affects their civic awareness, but the fear of offending people with controversy gives too much power to those who like the message the way it is (and resist social change), allowing them to control the "truth" that is shown to everyone else. Many of these people will never be happy unless you say what they want to hear and only what they want to hear, and to cater to them hurts the museum and everyone else. The anger that results from offending such people is as valid a catalyst for action as being oppressed or disenfranchised. The only way to truly empower "the other" is by admitting that both "us" and "them" are wrong sometimes. Only when both extremes of the political spectrum understand this can they truly come to mutual understanding. The only and greatest universal truth is that nobody is perfect, and we





should all be able to accept those faults without losing respect for each other. No matter who's right and who's wrong, and where on the political spectrum you belong, and how different the other side of the picket line seems, we are all still only human.

INTRODUCTION

Just about every museum discipline comes across tough topics in one situation or another. As cultural institutions, museums are often perceived or meant to be advocates for social change through the cultural stories of their collections and the shared understanding of cultural ideas and events that they present.⁶ Whether the discipline is science, art, history, or anything else, museums have a responsibility to advocate for social inclusion and cultural promotion. To advocate and change the preconceptions of visitors is a controversial undertaking all on its own, but is necessary for furthering social progression. By addressing controversial or difficult topics, museums can work with the resistance and contention of stubborn visitors to evoke the passion and awareness needed to bring about action and social change.

This paper focuses on civics as a case study for the necessity of addressing controversial issues like the ones congress

and pundits debate every day. Civics makes an important case study for tackling controversial issues as action and participation are necessary to citizenship, while it is famously difficult to engage the politically disengaged. Civic museums can get the politically disengaged engaged by evoking the controversy of politics rather than down playing it in the name of bipartisanship and acceptance. Presenting controversy is necessary for promoting social change, as controversy forces visitors to confront difficult topics and find a place for them within their social capital systems, changing the identity of shared events or ideas among a population. Whether or not civic museums should advocate liberally or conservatively is at the discretion of the institution, as there are some topics where a strong political statement can be safely held as the “right one,” as in advocating equality among all American citizens regardless of race, gender, sexuality, or political ideology. Other times

addressing controversy will open up debate about these topics without having to find a solution or answer for the exhibition, instead remaining open for each visitor to decide what they believe is the “right one.” In either case controversy serves to change or reframe the commonly accepted understanding of many civic events, advancing and evolving the meaning of these events and their social relevance, and furthering the museum’s role as an advocate for social change.

This need for a changing understanding becomes more and more apparent in all disciplines, but especially civics, as a new generational cohort comes to codify its civic and generational identity before they will soon take the reins of political power. As the youngest Millennials are or will soon be eligible voters, they are beginning to replace the Baby Boomers in all areas of leadership, not just civic, and will soon be changing how authority interacts with the general public in the arts,

sciences, civics, public life, private life, and everywhere in between. Focusing on how Millennials confront controversy and how they reinterpret the same shared events as previous generations will show how museums can work with their new digital understanding of the world to cultivate a new civic identity based on the authority of the individual and promoted by the action of a truly informed citizenry.



Graffiti installation in Tunis, Tunisia, by the Zoo Project, Photo by Elissa Jobson from <http://makanaka.wordpress.com/tag/martyr/>

CIVIC CONTROVERSY


“Nothing is more wonderful than the art of being free, but nothing is harder to learn how to use than freedom.”

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

Civic museums are a recent development in the ever-changing field of museum disciplines. According to Tony Bennett, civic museums are places that employ civic seeing, “in which the civic lessons embodied in those arrangements are to be seen, understood, and performed by the museum’s visitors. Or at least by the visitors who are included in the museum’s civic address.”⁷ “Civic” in this sense, relates to anything dealing with government and citizenship. Historically, action and individual participation has been the cornerstone of a functional democracy, and the engagement of an informed public is necessary

for American democracy in the Information Age. As a result, this thesis focuses on ways civic museums can strengthen their relevance to their communities and better define their function by creating more aware, informed citizens.

Civics is a terms with wide, and vague applications. According to Merriam-Webster, civic means, “of or relating to a citizen, a city, citizenship, or community affairs.” This can generally apply to just about anyone or anything they do. The important characteristic of a “civic” thing, is the relationship between the citizen and his or her *duty* to the public society, as opposed to close, inter-personal relationships. Civic affairs tend to be affairs with social, moral, or political implications, or some combination thereof. While not all scholars can agree on the relationship between the civic, social, moral, and political, most agree that civics intrinsically requires *participation* of the citizen,⁸ an ideal generally espoused by civic museums in their

A decorative graphic at the top of the page consisting of numerous blue lines radiating from a central point, creating a sunburst or starburst effect. The lines vary in length and thickness, creating a dynamic, geometric pattern.

mission statements. But before anyone can be empowered to participate in government and political processes, they must first be aware of their ability to impact government and political process. While history museums focus on the lessons of the past and the great foundations of our great society to draw parallels with the history and historical processes happening *now*, civic museums use these parallels in an attempt to shape these processes.

This project first analyzes the areas where civic museums can serve their communities in ways no other civic institution or museum of any other discipline can; strengthening their burgeoning and distinct role in the civic process. Civic museums teach us about the history of American citizenship, the rights and responsibilities that go along with it, the history of government and political processes, and how the individual visitor defines him or herself as a citizen in relationship to other citizens, the government, and in relationship to the global

society. This imbues the civic museum with an important social responsibility as an agent of mediated government. In a time when the American public is becoming increasingly disconnected from the government meant to represent and legislate it, they rely heavily on media to make sense of it for them. Today there is a unique opportunity for civic museums to switch from simply teaching visitors about the history and function of government processes, to creating a more informed public who think critically about the controversial issues our representatives are supposed to be addressing on the public's behalf. Simply employing "civic seeing" is no longer enough for civic museums to remain relevant to their communities in the current political climate. Because of the social responsibility of civic museums and the self-interested nature of American democracy and its citizens, civic museums must challenge their visitors to better understand their personal belief systems and how their decisions affect

others on both a micro (local, personal) level and a macro (global) level. Alexis De Tocqueville remarked in the 1800s, "The people reign in the American political world as the Deity does in the universe. They are the cause and the aim of all things; everything comes from them, and everything is absorbed in them."⁹ Without this awareness of our civic influence and agency on the course of human history, there can be no action upon it.

Civic museums come out of the history museum model, and often adopt traditional history museum methods of a linear message presented to museum visitors that they are meant to absorb, to create a cohesive public identity. Museums have their origins as "memory theatres" where the monarch displayed the spoils of war to exhibit his power and authority. Soon it was wealthy aristocrats displaying their wealth and sophistication.¹⁰ In the early half of the 20th century, there was a shift in the display of history of the

wealthy elite, and more focus on the common American farmer.¹¹ Eventually, scholars turned to displaying the comprehensiveness of their scholarly research while promoting American values.¹² After WWII however, there was a new focus on the plural and the individual. Young historians placed an importance on intellectual history and elevation of the middle class.¹³ Identity politics led to an interest in the voice of “the other” in history, and the individual’s interpretive frame of past events.¹⁴ On top of that, academic scholars have a conflicting or fragmented understanding of the narrative of recent social history.¹⁵ Civic museums face the unique dilemma of exhibiting a unified cultural identity to the plural masses by rectifying the focus on “pure research” of the history discipline, with the relevant and confusing narrative of contemporary history.

Because of the lack of developed studies and research available on the civic museum as its own discrete museum discipline, we can

combine information on civic engagement and general audience data on museums, especially as many civic museums tend to adopt history museum methods to tell historic civic stories. Like history museums, civic museums often address events of the past, telling a long didactic story from beginning to end. This monolithic presentation of facts is a traditionally accepted form of exhibition display, and is characteristic of history museums where the scholar or expert interprets the events of the past through their own frame of reference. But studies show that this method has become outdated. Reach Advisors found that:

Nearly half of students said they “hardly ever” or never went to museums. Students told us that museums equal reading, and reading equals work, which they avoid. They were frustrated with museums, saying there are “lots of things we can’t touch” and “I think about sleeping. I hope you will make



By Trustco Corp from <http://www.dymdaily.com/866/the-great-art-of-trustcoorp/>



The National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, PA. G. WIDMAN FOR GPTMC from <http://www.visitphilly.com/museums-attractions/philadelphia/national-constitution-center/>




The Newseum's Interactive Hall, Washington, DC. from <http://www.washingtonian.com/blogs/afterhours/miscellaneous/extra-extra-the-newseum-reopens-in-dc.php>

a museum that is interactive and we can do more activities.”¹⁶

While these responses were in regards to museums of any discipline, a unique trend is emerging among young audiences. After the implementation of President Bush’s No Child Left Behind laws, educational focus shifted to meeting standardized test requirements in math and reading, leaving history, science, arts, and field trips in general to languish. Museums generally lose young visitors as they switch from their parents as their main social network to their peers.¹⁷ Among older visitors, museums are notorious for excluding minorities; being institutions run by and for well-educated, affluent Caucasians. Western history in general is dominated by the white male, but as the American populace becomes more diverse, individual, and information savvy, they are becoming disconnected from the spirit and ideals that led to the founding of America.¹⁸

Bigger, more recently established civic museums, such as The National Constitution Center (NCC) in Philadelphia or The Newseum in Washington, DC incorporate more high-tech interactive elements to better cater to their tech-savvy young visitors who often arrive in school groups needing to satisfy state education requirements. While young adult Millennial audiences need these interactive experiences as well, they often find them to be geared toward those more juvenile visitors.¹⁹ As visitors of all ages become more tech-savvy in the digital age, interactivity and customization is a growing priority that museums are only just now learning to accommodate.²⁰ In a pluralist, post-modern world, visitors have to come to expect individualization as much as they expect technology.²¹ This is one area where civic museums must improve on traditional methods for the display of public history.

