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Communicating History: Podcasts as Public History

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COMMUNICATING HISTORY: PODCASTS AS PUBLIC HISTORY

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Since the arrival of "audioblogging" in the 1980s and its transformative rise in popularity in the early 2000s, podcasts have been used to share stories and information all over the globe. History-themed podcasts in particular have grown in number, with content creators utilizing new and emerging media as platforms for dissemination of historical subjects. As a newer medium, podcasting was never specifically targeted to be an educational endeavor, yet it is sharing history through a widely accessible platform. This raises the question, are historically themed podcasts a form of public history? If they are, then how do they function as such? In this paper, I examine how history-themed podcasts function within the realm of public history by considering two podcasts, *BackStory Radio* and *Hardcore History*. Both of my selections fall under the history podcast umbrella, yet vary in terms of creators, modes of delivering content, public engagement, and goals. This examination of podcasts as a mode of public history demonstrates their viability and importance as a medium while drawing attention to the role of content creators as potentially operating beyond the traditional definitions of academic or public history. Further, this study opens questions about the relationships between academic and public history, their intersections, and evolving descriptions of historical practice.

Public History, as defined by the National Council on Public History, "describes the many and diverse ways in which history is put to work in the world."[1] With a variety of applications, it is difficult to determine what exactly is and is not public history. From its origins as a professional sub-discipline in the 1970s, its catapult into the public spotlight in the 1990s, and its continuing evolution today, public history has taken on many forms between academically trained historians and passionate amateurs alike. The idea of public history has changed and evolved over time with its development as a profession, but it is not solely used by professionals. The evolution of social media and other independent content-creator platforms has revolutionized the way that history can be publicly disseminated. The public's interest in history did not end at wanting to learn about it, but instead grew into wanting to share it. This thesis will examine the qualities that both independently and academically created historic-themed podcast content possesses, how those qualities align with conceptions of public history as it has developed in America, and whether or not they function effectively as public history or something else entirely. The literature in this review covers topics related to the history of public history, the history of podcasts as a medium, and the developing role of independent creators of historical content.

Public History: What Is It and Where Did It Come From?

The idea of public history first arrived in the 1970s, amidst a barren job landscape for Ph.D.-holding historians.[2] With a lack of traditional roles for professional historians, such as

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[1] "About the Field," National Council on Public History, accessed November 15, 2017, http://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/about-the-field/.
[2] "About the Field," National Council on Public History, accessed November 15, 2017, http://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/about-the-field/.

tenured positions in academia or work in museums and archives, these historians sought a way to apply themselves outside of their established institutions. It was around this time, in 1978, that Robert Kelley wrote about public history as a developing career, which already had role models in place. Kelley focuses on the development of positions for academic historians in policy making, citing the careers of Richard Hewlett and Wayne Rasmussen, chief historians of Federal history offices. Kelley tracks the growth of these two men's careers as models for how public history careers may be formed. It is here that he cites an evolution from holding basic historical knowledge of a subject, to creating a narrative history, and then effectively gaining hold over that history's documentary resources to become an invaluable reference for that subject. This understanding limits what public history could be, only being able to apply it within governmental institutions, but tracks the early development of how some academic historians entered public careers. What Kelley does touch upon though is the idea of a growth out of this model, where public historians are not just academics performing an occasionally publicly-related task, but are really integrated into everyday public service.[3]

Moving into the 1990s and the culture wars in America, the public's interest in history exploded alongside their growing cultural and identity consciousness. It is against this backdrop that connections between history and memory were being more intently examined: not only *what* the public believed but *why* they believed it. Growing historical consciousness provided a ripe landscape for public history to thrive; with the demand for access to history on the rise, succinctly noted by Diane F. Britton through the popularity of historical novels, T.V. programs, and video games of the time,[4] the need for public historians was inevitable. The idea that history

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[3] Robert Kelley, "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects," *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1978): 16-28.