In order to better address civic concerns and promote civic agency and awareness,

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the audience of the civic message must be better defines. Marketing research reveals there is often a “typical visitor” for museums that varies by discipline. In art museums for example, the typical visitor is an elderly, affluent, Caucasian woman, while the typical children’s museum visitor is a child and their family.²² Civic museums, however, are addressed to the citizen. This can encompass audiences such as “a regular procession of local schoolchildren presumed to need a simplified, graspable story line; visiting tourists, dignitaries, and businessmen for whom it seems desirable to put a best municipal foot forward; and a diverse general population that many museums have sought to gather under a unifying historical umbrella, building and reinforcing community through the act of celebrating it historically.”²³ Traditionally, history museums and historic sites draw adult audiences looking for adult experiences, rather than school children who must satisfy government educational

requirements. These adults are keenly aware of the design of historical exhibitions for children, and can often be dismissive the civic messages if they feel they aren’t a part of the audience the civic address is aimed at.²⁴ In order to truly tackle the important civic issues happening in society at large in a meaningful way that promotes awareness of civic agency, then civic museums must *choose* a particular audience to present each specific civic issue to. While a civic museum filled with exhibits can and should cater to the broad demographics that constitute the citizen, selecting a particular demographic to aim particular exhibits and topics to will strengthen the connection museums make with these visitors.²⁵ In situations where the museum attempts to please and cater to everyone, they will find it difficult to form deeper, more meaningful connections with anyone.

DISENGAGED AUDIENCES

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead

This project focuses on a demographic often underrepresented at museums and the polls – 18-29 year olds. As a historically disengaged demographic, controversy is the key to fostering and cultivating the existing seeds of engagement. The desire to care or act can’t be a message packaged for people to consume and assimilate into their being, it either exists or it doesn’t, and any institution can only seek to nurture what already exists. By embracing controversy and validating the questions visitors have regarding important social issues, museums encourage the input

and participation of the viewer in the shaping of a shared identity, regardless of the topic or visitors’ generational identity. For museums to embrace their role as a force for social change, they must engage newer generations to challenge the definitions of shared events established by their predecessors. This challenge and controversy causes a dissonance within personal value systems that visitors are then forced to reconcile, creating a new definition and new understanding of shared events in a shared cultural value system. This is true of nearly any demographic and any kind of meaningful social engagement.

In a civic context, these visitors are at an age where they are beginning to develop their own social capital independent of their parents; and are newly registered to vote.²⁶ This age group is the most in need of understanding how their government works, yet as a result of having little income and assets, thus not paying much in the way of taxes or campaign



From http://www.streetartutopia.com/?attachment_id=4512

donations, they are traditionally ignored in political discourse.²⁷ 18-29 year olds are historically, because of their lack of obligations and political malleability, most likely to pursue methods of political discourse outside of the system that has ignored them.²⁸

The group of 18-29 year olds today, the Millennials, is a unique generation of young adults with a heightened social awareness

and importance of its own history. They are increasingly skeptical of authority and the political process, yet they are engaging civically at an alarming rate.²⁹ Millennials are increasingly connected, socially, digitally, and globally; using social media not only as a tool to support their day-to-day activities, but as a lifeline for diasporic online communities. The way Millennials communicate on a fundamental level has changed from the way any other previous generation has ever communicated – especially with government. Civic museums have a duty and an ability to serve and impact a community traditionally ignored by government, and museums alike.

This project finds solutions outside of museums to better present controversial issues to the 18-29 year old public. Museums traditionally compete with other forms of entertainment for visitor attention – from television to the internet to just hanging out doing nothing with friends. And while museums

have increasingly been looking toward incorporating these technologies and social experiences into museums, the civic museum should truly embrace these non-traditional methods in ways that will not only connect visitors to complex issues, but will make them more aware of their relevance to government and their civic duty and responsibility. Cultivating and fostering this awareness is the first and biggest step toward promoting a more actively engaged civic youth. When the public interacts with its government, they feel they are being heard, and that they are in control of their government, giving the government the authority it needs to function in a democratic society.

THE NEXT GREAT GENERATION

“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline.”

- Kofi Annan

Audience segmentation by age or generation has shown to be particularly useful when trying to expand public appeal, and this is no different for civic museums. In fact, because generational identities are developed through shared experiences, this is *more* relevant to civic museums.³⁰ Major events that affect a large number of citizens often result in civic consequences, whether the event is based in public or private conflict. These events combined with when in life and through what medium they are experienced, are those that impact the civic identity of a generation.³¹ Such strong generational differences are a recent

development in human history, the first notion of such a distinct generation identity begins with The Silent Age; World War I veterans and immigrants who brought their traditional values to America and “paid their dues by upholding the responsibilities and privileges [of American citizenship].”³² They are largely a nostalgic memory who passed on their civic pride to their children; the Dutifuls. The Dutifuls collectively experienced the Great Depression, WWII, the Korean War, the McCarthy Era, and the early parts of the Civil Rights Movement.³³ They are characterized by their sense of duty and sacrifice instilled by their parents and set the ideal standard for fulfilling civic duty.³⁴ While this generation makes up one of the largest portion of both voters and museum visitors, they are a dying generation on their way out of political relevance.³⁵

The Baby-Boomer generation began developing a collective generational identity with the early parts of the Civil Rights


Movement, the election and assassination of President Kennedy, the Women's Rights Movement, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Vietnam War, Watergate and the resignation of President Nixon.³⁶ In the 1950s and 60s, the Boomers grew up in a post-atomic, post-modern, post-sacrifice, and post-heroic society that responded to the atrocities of the World Wars. The Baby-Boomers have a history of dominating politics and culture since they have come of age, simply by sheer numbers (as the largest portion of society at the time fit into this category). The Vietnam War defined a new era of media; immediate and from the front lines, the American public witnessing events as they happened, and the Boomers were not happy with what they saw, using their numbers and civic authority to sway Nixon to withdraw troops from Vietnam. Characterized as a generation of counter-culture bringing about the sexual and drug revolutions of the 1960s and 70s,

the Baby-Boomers in the 21st century are now the establishment.³⁷ They drove the focus of American ethos toward the individual and "the other"; the woman, the African-American, alternative sexualities, and anyone else who was not a white male. But the idealism of the Baby Boomers has laid the groundwork for a whole new set of social-ills. It falls to the next generations to deal with the fallout and confusion of pluralism while the Baby Boomers continue to clutch to their civic power.³⁸

Generation X, born between 1964 and 1980 experienced many of the same cultural revolutions as the Boomers – but at a much younger age. Coming of age in their wake, Generation X became skeptical of Baby Boomer idealism; the effects of pluralism changing the very structure of the family unit for Gen-Xers. With more two-income families, homes had more luxuries that grew into full blown materialism, and television replaced familial interaction.³⁹ The free-love revolution



Image of the Brandenburg Gate at the Berlin Wall, November 9, 1989. Image from <http://www.scientificamerican.com>



the Boomers reveled in left Generation X with AIDS. The Space Race brought the explosion of the Challenger Shuttle and the bleak realities of the Communist divide came to light. Living through the Watergate scandal at a young age, Gen-Xers were raised distrusting the government that handed them a \$3.6 billion deficit as they grew into financial independence.⁴⁰ Overshadowed and overpowered by the sheer numbers and force of the Baby Boomers (and their children to come), the generation born between the 1960s and 80s, encompassing approximately 46 million Americans, is often called “the Invisible Generation.”⁴¹ Generation X rebels against their predecessors and Boomer idealism with alienation, anger, and apathy expressed by popular punk and metal music cultures.⁴² This rejection of both the public and the private, combined with the proliferation of VCRs, cable and satellite TV, led to a growing reliance on media for the formation of a cultural identity.

The Millennials, children of the Baby Boomers, rival their parents in numbers at 78 million Americans. Millennial children are the safest children on the planet; protected by car seats, child-proofed pill bottles, constant parental supervision, political correctness and the mentality that each child is special and can be whatever they want to be when they grow up.⁴³ Events that Millennials experienced early on, such as lifting the veil of communism, the Gulf War, Bill Clinton's sex life, the Columbine, Colorado school shooting massacre – and perhaps most defining of all, September 11, 2001 – were presented through the cynical Gen-X lens of popular culture.⁴⁴ These two forces have led the Millennials to take pluralism down an ego-centric path. While the internet was born with Gen-Xers, it came of age with Millennials. The technology boom has mingled with media, becoming an ever present force in daily life that both connects and disconnects the masses. Under the Clinton administration,

education standards rose, cultivating a generational value of knowledge, information storage, and data mining.⁴⁵ Millennials are skeptical, perhaps even more so than their predecessors; the internet bubble burst, the housing bubble burst, the government lied about going to war in Iraq, and the media was remiss to address it. The civic apathy of the Gen-Xers has filtered into Millennials' downright dismissiveness of political engagement entirely.⁴⁶ As Millennials graduate college and begin looking for the jobs they were promised by their Baby Boomer parents, the truth of the political and economic climate is proving to be yet another let down. Raised to believe the government would protect them,⁴⁷ Millennials feel lied to again as any effort to reform the transgressions that led to the economic recession of 2008 results in a stalemate mired in the interests of politicians, lobbyists, Super PACs, and other special interest groups; the interests of Americans often appear secondary

at best.⁴⁸ As Millennials come of age, they must come out of their ego-centric world-view and harness their civic authority as the new force of civic change in America, not just on a local or even national level, but a global one as well. Civic museums have an opportunity and responsibility to reveal the government processes going on around them to inspire visitors to advocate change in their communities and at large, promoting more informed civic action.

This age group is often least represented both at the polls, and in museums. In the 2010 midterm elections, only an estimated 20.9% of all eligible young people voted; a drop off from the enthusiasm garnered by Obama's historic election in 2008, but still a growing improvement over the voter turnout in the 1990s.⁴⁹ 65% of history museum and historic site visitors (as statistics relating directly to civic museums are sparse) are over age 50.⁵⁰ Traditionally disenfranchised by government


and rejecting of the traditional and educational values of museums, the Millennial demographic is often left out of the political process when they are most in need of understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizenship on the adult level.⁵¹ Due to the political climate today and the nature of the Millennial generation, civic museums have an excellent opportunity to take advantage of a large segment of the population that is growing increasingly restless with the state of government.

Traditionally the 18-29 year old demographic has been largely ignored by political process and campaigns. The three major factors that contribute to voter concerns during any election; money, marriage, home ownership, are commitments that Millennials are putting off until later and later into adulthood.⁵² As a result of their lack of assets and taxpaying, political

campaigns often direct their canvassing efforts elsewhere, leaving young adults out of the political process in favor of their older counterparts who continue to vote in twice or three times the numbers.⁵³ It is at this age that young adults leave the shelter of home and their parents' political belief systems and social capital systems to define their own personal identity as individual citizens. This makes young



MoveOn Flash Mob Protest on Wall Street on June 6th 2011. Photo by joanneleon from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/joanneleon/5812382405/>



adults a prime audience for both politicians and museums who wish to capture a young adult while he or she is developing the sense of self and behavioral patterns that they will carry-on into their adult lives and eventually pass on to their children.⁵⁴ Some op-ed columnists have posited that 18-29 year olds simply don't care about the issues or the importance of voting, and as a result, they shouldn't be involved in the political process.⁵⁵ But as the 2008 presidential election has shown, when young adults are listened to, they can seize the power to effect great change and to become more engaged in the civic process. Furthermore, Millennial disenfranchisement isn't just perceived. After Obama's presidential election, numerous states began pushing legislation to strengthen voter ID laws, cut voter registration mobilization, early voting times, and making it more difficult to restore lost voter rights. These laws largely impact the disabled, the poor who can't afford expensive new ID regulations, immigrants

who face invasive new proof of citizenship requirements, and young people who only become eligible to vote around election time. More than 5 million eligible voters could be affected or restricted by the new laws passed in 34 states by the 2012 Presidential election.⁵⁶ While the age group between 30-39 is most likely to participate in traditional methods of government communication such as writing to a congressman, making monetary donations, or boycotting, young adults are on the precipice of defining their personal identity, social capital, and are defining their role as citizens. This is the time when they should utilize the civic museum's mediation to better understand government process and their individual role in it, possibly even more so than as young children on school trips or as elderly citizens with a greater understanding and appreciation of historic and civic engagement.

Museums have a history of neglecting the young adult audience as well. Educated,

affluent, white women are the most common museum visitor, and school groups and families with children tend to round out the major museum demographics, especially in art and history focused institutions.⁵⁷ Young adults are traditionally overlooked by museums for the same reasons they are overlooked by politicians – a perceived indifference to the civic process. Developmental experts claim that teenagers and young adults outright reject the educational and traditional values promoted by museum visits, in favor of more social experiences with friends.⁵⁸ While there has been a decided push in recent decades to increase the emphasis on creating social experiences that promote engagement with exhibition content, teenagers and young adults are still often left out. Some historic institutions have written off the young adult demographic altogether, perfectly content to wait until they age and come back to the museum all on their own.⁵⁹ But again, as with the political

processes, 18-29 is an age where it is important to “hook” visitors while they are desperately searching for a context within which to develop their own personal identities and personal value systems. Civic museums in particular have the greatest social responsibility toward captivating and creating an informed citizenry as they

promote public action.


The Millennials are a unique group of 18-29 year olds that, through their own inherent skepticism and social consciousness, create a unique opportunity for civic museums to utilize the unrest of the current political climate. Previous youth/student driven political action,

namely the Civil Rights and Anti-War movements of the 1960s and 70s, is the paradigm of the effectiveness when youth are civically engaged. These young adults grew up in a post-atomic society wherein Mutually Assured Destruction and Nuclear War were a real and daily threat. Despite a lack of faith in government and its officials, America was in the midst of an economic boom, and greater access to education and resources helped create the informed citizen who protested the monolithic,

modernist nature of government.⁶⁰ Today’s 18-29 year olds are radically different. The current economic climate looks harsher upon young adults than any previous economic downturn in history. Unemployment among young adults stands at 16.7% for people under 24, compared to the 8.3% unemployment nationwide.⁶¹ All over the world, from Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and to America, young adults are leaving childhood with nowhere else to go. Globally, the population is aging. Older citizens hold on to the best jobs longer and longer, and when they finally do retire, they demand pensions and benefits that the Millennials are expected to finance.⁶² As a result, more young adults are forced to prolong their childhoods, living at home with parents unable to find work to pay off their student loans for degrees that have seemingly failed, despite an upbringing that promised they could be anything they wanted.⁶³ The current group of 18-29 year olds faces a harsher economic climate than any



Image From <http://blogs.reuters.com/reuters-money/2011/06/23/is-the-american-dream-dead/>

A decorative graphic at the top of the page consisting of numerous blue lines radiating from a central point, creating a sunburst or starburst effect. The lines vary in length and thickness, creating a dynamic, energetic feel.

generation before, a climate that again ignores the Millennial eagerness to effect change, forcing disenfranchisement to stew.

Technology alone has changed the way society functions as a whole; from the rise in globalization and social connectedness, the isolation of living virtually, unparalleled media exposure, to access to information and personalization in nearly every aspect of life from the way we watch TV to the way we go grocery shopping. Unlike their parents who have only grown with personal computing technology later in life, the Millennials are the first generation not to remember life before the personal computer or cellphone. The way Millennials absorb information and act upon it is increasingly digital, virtual, and natural.⁶⁴ Social media is rapidly growing from a tool to support social interaction, to the very medium upon which it relies. The increased use in social media gives these disenfranchised youths a forum to assemble, regardless of

physical location. Technology has changed the way information spreads and how humanity interacts on a whole, but when it comes to the Millennials, technology and interaction are inextricably linked, changing the way both government and museums must approach young adult audiences.

Both government and civic museums can strengthen their relevance to young adults in ways that benefit democracy as a whole. It is important for a civic museum to serve the widest variety of citizens, but when addressing certain civic issues, focusing on one particular generational demographic is paramount to creating and reinforcing a meaningful connection, especially as generational identity is defined by shared civic experiences. By addressing this specific audience, civic museums can strengthen their relevance in a rapidly changing technological society. As Millennials begin to redefine the purpose and meaning of civic engagement,

the museum must redefine the way they approach controversial civic topics in order to enlighten the Millennial about his or her civic agency and cultivate deeply informed citizens. By looking outside the museum, there are various methods for connecting young adults to the political process and promoting an understanding of the critical thinking and social-awareness needed to support American democracy. By shifting to more entertainment-inspired methods for employing civic seeing, civic museums can better build on the way Millennials already interact with political drama, and can even better help them frame the development of their social capital in varying points of view. This lays the groundwork for the self-centered Millennial to truly recognize his or her personal relevance and agency as a force for change in global society.

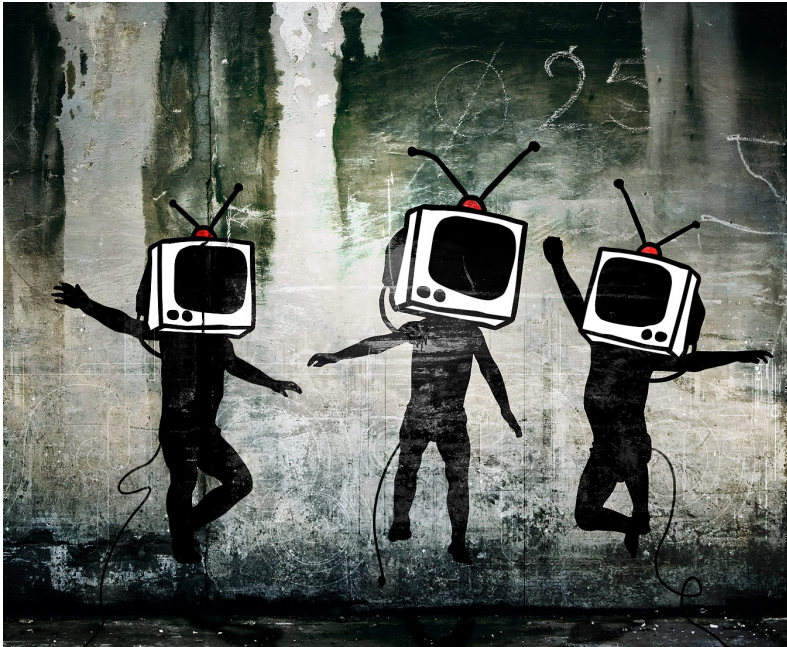
REDIRECTING MILLENNIAL FOCUS



“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.”

- President John F. Kennedy

THE POLITICAL DRAMA




Banksy TV Head Dance photo from <http://www.steelyourmind.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/51-Banksy-TV-Heads-1920x1200.jpg>

As an outgrowth of the history discipline, civic museums often use the tumultuous history of American politics and government to draw parallels to current political processes, with the goal of inspiring visitors to act, and affect the course of history. This is a way civic museums help visitors understand the forum of American political processes. But civic museums often choose a demure, apolitical stance on the issues they discuss, often in an attempt to shy away from blatant controversy regarding controversial issues. The NCC for example, promotes non-partisanship in their institutional mission in an attempt to make those with differing viewpoints feel accepted. As a result, civic museums often lose the passion and

motivation to act that controversy naturally evokes. So how can civic museums retain the chaos and tumult of political controversy in a way that inspires civic agency without excluding anyone regardless of where they fall on the political spectrum?

The media presents a range of examples for controversial storytelling methods with civic messages. Television shows like *The West Wing* and *The Wire* show the inner workings of civic processes; weaving tales of political intrigue that, through heightened drama that embraces civic and political controversy, allow viewers to see that “good guys” are not all “good” and “bad guys” are not all “bad”, regardless of political affiliation and leanings of the characters or viewers. Shows such as *The O'Reilly Factor* or *The Daily Show* are totally biased, and unabashedly so; but these shows have the ability to evoke political discussion and debate on the personal level, regardless of the issue. Offending audiences is no qualm for



these shows, and their popularity exemplifies the ability controversy has to stir political discourse. Even as people are offended, they are forced to recognize their place in the civic sphere, and begin to see civic issues in a more personal way. Furthermore, the general public is clamoring for truth and all of its scintillating details, rather than being patronized with a rosy façade of history.⁶⁵ Civic museums can employ some of these popular, dramatic elements to tell the story of political process in a way that retains the passion for civic engagement without excluding visitors with differing political opinions.