[4] Diane F. Britton, "Public History and Public Memory," *The Public Historian* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 11.

could have multiple interpretations came into public view at the time as well, sometimes controversially, as in the case of the Smithsonian's 1991 *West as America* exhibit,[5] or its 1995 proposed *Enola Gay* exhibit.[6] Controversial or not, the idea of the pluralistic nature of history was brought to the attention of the broader public, raising the question of where the public could access these more complex historical interpretations. It is here that the public historian could intervene, though cautiously, as history has deep ties with identity that can seem to be challenged by new interpretations.[7] Here the public historian was challenged with operating within the gaps between different understandings of history, but how?

The variety of methods that would answer that question were established in the 1960s, with the emergence of a new social history, and were expanded upon in the early 2000s with the development of the internet. The diversification of public history to include previously neglected groups, or a new social history, vastly redirected historical scholarship.[8] The process of reinterpretation combined with this shift in scholarship marked a moment where the ownership of the past really came into question, and academic historians lost their grip on being a sole authority of it. Here we can see the beginnings of the public taking history into their own hands, expressing their interest not only in the kings and generals of the past, but rather in a more personal view of everyday life and ordinary people. Through newer sources, such as oral histories, the public was increasingly trying to assume a shared role of authority with academic historians. Public history grew alongside the public's growing bid for ownership over their own history, working in the same arena but also having access to resources beyond the public's reach.

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[5] William H. Truettner and Alexander Nemerov, "What You See Is Not Necessarily What You Get: New Meaning in Images of the Old West," *The Magazine of Western History* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1992): 70-76.
[6] Richard H. Kohn, "History and the Culture Wars: The Case of the Smithsonian Institution's Enola Gay Exhibition," *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 3 (December 1995): 1036-1063.
[7] Diane F. Britton, "Public History and Public Memory," *The Public Historian* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 20.
[8] Eric Foner, "Preface," in *Who Owns History? Rethinking the Past in A Changing World,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), x.

In 2012, Benjamin Filene wrote about the growing emergence and influence of public, or "outsider," history makers,[9] expressing their aptitude for imbuing history with emotion. This instinctual, emotional investment in history, Filene argued, stirs a passion both within creators and their audiences that the seemingly more static, strictly educational methods of public history at the time did not. This passion divided traditional public history and independent content creators, and Filene urged public historians to reorient their methods to incorporate this more instinctual connection to the history.

From the more factual and standardized nature of Kelley's original idea to Filene's urgency to incorporate a more human element to the practices of public history, the profession has certainly grown and shifted over time. Methods of content delivery and analysis have changed, as well as the public's understanding of history on a broader level, so at this point one would think there is a more concrete, developed definition for public history. From the National Council on Public History's (NCPH) website in 2017, though, a "distilled" definition of public history states, "public history describes the many and diverse ways in which history is put to work in the world….[I]t is history that is applied to real-world issues."[10] In contrast, looking at a brief overview of the history of the American Historical Association (AHA), they describe multiple, evolving roles for academic historians, including "the promotion of historical studies, the collection and preservation of historical manuscripts," and the support of new historical research.[11] Academic history in essence is to further the study of history *within* the academy, not "in the world" as the NCPH describes public history. The expansiveness of the NCPH's

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[9] Benjamin Filene, "Passionate Histories: 'Outsider' History-Makers and What They Teach Us," *The Public Historian* 34, no. 1 (February 2012): 11-33.

[10] "About the Field," National Council on Public History, accessed November 15, 2017, http://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/about-the-field/

[11] "Brief History of the AHA," American Historical Association, accessed April 4, 2018, https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/brief-history-of-the-aha.

definition is intentional though, because although public history has evolved over the years and become a recognized profession, it is ever-changing in its methodologies.

Throughout this thesis I will focus on a singular method of publicly disseminating historical content—podcasts. In doing so, I will consider the vagueness in public history's definition, and will draw attention to the qualities that podcasts possess in relation to the recognizable qualities of public history.

Podcasts: History and Phenomenon

The arrival of "audioblogging" in the 1980s, later coined podcasts, unintentionally started a new platform that would later erupt into a hot bed for passionate independent content creators. Through this medium, creators have crafted podcasts about almost every subject under the sun. Whether someone wants to learn about physics, true crime, how to practice mindfulness, or just listen to regular people have conversations, podcasts provide a platform for it all. Similar to its contemporaries such as YouTube and Instagram, podcasting allows independent creators to make any kind of content they want (aside from anything against their chosen platforms' rules or community guidelines), tailoring it to their personal interests.[12] Podcasts can be disseminated through personal websites and a variety of platforms though, allowing creators to forgo any one platform's guidelines. This is not to say that the majority of podcast creators are picking platforms based on their rules; it is more likely based on their outreach, but it is a possibility for podcasting nonetheless.