In the short history since the advent of print media, mass-media itself has grown into a fundamental part of the human experience, rather than just accompaniment. Daily life is constantly mediated by corporations, companies, advertisers, broadcasters, RSS and Twitter feeds constantly telling us what to watch, what to wear, what to eat, etc. The

average urban dweller is exposed to over 5000 ads a day, compared with 2000 ad messages 30 years ago.⁶⁶ Thanks to the new global connectivity, a new form of literacy is arising that transcends language barriers, physical location, and even time and space – media literacy. As human experiences are constantly being mediated, Millennials *rely* on media as an authority more and more, especially when it comes to political processes. Since the 1970s, Americans have increasingly looked to television to mediate their political engagement, but today, the news is no longer the main source of political information.

The 1970s gave birth to the instant-gratification news media as we know it; frontline reports coming in from Vietnam as they happened. The media was tasked with acting as the government's conscience, sometimes referred to as “the fourth branch”. Americans have grown to rely on the media to keep them informed of political processes, increasingly

disconnecting the government from the society it represents. Politicians began taking advantage of the ability to reduce their image to a pre-planned message and sound bite. As traditional news media has been increasingly swallowed up by the conglomerates it once blew the whistle on, today's young adults are already distrusting and disenfranchised with the traditional media style of an “intellectual interaction of elites” in their political mediation. Shows such as *The O'Reilly Factor* and *The Daily Show* present the political drama by mimicking the traditional “talking head” format in a highly partisan or even satirical manner. Rather than blurring the line between right and left, these shows focus on it. They highlight the divide and seek evoke political debate rather than allowing civic debate to stagnate in favor of sensitivity. While these shows generally turn off approximately one half of the viewing public (those whose opinions are not espoused by the demagogues), they

inspire one of the most important elements of a legitimate, representative democracy; discourse. The popularity of these shows that actively incite and mock the traditional news media shows that stirring controversy is a key motivator in getting people to simply realize their relationship to civic processes.

The Millennials have grown up in a pluralist, representational democracy. There are too many politicians and issues and interests and the channels of bureaucracy have become so abstract and disconnected from the discourse of everyday life that the general public *relies* on the media to act as conscience for our government and tell us what is important. But traditional news media has become old-fashioned and passive in recent years. Recent scandals in journalism ethics, especially the “media’s timidity in thwarting or exposing blatant propaganda under the Bush administration and its push for Iraqi War,”⁶⁷ have left Millennials feeling further disenfranchised

from their government. And while news media organizations have recognized the need to bring in young adult audiences, they typically do so with “MTV Style” editing where, rather than presenting quality information regarding politics and public affairs in an effective method for young adults, traditional media outlets shorten the length of news stories, adjust the visual graphics to appeal to a younger audience, and provide more entertainment coverage.⁶⁸ The Millennials are smart, skeptical, and just like any other citizen, increasingly view politics as a soap opera filled with shady characters in pursuit of sex, money, and power; seeing politics through the very narrow lens of what makes it “newsworthy.” In this context, political ideologies fade away, further making politicians “characters in a script sometimes written by themselves, but more often by their advisors, the infamous spin doctors.”⁶⁹ The public in general are turned off when they are being patronized, especially the disenfranchised



Anonymous from http://www.irational.org/heath/trust_the_lies_not_the_truth_fly_poster_graffiti/sticker_graffiti_trust_the_lies_not_the_truth_lamppost_bristol01.jpg



Millennials.

The best way to approach this audience is through highly dramatized narratives that take the visitor from the superficial binary extremes to a much more pluralistic understanding of the many sides of controversial issues. The increasing value of storytelling can be seen throughout media and information dissemination, and museums have been using storytelling to connect visitors to disconnected content for some time now. While we are never more aware of the importance of accuracy in the documentation of our own history as we are in the 21st century, Millennials are accustomed to the idea of the “political drama” and, when the sensationalized aspect of it is transparent, consumers (whether they be museum visitors or TV viewers) are more apt to accepting the underlying messages as true in a deeper, more meaningful sense than the traditional news clip featuring talking heads arguing about some piece of legislation with a mundane name that

rarely describes its actual contents.⁷⁰ These stories naturally combine with media and civic seeing. The quickness and immediacy of media reflect the streamlined, customized nature of the technological and information age, and allow people to feel in control of their civic engagement and mediation, strengthening the values of representative democracy. Whether political action is sparked by long-bubbling civic discontent, or the furor of a moment, the catalyst is almost always a story; the story of Bostonian citizens massacred by British Soldiers in the 1700s, to the plight of a Tunisian food vendor who, after being bullied by the police and feeling impotent in the face of authority, set himself on fire in protest in December, 2010.

For presenting controversial civic issues, we see how certain narrative structures are successful in shows like *The West Wing* and *The Wire*. Both of these shows begin with a very binary “us vs. them” appeal. In *The West*

Wing, the decidedly liberal Bartlet Presidency struggles with a resistant legislature, and *The Wire* dramatically sets up the division between the cops and the robbers (or in the first season, drug dealers). Both shows unfold overtime, developing stories that reflect real life struggles, including scandal, terrorism, class warfare, and civil rights issues. In the end, these broad “us vs. them” ideas are challenged and as the characters’ struggle with their own social capital and sense of morality in what is, ultimately, an unjust world, the viewers grow and change as well. Most importantly, and probably the most realistic aspect of these narratives; the good guys don’t always win. This is contrary to the typical display of civic history that tends to promote the unwavering triumph of American ideology and democracy over tyranny, a proclamation that can seem rather silly in the midst of current social, political, and economic conditions. Adapting this dramatic narrative method to the museum setting can

truly put visitors into a safe position to question their own belief structures more so than any well documented history of a politician in a powdered wig or yellowed legislative compact.

This is supported by psychological research of how people interact when their personal belief structures and social capital are questioned, or when they are presented with a controversial issue they may not know much about. Immediately a visitor will be drawn to an extreme, choosing between one paradigm or its converse. As visitors follow these threads, they can be preached at with facts and campaign slogans, and harden their resolution, even on issues that aren't being challenged. But when a person is asked how this ideology fits into their social value system, past actions, or future goals, they may change their social value system to rectify the discrepancy, rather than harden their extreme resolution.⁷¹


Some museums have begun to recognize the power of the political drama for not only

entertaining but educating as well. The Lower East Side Tenement Museum in Brooklyn New York is a historic house museum that has evolved their purpose and mission to drawing attention to contemporary issues with immigration, a hugely relevant topic to American civics and politics. The very nature of the house's history makes complete accuracy nearly impossible. With over 7000 immigrants who passed through the building, telling each and every story in full detail wouldn't be an effective method for communicating the expansive history, not only of the building and its tenants, but of American immigration as well. Exhibit designers and developers pick, choose, combine, and edit stories for the greatest impact.⁷² The objects on display are often replicas rather than precious artifacts, allowing visitors to interact and connect with the building and its stories on a deeper level than painstakingly researched details and objects hidden behind protective glass. The museum



Ars Nova performance in The Lavine Family Kitchen at The Lower East Side Tenement Museum.
http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_f5V9kEw5GiM/TKID0nvcXI/AAAAAAAAAJM/2xJ-NQTXm88/s1600/NowCircaThen0125.JPG

employs these methods with the specific goals in mind of encouraging visitors to think critically about their own perceptions of immigration and immigrants. This helps address contemporary issues by learning from the experiences of the past, to develop visitors' awareness of their own impact and relationship to immigration.⁷³ These methods make the Lower East Side Tenement Museum very successful. In visitor

A decorative graphic at the top of the page consisting of numerous blue lines radiating from a central point, creating a sunburst or starburst effect. The lines vary in length and thickness, creating a dynamic, geometric pattern.

focus groups addressing the issue of immigrant assimilation and language barriers, visitors who originally perceived the language barrier as a rejection of American culture and values rather quickly loosened up when told stories that conveyed the difficulty and urgency of creating a new life in a new country.⁷⁴ While beginning with the extreme opinion that immigrants either embrace or reject American culture and language, visitors were forced to reevaluate their own social capital when confronted with the options that immigrants have to make – leave your old culture and identity behind to become American, or congregate in communities that use familiar language and customs to make a life in a strange place.⁷⁵ This reevaluation is paramount to the development of one's civic identity and the realization of one's personal impact in a civic arena.

By drawing on the media and dramatic political narratives, civic museums can better impart more abstract controversial issues

to visitors in a way that causes them to think critically about their own belief systems without offending or causing anyone to put up defenses. These methods of storytelling play on the sophisticated media literacy of the Millennial generation, rather than pandering to them with fluff stories and sound bites of what the outdated news media finds newsworthy. By tackling tough issues in an allegorical way, museums (like TV drama) are transparent about the veracity of their stories, entrusting and empowering the visitor to customize their civic engagement and realize their civic authority in the museum setting.

DIGITALLY INFORMED CITIZENS



From the G20 Summit in Toronto, June 26, 2010. Photo by michelledrewapicture from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/60012557@N00/4746427858/>


“An informed citizenry is the only true repository of the public will... The People cannot be safe without information. When the press is free, and every man is able to read, all is safe.”

- Thomas Jefferson

The drama of political narrative is important for conveying over arching controversial civic messages in a safe and entertaining environment, but this only sets up the groundwork for creating an aware and informed citizen. Those traditional history museum methods civic museums use help connect citizens with the civic processes of the past, but the direct link between past and present is often lost.⁷⁶ These connections are so important to the civic process because it is from the mistakes of the past that we learn to better the future, but also in highlighting the idea that a civic issue can almost never truly be “solved,” but instead they evolve into new solutions and new problems for future

generations. Civic museums can be quite successful in making these connections, but many more are not. By failing to make these explicit connections, visitors are unable to discern “what parts of the present are being projected onto the past”, and can “actually serve to enmesh people more deeply in the social structures of the present.”⁷⁷

To cultivate the informed citizen, the civic museum must focus on helping visitors understand where they are on the political spectrum. As Millennials are only forming their civic identity, the civic museum can give them many issues and stories to challenge their social capital, and define

A decorative graphic at the top of the page consisting of numerous blue lines radiating from a central point, creating a sunburst or starburst effect. The lines vary in length and thickness, creating a dynamic, geometric pattern.

their political ideologies for the first time. In order to accomplish this self-reflection, the civic museum must be clear and forthright about where its own political ideologies lay – often with stakeholders. Visitors can accept that museums must make money from very wealthy and often opinionated people, but if the museum tries to hide this fact, the visitor can't separate others' political ideologies from the facts, and might only become more disenfranchised with the museum and its civic address.⁷⁸ Furthermore, young adult visitors who have grown up in the wake of pluralism are accustomed to the elevation of the individual, inner creativity, and personal invention, leading to an inherent understanding of the veracity of the individual, the other, the biased and, therefore, complete.⁷⁹ Admitting, accepting, and embracing this honesty and openness is important in creating a trusting relationship with the general public, and Millennials in particular, so visitors feel safe questioning their personal

belief systems in order to better define them.

Once the museum has built a relationship of trust based on mutual understanding of who makes the “facts,” civic museums must present information that clearly highlights the discrepancies and gray areas that allow for controversy to spark. As the psychology of extremes shows, when people are confronted with an issue they don't know how to fit into their personal belief system, they will choose an extreme and try to make it work. But as we evaluate any such controversy, the dichotomy of extremes can fade away in place of more reasonable understanding of the other side.⁸⁰ By making juxtapositions between what appears to be radically different sides, visitors will be forced to make sense of them in some way.⁸¹ Whether they develop an empathy with the other side, or hardening of their pre-existing opinions, visitors will have to confront and become aware of their own political biases and

ideologies.

One method for improving the ways civic museums present controversial information about civic topics in a historical context is to aggregate. Web-based aggregators have sprung up all over the internet as the amount of information and information sources swells astronomically. These sources work by mining information from various sources all over the internet and combining it to create some sort of analysis to help users find *and compare* the widest, most diverse and up-to-date information in order to make the best, most well informed decisions. The idea of information aggregators is not new; anthologies and magazines are both sources that collect a specific type of information and redistribute it, but with the advent of the internet and artificial intelligence, and the growing Millennial reverence of instant and customizable information storage and mining facility, the

aggregator provides a new media technology for presenting a diverse array of information that allows visitors to pick and choose the most relevant data for their civic decision making process.⁸²

In a civic context, it is important that these



the political blog aggregator for moderates
switch to: /blue /purple /red

PROGRESSIVE

MODERATE

CONSERVATIVE



Midday open thread

Scott Brown falls off the wagon

Mitt Romney waxes poetic about 'magnificent' French vacations with wife

Fox 'News' teed up Mitt Romney's silver spoon Fauxtrage with fabricated quote from President Obama

Obamacare will save Medicare \$200 billion by 2016

Mike Huckabee proposes keeping student loan rates low in exchange for keeping the Bush tax cuts



Blagojevich Washing Pots in Prison

Crist's Law Firm Gives to Obama Super PAC

Obama Still Needs a Theme

Minnesota Republicans Face Eviction

How to Live Off Campaign Contributions

McKinney Preparing Comeback Bid



David Axelrod Bemoans Republican 'Reign of Terror'

Have We Learned from the Holocaust?

Breaking: Tim Pawlenty to Open Margarita Bar

Romney Announces Support For Extending Reduced Interest Rates on Federal College Loans

Silly AP Story on California 'Diversity'

A Gift to the Comments Section?



Romney spokesman made sexist and homophobic remarks about Mrs. Obama, Hillary Clinton

Romney, flip flopper or "severe conservative"?

Trayvon, Zimmerman and a word about photos

Lieberman declines to endorse in presidential race

Flight of the Conchords: "It's Business Time"

Usual two parties pass first round in French elections



Fact-checking claims in the Wisconsin recall election

In context: Obama's comments on eating dog in Indonesia

In Context: Ted Nugent saying if Obama wins, 'I will either be dead or in jail'

Stimulus still paying for Obama's promises

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aggregators help visitors compare information from differing sources in order to create their own civic identity, but it is also important to compare information across time. In promoting those direct connections between past and present that are so important to reinforcing the individual within an evolving, historical process.

Information aggregators can help visitors compare the knowledge that their predecessors had when making their civic decisions to the knowledge we have now, in hindsight. This comparison draws attention to the way visitors make decisions and forces them to confront what preconceptions they have that they impose on their own perspective on the past and “the other”.⁸³

The diversity of information afforded by online aggregators

gives a more comprehensive and well-rounded view of controversial civic topics. They help users see issues from all ends of the political spectrum and everywhere in between. These are common tools widely available for free on the internet, but few aggregators aggregate across platforms. It’s easy to find news aggregators for the blogosphere, for twitter hashtags, for political polling results, for news and journalism websites, but there are very few options for aggregating among all of these various platforms. In creating civic awareness and discourse, it is important to gather those facts and figures, but as the previous section of this paper shows, the news alone can not tell the whole story. To produce an information aggregator that works across varying information platforms will help the civic museum strengthen its relevance as a unique location for data mining.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

39

has been prototyping multi-media information aggregators in their exhibition space to provide visitors with the greatest amount of cultural information the Museum can provide. The Met addressed the need to provide visitors with a more comprehensive and pluralistic context for their objects by creating an interactive based on information aggregating and customizable data mining. The study showed that while visitors appreciated greater individualization of


their information and the graphic presentation of it, they did little further digging on the subject matter.⁸⁴ Drawing attention to the difference in information between past and present will improve on the Met's method for drawing explicit connections between past and present, not just through providing a greater understanding of museum collections, but by showing how advances in science, technology, sociology, psychology, and civic identity have changed and presenting the possibility for continuing advances, and perhaps, how best to address that potential when making civic decisions.

Once they see how the museum perceives and promotes itself, visitors can begin to see these biases in themselves. It is this awareness that is fundamental to civic empathy, solidarity, and eventually, action. Millennials are accustomed to communicating through the internet and social media and

networking, and have already proven its ability to connect people in political discourse across space and time; physical location and language barriers meaning little in cyberspace. As they grow more and more disenfranchised with government and the traditional news media, young adults increasingly turn to the internet and the communities it supports to find solace in a society that has pulled the financial rug out from under them. In the 21st century, social media has already transformed from an aid to or diversion from real life interaction into the lifeline upon which underground subcultures (the political/cultural/social “other”) thrive.⁸⁶ Social media has already shown to be a life support for revolution in the Middle East and Asia where communications are notoriously censored, and the 2011 summer riots in London were sparked by the shooting of an unarmed youth by police officers, but was instigated and sustained by a BlackBerry message that stated simply, “link up and create havoc” [sic].



Exhibition Information Aggregator from The Metropolitan Museum from Urban, Richard J., Piotr Adamczyk, and Michael B. Twidale. "Cultural Heritage Information Dashboards." (2010). Web. 16 Apr. 2012.



The ability of the crowd to identify itself and remain connected over BlackBerry message held the northern parts of London in the grip of mob rule until BlackBerry was called in by UK Parliament to shut down their messaging servers.⁸⁷ Social media is a powerful tool that Millennials are accustomed to, well versed in, dependent upon, and even expectant of for communication on the both the personal and global level. Bill Wasik said it best:

For tech to become effective as a tool for civic disorder, it first had to insinuate itself in people's daily lives. Now that it has, there can be no getting rid of it. The agent provocateur lives inside our pockets and purses and cannot be uninstalled.⁸⁸

Incorporating these technologies into the civic museum is paramount to attracting, entertaining, and educating the Millennial. The

way Millennials mine and absorb information is wholly distinct from any previous generation, and is increasingly digital. By using information aggregators, Millennials can better customize the wide variety of information they need to make important civic decisions and make stronger connections between past and present, and other individuals as well. New media information aggregation and communication technologies have provided an avenue for museums to democratize their diverse, comprehensive cultural resources that work with the Millennial mind. By creating an environment where common daily experiences (like web-surfing and status updating) have an added civic importance, Millennials will be better able to absorb new and controversial information, and be prepared to continue this self-reflection and critical thinking in their lives outside the museum, making civic museum visitors more informed citizens, and impacting the civic decisions they make every day.

BECOMING SELF AWARE

“Not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but also clouds their view of their descendants and isolates them from their contemporaries. Each man is for ever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart.”

- Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America*

This paper has already addressed many of the ways young adults of any generation, and Millennials in particular, are being disenfranchised from the political process and how this affects their civic engagement. It is admittedly difficult to get the general public interested in politics, much less young adults; and it can seem downright futile to attempt to get them to physically participate in civic processes. After all, we elect officials to act for us. Nationally, nearly 35% of American adults are civically engaged in some way, related to elections, political discussion, community service, or consumer activism;⁸⁹ but less than

25% of Millennials are civically engaged.⁹⁰ As this research shows, the generational divide between older and younger citizens is becoming more and more contentious as young adults slowly replace their fathers and grandfathers as the main power holders. The main difference in the way these two generations engage civically comes from growing pluralism and individuality among the various political causes there are to espouse at a local level, rather than engaging through traditional means of voting and involvement with candidates and policies; while voter turnout has been on the decline among young adults, community service has been on the rise.⁹¹ With the past 25 years of conservative dominance in government, political power has been increasingly decentralized and remitted to local governments and private sectors, giving elites and corporations the true power for political action. This growing blur between public and private impacts the growing

disenfranchisement with politicians, political parties, and national organizations that mine the public for votes, while true change happens at the community level without the involvement of political agenda.