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[12]iTunes Podcast's and YouTube's community guidelines are good examples. "Content Requirements," Requirements, Apple, accessed February 26, 2018, https://help.apple.com/itc/podcasts_connect/#/itc1723472cb; "Policies and Safety," YouTube, accessed February 26, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/yt/about/policies/#community-guidelines.

One of the personal interests that has exploded into a diverse selection of material is history. History podcasts have grown greatly in number since the early days of podcasting's popularity (around the early 2000s), and continue to be produced today. With widely accessible dissemination platforms, including iTunes Podcasts,[13] PodBean,[14] Stitcher,[15] and others, and ease of creation, podcasts are more popular than ever before. Nearing on two decades of content, the question is where can podcasts go now? And is education, or for this thesis, public history, an answer?

With few resources for scholarship on the subject of podcasts, this thesis relies heavily on the writings of Communication scholar Richard Berry, who has produced a wealth of literature over the years dealing with podcasts, mainly concerning their history and evolution. Berry wrote in 2006 about the rapid growth of podcasts and their potential effect on radio,[16] then responded ten years later in a follow-up article responding to earlier questions he had posed, and now wondering if podcasts had reached maturity.[17]

Berry's original article commented on the portability and accessibility of media in the early days of the iPod and other digital audio players. This started a development of more "intimate" media experiences, of which podcasting was included. The divergence from the typical programmatic structure of radio was also notable, both in the 2006 and 2016 articles, as podcasting allows for an accessibility to the content that a competing platform like radio could not provide. In the 2006 article, Berry presents the idea of independent content creators being able to find their own voice through podcasting, which tied into the intimacy of podcasts.

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[13] "Podcasts," iTunes, accessed January 25, 2018, https://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/.
[14] PodBean, accessed January 25, 2018, https://www.podbean.com/.
[15] Stitcher, accessed January 25, 2018, https://www.stitcher.com/.
[16] Richard Berry, "Will the iPod Kill the Radio Star? Profiling Podcasting as Radio," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 12, no. 2 (May 2006): 143-162.
[17] Richard Berry, "Part of the establishment: Reflecting on 10 years of podcasting as an audio medium," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 22, no. 6 (2016): 661-671.

In contrast, Berry's 2016 article notes that podcasts, like radio and other content-distribution counterparts, parted from their original proliferation of independent creators to give way to larger organizations. Though these independent creators still exist and thrive through podcasting, there is a sense of inequality between larger, more traditional broadcasting networks, such as National Public Radio (NPR), and smaller producers. This disparity may come from audiences' rising desire for frequent and high-quality media that larger networks can produce more readily than independent creators. To that point, out of the five history podcasts I originally considered for this thesis, only two of them are independently created (outside of a major organization), and interestingly yet not unexpectedly, three of them are made by non-historians.[18] This group of non-historians includes journalists, artists, and radio producers. For the purposes of this thesis, I have narrowed my scope down to two case studies, the podcasts *Backstory Radio* and *Dan Carlin's Hardcore History.*

Backstory Radio and *Hardcore History* are both very popular in the history genre, and have been producing episodes for quite a long time (since 2006 and 2008, respectively), leaving a wealth of content to examine. These particular podcasts also show a comparison between certain key aspects of history-themed podcasts that I intend to examine. These podcasts enable comparisons between content creators—traditional, academic historian versus journalists—and production styles—supported by a foundation and a large team vs. independently created with a small team. Overall, *Backstory Radio* and *Hardcore History* are both great examples of history-themed podcast content itself, as well as interesting, comparative case studies regarding the process behind podcast creation.

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[18]I had originally planned on writing about five case studies, but later narrowed it down to two for the sake of more thorough analysis. My omitted studies were *The Fall of Rome Podcast, The Memory Palace,* and *More Perfect. The Fall of Rome Podcast* and *Hardcore History* are the two independently created podcasts, while (again) *The Fall of Rome Podcast* and *BackStory Radio are* the two made by historians.