There are a plethora of civic engagement groups and projects that help people feel connected and impactful to their communities. Groups like the Young Republicans and Young Democrats also focus on voter canvassing, fundraising for non-political campaigning (these organizations are not permitted to campaign *for* a candidate, but rather they may campaign for issues and draw attention to the candidates that support/are against them) and networking as participants' main course of action. Groups like Vote or Die, Rock the Vote, and MoveOn are all non-partisan organizations that seek to motivate the general public (youth in particular) toward civic engagement, namely by registering people to vote and encouraging them to follow through. But when

young Americans are growing more and more disenfranchised with the power, and even basic purpose, of voting, as well as having lost faith in civic leaders and the bipartisanship that has resulted in legislative stalemate, how do civic museums turn new found civic empathy and understanding into political action? Before civic action can happen, Millennials have to be shown that doing something *can* make a difference, and that action on a global scale begins with the individual citizen who recognizes their civic authority.

The main issue preventing Millennials and young adults from participating in political civic engagement is their lack of awareness of their own civic agency. Obama's election in 2008 was a big step in proving the civic authority of young adults, and the election was won largely by interacting and campaigning online.⁹² Candidates and political parties that seek to mobilize the vote and get people to act are often missing the important step of



American Pride by AllTimeLover from <http://alltimelover.deviantart.com/art/American-Pride-297153047?q=boost%3Apopular%20american%20pride&qo=116>



showing to young adults that their actions do make a difference, not just when we join mass movements, or vote, or boycott, or donate to campaigns, but individually and daily, when we pay sales tax, ride public transportation, go to the doctor, or encounter the police.

While voter turnout and political engagement among young adults has dropped, civic engagement through public voice is on the rise. These activities include “working with others in one’s community to solve a problem, participating in a walk, run, or bicycle ride for charity, other activities to raise money for charitable causes, doing volunteer work for non-electoral groups on a regular basis, and active participation in a group or organization”, and they are just as likely to express their public voice by signing petitions or engage in consumer activism (buying or not buying one product over another for civic or political reasons) as their elder counterparts.⁹³ The main thing all of these methods have in

common is the sense of goal seeking and accomplishment at the end, while voting seems to accomplish little. While some scholars may argue that some of these activities don’t count as civic engagement, the fact is, Millennials are redefining civic engagement to suit their needs and address issues that previous generations perceived as too controversial, or private problems that now have far reaching effects.⁹⁴

The opportunity here for museums is to again make clear the ways Millennials are *already* civically engaged. Millennials are accustomed to hearing they are great and special and wonderful and different, but have little intrinsic understanding of or institutional/educational guidance regarding the consequences of their actions in a civic context on a global scale, setting them up to fail to seize their potential.⁹⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville predicted and argued that this inward focus and eschewing of public life would be the very downfall of American democracy.⁹⁶ Studies

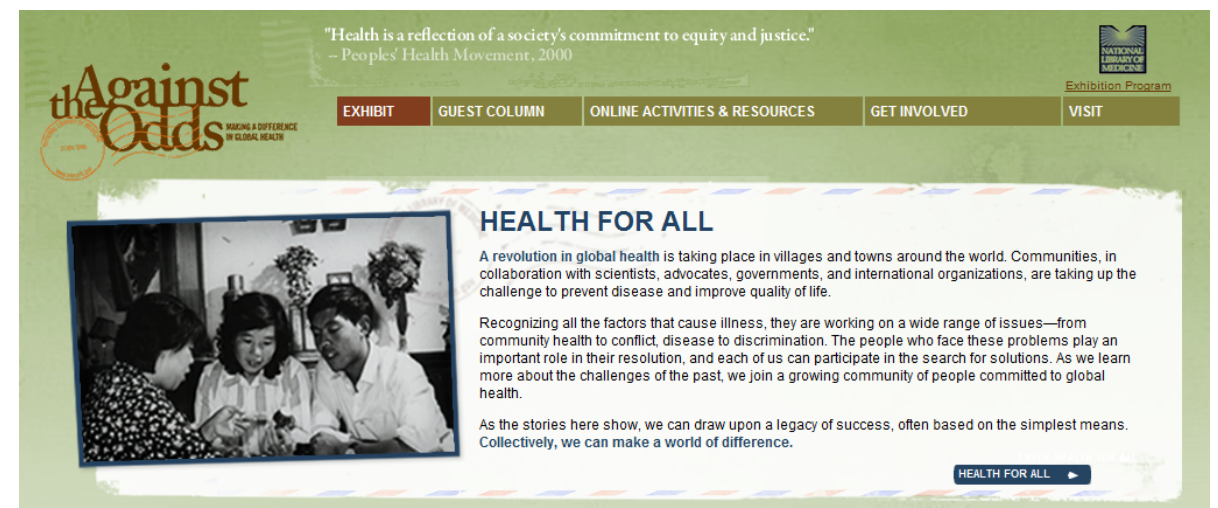
show that Millennials adopt an “it’s all good” mentality in response to the confusion and short-sightedness of pluralism, feeding into the disconnection between citizens.⁹⁷ So then, how do museums get Millennials to engage in “associational life and self-government, and democratic freedom, if not by appealing to their love, then to their tastes, and if not to their tastes, then to their passions.”⁹⁸ By directing Millennials to look at the good defined by the culture or society (contextual relativism), to look at those ways that they are impacting others, rather than a generational focus on the good defined by the individual life experience (subjective relativism) as they are predisposed to do.⁹⁹ Reframing the banal decisions we make and actions we do on a daily basis through the dramatic and controversial issues that appeal to what Millennials want and need to know about, will help refocus him or her from thinking “it’s all good” to “it’s all good for you, but what about the rest of us?”¹⁰⁰

The National Library of Medicine in Washington, DC has developed an exhibition with similar aims in regards to world health issues. Exhibit and content developers came to the conclusion that previous exhibitions addressing global health concerns seemed paternalistic, focusing on scientists and their contributions to medical history rather than addressing the root causes of most global health crises: poverty, discrimination, lack of affordable healthcare, and lack of prevention.¹⁰¹ By reframing exhibition of controversial health issues from a history of innovation and solutions afforded by medicine, to one that empowers the visitor to take responsibility for their own health, healthcare, and the societal ills they contribute to that affect others' health as well. Exhibitors were originally concerned about the controversy of discussing the non-scientific and personal causes of health crises, but evaluation showed that visitors weren't at all offended, but in fact, they clamored for more

and were eager to contribute their thoughts on other topics they felt related that the exhibition didn't address, already making those important connection between exhibition content and daily life.¹⁰² This case study shows how addressing controversy, and putting visitors at the center of it, actually can inspire them to realize their authority and seize it, more so than it will offend them.

This awareness is both the cornerstone and keystone for civic engagement. Once Millennials recognize their connection to others on a civic level, and the social responsibility and duty that comes along with it, they will begin to think critically

about the decisions they make every day, the civic consequences more becoming visible. Millennials will begin to think about their decision making in a more contextual way than a subjective way, showing them the political centralization that undermines democratic liberty does not stem from abusive government, big business, or foreign terrorists, but rather from apathy within the citizen body.¹⁰³



Against the Odds: Health for All Exhibition at the National Library of Medicine, screenshot from <http://apps.nlm.nih.gov/againsttheodds/exhibit/index.cfm>

DESIGN APPLICATION

The aforementioned techniques for presenting controversial issues to Millennials can be mixed and matched and applied in various ways, but the application of this thesis focuses on a multimedia interactive that will combine all three avenues, dramatic storytelling, information aggregating, and refocusing the Millennial, to create better informed citizens. For tech savvy Millennials, creating a customizable interactive exhibition experience that embraces their media literacy, facility with data mining, and expectation of instant gratification¹⁰⁴ is the best way to put them into the points of view of other citizens, creating a civic awareness and reinforcing a social responsibility. To effectively create empathy among different citizens with contrasting or opposed opinions is the best way to truly inform a citizen for making civic decisions on a large scale. Incorporating hyper-text information aggregation again appeals to Millennial media literacy, providing the widest array of up-

to-date information, providing a more well-rounded and pluralist context of new civic experiences. Finally, constantly reinforcing existing civic engagement and drawing attention to the ways individual decisions affect others will help Millennials accept agency of their civic authority. These methods can work together to show civic museums it is not only safe to encourage controversial discourse, but that it is essential to being an effective tool for visitors to develop their civic identities.

This interactive is based on a hypothetical exhibition about the Women's Rights Movement, but can and should be applied to just about any controversial topic. It is important to select a topic with a bit of historical distance in order to have some idea of the ramifications of the civic processes involved in the topic, and to show that controversial civic topics never really go away, they merely evolve. In the case of the Women's Rights Movement, we

can see the effects of the cultural and sexual revolutions on the 1960s and 1970s, and we can see how Women's Rights are a continuing source of debate and controversy today. Four main characters have been created to exemplify a wide possibility of experiences. In the case of Women's Rights, a young woman, young man, older woman, and older man have been chosen as those demographics show a wide range of possible effects on gender and age. For other topics, such as an exhibition on the Civil Rights Movement, one may choose characters based on race or socioeconomic status. But choosing these characters will give the visitor the opportunity to assume the role of someone similar to themselves, or radically different, as the character lives through and experiences the Women's Rights Movement. Choosing characters that represent extremes of the political spectrum will play into the psychology of extremes. As stated earlier in this paper, when someone doesn't know much

about a topic, they are drawn to the extremes, and as they are confronted with decisions to make, their personal value systems and social capital will be challenged.¹⁰⁵ In the case of the women's rights interactive, the young man and young woman represent the intended audience in another time. The use of an older man and older woman will represent the older visitor, or possibly the establishment that the young man and young woman must respond to and in turn effect. By establishing parameters and back stories for the characters, visitors will be able to choose a character like themselves and explore their own personal beliefs in a new context, or they can choose a character with totally different ideologies to see women's rights from a new perspective, or in an attempt to change that character's mind; in turn illuminating the visitors' own political ideologies. While these characters immediately represent very extreme sides of the political spectrum, the flowchart that illustrates the interactive "choose

Sarah is young and impressionable, and about to graduate high school. She comes from a conservative upbringing, but enjoys rock n roll and has a boyfriend, Tim, she really likes. Will you help Sarah make civic decisions?



CONSERVATIVE LIBERAL


Socially ☐

Fiscally ☐

Politically ☐

☒ Choose?

Betsy is a happy wife and homemaker of many years. She has raised her kids to love God and Country, but now they are grown. This counter-culture revolution brewing worries her; sex, drugs, rock and roll, what's next? Will you help Betsy make civic decisions?



CONSERVATIVE LIBERAL


Socially ☐

Fiscally ☐

Politically ☐

☐ Choose?

Tim used to get straight As before he started making some new friends at school his parents don't like. Tim's started getting interested in *The New Left*, but he mostly keeps that stuff away from his girlfriend, Sarah. Will you help Tim make civic decisions?



CONSERVATIVE LIBERAL


Socially ☐

Fiscally ☐

Politically ☐

☐ Choose?

Herman is a pillar in his community with a successful business and happy family...and mistress. Herman has a lot of influence in high society, and after a long life of hard work, he's not interested in letting anyone get their hands on his stuff. Will you help Herman make civic decisions?




CONSERVATIVE LIBERAL

Socially ☐

Fiscally ☐

Politically ☐

☐ Choose?




your own adventure” shows how any person, through their experiences and decisions, can become radically liberal, conservative, or somewhere in between, and showing the Millennial where on that spectrum they lie. By placing famous civic leaders (politicians, celebrities, activists, etc.) on that spectrum, the visitor can get a better idea of where their representatives lie and who is best advocating for the visitor’s new-found concerns.

Over 47 million Americans over 13 subscribe to Massive Multi-player Online Roleplaying Games (MMORPGS), millions of them playing on a daily basis, and 52% of whom are over the age of 25.¹⁰⁶ Many Millennials (and gamers of all ages) are accustomed to assuming the mantle of a video game protagonist, from Batman, to zombie orcs, to flying kitty cats, to rollercoaster tycoons, and experiencing a whole different world through their point of view. By using this first-person

story method, visitors will truly be able to assume the identity of someone they may have never considered being before.¹⁰⁷ This game, however, is greatly supported by the museum setting rather than an online game because the visitor is already learning about important civic issues in a safe environment, allowing the visitor to employ the critical thinking skills and civic messages of the exhibition before they even leave, bolstering the civic museum as a resource for comprehensive and honest political and civic knowledge, creating an informed and aware citizen who can then perform informed acts of citizenship. The goal of this part of the interactive is to immerse the visitor in the historical context of the Women’s Rights Movement, making decisions with their character as if they were living in another time. This will make the visitor truly ask him or herself, “what would I do if I were this person? What would I do differently knowing what I know now?”

This dramatized game format will help supplement the factual and educational value of the exhibition content and objects on display, with an entertaining component. This is necessary, because as a person’s social capital is challenged, they have the opportunity to harden their perspective on the issue, becoming more rigid and extreme, or they may reevaluate their social capital systems to become more flexible and understanding of the other side.¹⁰⁸ By using a clearly fictitious context to question visitor’s social capital, they will be more inclined to be flexible and understanding. On the other hand, using true stories and facts to try to change a visitor’s perspective can leave him or her (especially a visitor with an unpopular point of view) feeling preached at or even attacked, making them defensive and causing rigidity in one’s social capital.¹⁰⁹ By supplementing the important historical content of an exhibition with a dramatic and entertaining interactive experience, civic museums will be





creating a safe venue for visitors to question their own personal belief systems, creating a more socially aware and responsible citizen.

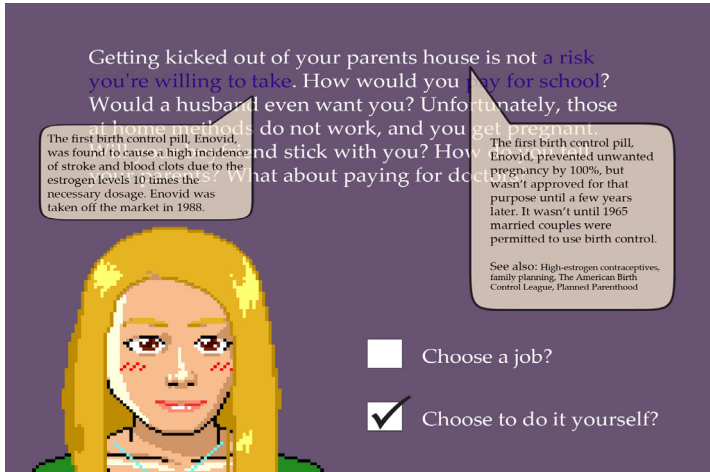
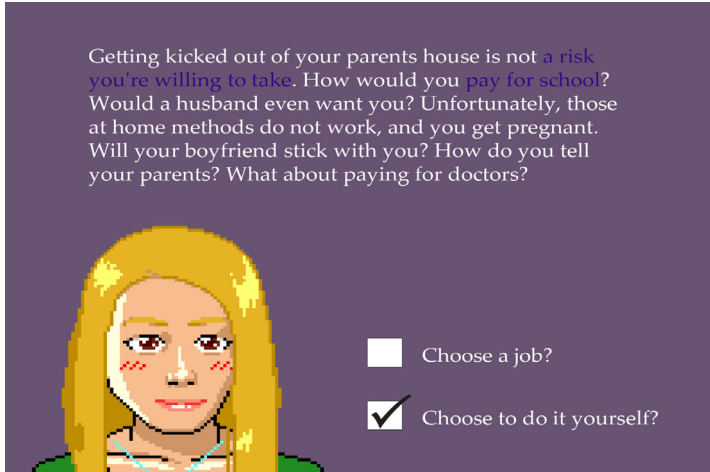
The user interface of the interactive can be flexible, though a few characteristics will be necessary, in particular the use of hyper-texting and information aggregating and a slightly abstracted graphic design. The abstracted graphic design goes in tandem with and reflects the abstracted nature of the dramatic narrative. The exhibition content is meant to be accurate and truthful and based totally in fact. But as the interactive abstracts historical events to convey over arching civic themes, the graphic interface must separate itself from the documentary photo and text style of exhibition graphic panels, lest visitors feel misled about whether or not they are living out the life of an actual person.

The hyper-texting and information aggregating is paramount to creating the

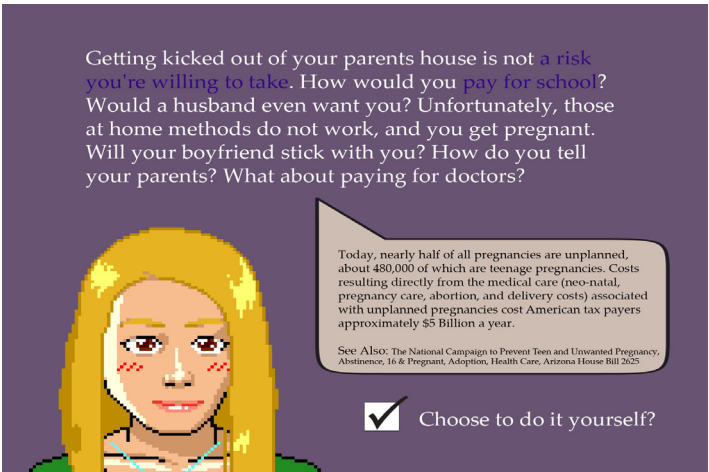
informed citizen. As a visitor attempts to live in the shoes of another person, they will need all of the information their character might have had in order to make the most informed decision. Once the decision is made, however, more information should appear; what more we know now. By comparing the information characters (and the general citizen) would have had back then to make a decision upon and the amount of new information and research that could have better informed that opinion, will show the visitor the importance of having all the facts, from the widest variety of sources, and explicitly drawing connections between important civic issues of the past, and how they have evolved into the civic issues of today.¹¹⁰ Rather than serving as an encyclopedic database, this interface will aggregate information. Information aggregators have evolved over the past 30 years. Traditional search engines like Google and Yahoo! are early aggregators, providing excerpts from web

pages to convey what's behind a link before you click it. Today, aggregators have evolved to mining information from various virtual locales, combining it with other information from other sources, making judgments and conclusions about that information, and then presenting this information in an easy to understand, customizable, graphic interface. Information aggregators of all types and sorts exist for locating any specific type of information, but there are very little services that aggregate information across platforms. Sorting through twitter hash tags, the political blogosphere, and separating campaign slogans from when civic leaders are actually speaking to constituents will give visitors the tools to continue their civic engagement after the exhibition.

Drawing attention to the difference in information visitors (and characters) have in making their decisions compared with how much has been learned since, will improve



on the Met's method by causing visitors to question the information they have when making their own decisions in their daily lives, working with existing Millennial information mining methods and reinforcing customization of the experience.⁸⁵ This information aggregation will cause visitors to stop and think, "look how much we have learned about women's reproductive health in the 50 years since the FDA approved birth control. What might we learn in the next 50 years, and

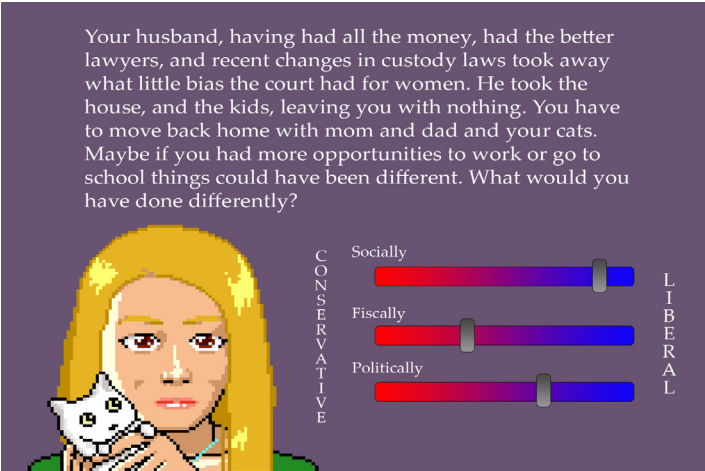


how should that affect my civic decision?" This constant reevaluation of the individual's personal belief system is paramount to creating the informed citizen.