One podcast that I will not be examining, but that has been credited with revitalizing the podcasting industry in 2014,[19] is *Serial. Serial* was a breakout hit in the US, detailing the 1999 murder case of Hae Min Lee, thought to have been killed by her former boyfriend, Adnan Syed. The episodic podcast became wildly popular, reaching over five million iTunes Podcast downloads within its first month.[20] *Serial* shows a model for what many history podcasts today follow: an episodic formula of explaining or "investigating" a topic or event. Produced as a spin-off of *This American Life,* from WBEZ Chicago,[21] *Serial* brought storytelling podcasts to the top of the charts, and into view for a wider audience that had not encountered podcasts before.

A quick aside here just to note that "tops charts" for podcasts seem to be the only accessible way to gather any sort of metrics on podcasts, and even that may be questionable on what it tells us. With the absence of any one, unified dissemination platform, and vague ideas as to how podcasts are moved throughout the charts (through subscriptions, comments, and overall activity), there is little for the researcher to find in terms of tangible, numerical data.[22]

What research can produce though, is that storytelling podcasts, such as *Serial*, and the translation of oral history to audio mediums has made quite the stir. Critiques of storytelling platforms, such as *StoryCorps,* have pointed out their reliance on emotions rather than historical fact.[23] These emotions are brought about by the individual narratives that *StoryCorps* provides to its listeners, often told without the larger structural and historical context they are situated in,

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[19] Richard Berry, "A Golden Age of Podcasting? Evaluating Serial in the Context of Podcast Histories," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 22, no. 2 (2015): 170.

[20] Stuart Dredge, "Serial podcast breaks iTunes records as it passes 5m downloads and streams," *The Guardian,* November 18, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/nov/18/serial-podcast-itunes-apple-downloads-streams.

[21] Richard Berry, "A Golden Age of Podcasting? Evaluating Serial in the Context of Podcast Histories," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 22, no. 2 (2015): 170.

[22] Richard Berry, "A Golden Age of Podcasting? Evaluating Serial in the Context of Podcast Histories," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 22, no. 2 (2015): 173.

[23] Alexander Freund, "Under Storytelling's Spell? Oral History in a Neoliberal Age," *The Oral History Review* 42, no. 1 (March 2015): 96.

another criticism of the platform. Presenting history from an emotional angle is not inherently a bad thing, but an argument can be made about the somewhat facile culling of emotion brought about through such podcasts. *StoryCorps*, and many other history podcasts (not just storytelling podcasts) employ the benefit of editing. Through carefully selecting raw audio, remixing it with additional elements, and perfecting the narrative structure, podcasts have advantages over live media in how they can manipulate their stories.[24] This is an advantage that cannot be ignored, especially when dealing with history podcasts.

The emotional, yet subjective, reach of podcasts is what entices listeners, and can add a sense of passion that inspires interest and repeated listening. But, if history podcasts are to be treated as public history, one would assume that they are factual and potentially objective in nature. The overall factualness of the podcasts I have selected to closely examine is not in question, as the hosts' backgrounds in combination with the resources they employ leave little room for doubt. Through the personal interests of the producers themselves, however, as well as the edited nature of podcasts, their divergence from an objective position is inevitable. In this sense, I mean to say that factualness would align with the historical accuracy of the podcast content, while objectivity would align with the hosts motives in making the podcast.

With a growing number of podcasts coming out of larger organizations, this objectivity is complicated by the question of motive. Assuming that the dissemination of knowledge is the first and foremost priority, what else are these podcasts meant to accomplish? As previously mentioned there is the possibility of personal agendas of the companies or producers, and the incentives of another huge part of podcasting, sponsorships. A 2015 article from *FiveThirtyEight,* a polling aggregation website, looked at the current top 100 podcasts on the

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[24] Alexander Freund, "Under Storytelling's Spell? Oral History in a Neoliberal Age," *The Oral History Review* 42, no. 1 (March 2015): 113.

iTunes "top podcast" chart and found that between those 100 podcasts, 224 sponsored ads were played.[25] They ranged from as little as ten seconds to four minutes, often being played or re-mentioned multiple times per episode.