Next, supplementing the interactive with a constant reinforcing the ways Millennials are already engaged will spark the self-awareness needed for civic action to happen. As mentioned previously in this paper, Millennials are very ego-centric, and to draw their attention to the actions they take every day with civic values and repercussions, forces them to confront their existing civic agency whether they actively embrace it or not. Whether visitors confront their own preconceptions with flexibility or rigidity of their opinions is not of ultimate concern as the end goal is simply the realization and self-reflection.

Assigning a numerical value to each decision made based on how liberal or conservative the decision is (0 for liberal, 10 for

conservative, and the spectrum in between) will help keep track of visitors changing political ideologies as they go through the interactive. At the end of the game, their score will be added, and the character's political sliders at the end of the game will be reevaluated, showing visitors how their decisions have changed the characters' political ideologies and illuminate the visitors' understanding of their own leanings, politically, socially, and fiscally. By presenting these sliders along with the sliders



of famous civic leaders throughout time. This will help show visitors not only how to interpret a civic leader outside of the propaganda promoted by his or her party or detractors, breaking down the pre-packaged media image of civic leaders, but will also show how notions of "liberal" and "conservative" have changed throughout time.

The final goal of this interactive experience is for civic museums as much as for their visitors. While reinforcing civic messages, duty, and action in the citizen, this interactive will show civic museums that they can safely and effectively engage the most historically disengaged age group in politics, while safely embracing controversy and the tumult of political discourse and debate that drive progress and forward thinking. Controversy, contention, and eventually revolution are driving forces in history, and for civic museums to shy away from such evocative subject

matter can be directly opposed to the goal of promoting civic responsibility and action. Of course, there are people who will be offended by any philosophy or ideology counter to their own, and often people can be hostile to the questioning of their social capital. Not every visitor can be accounted for or catered to in this situation. However, this very emotional bout is also a valid instigator for civic action, even if it's the result of a hardening of ideologies.

At the end of the exhibition and interactive experience, visitors will be given an opportunity to get on their soapbox. After "living through" historical controversy that led to the shaping of America as we know it, visitors should have the opportunity to share their bolstered opinions in the exhibition space. While the idea of visitors "preaching" their political opinions in the museum setting is a bit of a turn-off, it is important to give visitors a literal, physical platform to stand upon and be heard from.

Making this experience a private one, like being able to film your speech in a private booth to take home and post to social media websites, would be a good solution, as Millennials are accustomed to making their thoughts heard via social media.

One of the greatest barriers keeping people from getting involved, active, and engaged with the multitude of civic, social, political, etc. groups and organizations that exist is simply that they haven't been asked. Setting up a forum for these groups and organizations to reach out and connect to visitors in the exhibition space will help visitors seize their civic authority while they are still in a place that encourages and fosters that engagement. Providing resources for finding and contacting the relevant civic leaders and including those traditional methods of government communications like petitions and letters to congress. This space should

likely be digital in nature, as inclusion of all groups on the political spectrum relating to the controversial issue at hand is paramount to the comprehensive encouragement of engagement. What about extremist groups who are also vying for youthful, engaged members and often prey on the anger stirred by controversy? Inclusion of these groups is necessary, as well. By utilizing the information aggregation technology, the museum can analyze and present the aims, missions, or goal of the group, even if they aren't clear from the group's propaganda. Including these groups is important not only to trusting and empowering the visitor's to make the right decision on their own, but to helping them know how extremist groups work, where they are, and seeing the effects that extremist ideologies can have on the civic process, and the importance of understanding the other side to prevent the atrocities extremism is capable of.



Obey Megaphone by Shepard Fairey




New York City graffiti. Photo by <http://yaponi.deviantart.com/art/obedience-is-not-patriotism-98579254?q=boost%3Apopular%20patriotism&qo=691>

This interactive can be played with multiple visitors, and this is in fact encouraged. As the flowchart shows, it is possible for the decisions of one character to affect the choices another character can make. This allows multiple visitors to play together, and encourages them to discuss why they make their choices and the possible results, much like MMORPGs that encourage and foster

collaborative in-game experiences.¹¹¹ Assuming the mantle of the character and what happens to them will provoke visitors to question each other to consider the consequences of their actions, encouraging political discourse throughout the game, and making it a social experience where visitors can work together to rectify differences in their social capital systems. However, it should be possible to play on one's own. As visitors make choices and decisions, these should be recorded in the game in case a visitor is playing alone and another character's decision is needed to advance game play. In these situations, the most often chosen (democratic) response will advance the story for the player. The interaction among the characters and story lines is paramount to reinforcing the idea that our decisions have wide-reaching consequences on ourselves and others, promoting the social, moral, and political responsibility that comes with being an American citizen. This social

aspect of the interactive experiences promotes a discourse that will cause other visitors participating in the game to question their friends' social capital and value systems to help each other realize their civic authority.

Creating an interactive experience that can supplement the exhibition of controversial topics is an important one to furthering the mission of civic museums and strengthening their connections to their visitors. While learning about the facts and history of important controversial issues is paramount to understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in the 21st century, the civic museum can go further to create more informed citizens if they wish to promote acts that affect societal change. First the civic museum must choose a particular generational demographic to exhibit to in each situation, as generational experiences of civic events are so important to connecting and creating

A decorative graphic at the top of the page consisting of numerous blue lines radiating from a central point, creating a sunburst or starburst effect. The lines vary in length and thickness, creating a dynamic, geometric pattern.

civic identity. Millennials are a key audience to address in greater detail as they are just now forming their civic identity in a murky political climate, and they need intermediaries to help them understand where they fit as citizens in a global society. When targeting the Millennial audience, it is important to cater the experience to the way they already absorb information effectively; most universally through new media and entertainment methods. Addressing controversy through drama is not only a great marketing tactic, but important in helping visitors accept controversial issues in a safe manner, creating an environment for them to examine their personal belief systems without feeling attacked or defensive. By aggregating information across time and space, visitors will be able to put themselves in other points of view in order to better examine their own, sparking Millennials to think critically about the decisions they make the preconceptions they have when making civic decisions. By

reframing controversial issues from a linear method to one that encourages the visitor to examine the things they already do will help visitors realize their civic impact so that they can use the tools the museum has taught them to go forward and act.

CONCLUSION


“You may be sure that if you succeed in bringing your audience into the presence of something that affects them, they will not care by what road you brought them there; and they will never reproach you for having excited their emotions in spite of dramatic rules.”

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

Civic museums seek to connect their visitors to the political processes and social and moral issues going on in their communities every day in an attempt to inspire acts of citizenship, but they must go further in order to truly connect their visitors to important civic issues and empower them to act. In a society where the general public relies so heavily on mediation to understand their government, civic museums should take an active role in creating citizens who are informed on a much more personal level. The first step in creating an empowered citizenry is to simply show them that their power does exist, even when things like voting and petitioning and protesting seem

to fail.

Audience segmentation is common in museums these days, but is especially important in civic museums. As civic identity is created by shared civic experiences and when in life they happen, attempting to address controversial issues to all citizens as a homogenous body is counter to making deep connections on an individual level. No citizen should be left out of course, but focusing on a Millennial audience can best serve not only the museum, but the country as well. Study after study shows that young adults, by virtue of being young and unattached, are the least politically engaged age group. They inherently distrust authority and tradition, and seek out more socially fulfilling activities and develop their civic identities through their peer groups, making them unappealing as civic museum visitors. But the current generation of young adults, the Millennials, are redefining civic engagement in a new, digital context.



Knowledge and information are the new signifiers of status, and a government that is slowly grinding to a halt is leaving them far more disconnected and disaffected than previous generations of young adults. Millennials are already beginning to utilize the internet to define their collective identities, and are poised to take power from previous generations very soon; as the Arab Spring and Occupy Movements show, young adults are clamoring to be informed and armed with the tools to take control of their individual civic authority.

Civic museums can find their niche in embracing more controversial issues in their exhibits. Civics and politics are controversial by nature because of their reaching effects from a personal to global level, and to deny the validity of the feeling brought on by controversy, good or bad, breeds apathy in an environment where museums want action. Visitors of all ages, but especially Millennials, want the truth no matter how ugly.¹¹² By looking at entertainment media

rather than traditional news media, we can learn story telling methods that may better connect visitors with broader, more abstract concepts and the gray area that exists in any controversial situation. A fictitious multimedia interactive context will create a safe setting for visitors to think critically about government as well as themselves. Millennials are media literate and when they are aware of the use of drama and narrative, it can bolster the credibility of the civic messages within, rather than harming the credibility of the institution.

Through the incorporation of social media elements, civic museums can help connect visitors with their civic leaders and the issues they care about. Creating a portal that helps visitors find out what people are saying about the issues they care about fosters political discourse. But the resources civic museums have that is unique from the general web 2.0 experience, is the connection to the political and intellectual elites that represent us and

the scholars and objects within the museum. Combining the classical scholarship of museums with the plural and comprehensive nature of the information super highway will help Millennials interact with complex information in a familiar manner. This ability to instantly customize an enormous amount of data will create a comprehensive civic experience that encourages critical thinking and self-reflection. Civic museums have a unique opportunity to impart and understanding of the political process through an interactive and customizable discourse with history, our leaders, representatives, the civic process, and each other.

Finally, once the civic museum has cultivated the informed citizen, how do we help the visitor mobilize their civic engagement? Millennials have shown their distrust of the government, politics, and the public sector in general through their detachment from political engagement, but social and moral engagement

is rising. By helping visitors to see how their everyday actions have civic consequences and connecting them to the groups and communities that espouse the issues each visitor cares about most, civic museums can continue to bridge the generation gap in civic engagement.



Image from <http://www.mamamia.com.au/wp-content/comment-image/574377-tn.jpg>

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