In examining the origins and evolution of public history as an idea and as a profession, one can determine that today its application in everyday life is flexible and varied. Podcasts run parallel to the development of public history, though originating at a later date, facilitating everyday interactions that people can have with history. The proliferation of podcasts over the past two decades has also grown with the technology to support and make accessible such a medium. With the current widespread use of smartphones, tablets, computers, and other portable devices, now more than ever is the time for digital engagement with history. The digital landscape available today is ripe with opportunities for engagement and knowledge sharing, which makes podcasts such a timely platform for historical content. Connecting the old ways of radio audio programs with newer, on-demand capabilities that current generations are familiar with and expect creates the perfect blend of features to appeal to today's potential audiences for historical content.

The Intersections of Public History and Podcasts

Is There a "Typical" Public History Experience?

Public history has so many different applications, it is impossible to define what a standard public history experience is. For example, the National Council on Public History's blog, *History@Work*, writes "Project Showcase" articles, highlighting current projects in the

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[25] Stan Alcorn, "But First, A Word From 100 Podcasts' Sponsors," *FiveThiryEight,* May 1, 2017, https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/but-first-a-word-from-100-podcast-sponsors/.

field. As of January 1, 2018, three such articles have appeared on the blog, focusing on the Hoosier Women in STEM Wikipedia edit-a-thon, the website and app Clio, and the exhibit *Still Fighting For Our Lives.*[26] Three wildly different projects that covered a diverse array of subjects were all considered highlight-worthy public history projects.

The Wikipedia edit-a-thon was an event held in October of 2017 at the Indiana State Library in Indianapolis. Historians, librarians, scientists, and members of the general public came together to edit existing, and create new Wikipedia pages about women in STEM fields in an effort to bridge Wikipedia's gender gap. Clio is an educational website and mobile application developed by historians at Marshall University. Clio acts as a story-sharing application, focusing on digital mapping of regional history where entries can be connected to create tour routes. *Still Fighting For Our Lives* is an exhibit commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the Philadelphia AIDS Library, which was originally founded to disseminate information on HIV/AIDS to the Philadelphia community. The author of this showcase article writes, "If an exhibit can encourage our audiences to have a more personal connection to their past and feel inspired to do something for their communities today, then we've succeeded as public historians."[27] That is the common thread throughout these projects, not their delivery method or story, but their audience and role as public historians.

In the above cases, their audiences vary in terms of whom they are specifically comprised of, but overall these projects serve a "public" audience outside of academia. They are serving

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[26] Editors, "Project Showcase: Hoosier Women in STEM Wikipedia edit-a-thon," *History@Work*, January 8, 2018, http://ncph.org/history-at-work/project-showcase-hoosier-women-in-stem-wikipedia-edit-a-thon/; Pamela Curtin, David Trowbridge, "Project Showcase: Clio," *History@Work*, January 10, 2018, http://ncph.org/history-at-work/project-showcase-clio/; GVGK Tang, "Project Showcase: Still Fighting For Our Lives," *History@Work*, January 15, 2018, http://ncph.org/history-at-work/project-showcase-still-fighting-for-our-lives/.
[27] GVGK Tang, "Project Showcase: Still Fighting For Our Lives," *History@Work*, January 15, 2018, http://ncph.org/history-at-work/project-showcase-still-fighting-for-our-lives/.

communities both local and global who have strong connections to the parts of the past that the projects are involved with. On the surface, for example, the Wikipedia edit-a-thon is for women in STEM fields. Under that though, the event could be for anyone seeking to address Wikipedia's gender gap, for people simply interested in the women of STEM, or general members of the public who may research these entries. These project examples show how it is difficult to define one audience for public history outside of simply "the public," because each project relates to different communities, interests, and portions of the past.

This small pool of projects also gives us a glimpse into what is going on in the field of public history, and what is going on right now is not wholly standardized. In terms of aims, there is still an overarching standard that public history connects various audiences to the past, often through personalized means and experiences. It is when looking at the types of projects created to reach these aims that the idea of standardization seems to fall apart. This opens the floodgates to a variety of interpretations of what a public history project should be, what stories it should try to tell, and how it should tell those stories. This is where podcasting comes in: as a widely accessible platform for a variety of ongoing public history projects. Podcasts, from the highest of professional productions to the average citizen with a microphone, provide a range of content to select from with a huge portion being history-themed. No matter the story someone wants to tell, and conversely someone wants to hear, there is likely a charismatic host waiting to tell it.

With a greater sense of what is currently going on in the field of public history at large, one can more critically examine the world of podcasts and their potential role as public history tools. By looking at two different, but successful history-themed podcasts, *BackStory Radio* and

Dan Carlin's Hardcore History, I can begin to outline the overlapping public history methods and intentions they employ.

Case Studies

BackStory Radio

BackStory Radio was created in 2008 through the support of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (VFH), with hosts Ed Ayers, Peter Onuf, and Brian Balough. In 2017, the team was expanded to add Joanne Freeman and Nathan Connolly, with Peter Onuf transitioning to host emeritus. The main hosts are comprised of academic historians who cover a wide variety of expertise, including 19th century America, history of science and technology, immigration history, and early American journalism and print culture. Along with support from the VFH, *BackStory* also has nine other team members, including multiple producers and editors. On their website, they currently have 218 episodes free to listen to, though due to re-broadcast episodes their numbering system lists 232. [28]

BackStory describes itself as, "a weekly podcast that uses current events in America to take a deep dive into our past….[E]ach episode provides listeners with different perspectives on a particular theme or subject – giving you all sides to the story and then some." Each episode is "more than facts and headlines – it's about how the past has shaped who we are today." *BackStory* posits itself as a history-themed podcast that not only seeks to re-tell history, but to contextualize how it has impacted the world we live in today.[29]

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[28] BackStory Radio, "Episodes," accessed February 27, 2018, http://www.backstoryradio.org/episodes?page=1.
[29] Information throughout this section is taken from: BackStory Radio, "About," accessed January 29, 2018, http://backstoryradio.org/about; BackStory Radio, "The Team," accessed January 29, 2018, http://www.backstoryradio.org/the-team.

Some interesting features of *BackStory*'s online presence include teaching resources and

pitch submissions. Their teaching resources are available free to anyone on their website, but are

aimed towards educators to use in the classroom. Twenty-eight, or roughly 13%, of their

episodes include resources, and can be found by using the search filter "has resources" on their

episodes page. When accessing the web page for a specific episode, you are given access to the

episode audio and transcription, both in its full form and in segments, as well as a lesson set. The

lesson set usually focuses on a topic contained within the episode, and includes *BackStory's* note

on how to approach the lesson, a lesson plan, handouts, and sources. The lesson plans are

seemingly made by the *BackStory* team along with the National Council for History Education,

and are meant to be used in conjunction with the podcast episodes themselves, often listing

specific segments to listen to.

For example, one 2016 episode, *A History of Manufacturing in 5 Objects,* focuses on the

then-topical idea of "Made In America."[30] To present this topic, the team took a look at five

"inventions and innovations" that explore the history of manufacturing. This episode includes the

full audio and transcription, six separately available audio and transcription segments, and a

lesson set focused on child labor. The lesson set includes separate documents of information,

handouts, sources, and citations.[31]

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[30] This episode was released on October 13, 2016 around the end of the 2016 election cycle, where the topic of manufacturing jobs and the idea of products being made in America was a very popular issue. Although this episode seems prompted by the then-current political atmosphere, the abundance of media that explores history through specific lenses such as objects or foods has led me to omit any assertions of political intentions over simply an episode formatting convention. *BackStory* does respond to the news cycle, so I cannot claim that they have no relation to current news or politics, but I do not believe the political climate to be exclusively relevant to this particular example; British Broadcasting Corporation, "A History of the World in 100 Objects," accessed February 28, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nrtd2/episodes/downloads.

[31] Information throughout this section is taken from: BackStory Radio, "A History of Manufacturing in 5 Objects," accessed January 30, 2018, http://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/a-history-of-manufacturing-in-5-objects/.

In regards to their pitch submissions, *BackStory* provides an online contact portal and submission guidelines for sending them ideas for future shows. This allows for direct feedback and influence from listeners outside of basic email or social media engagement. This is not to say that their social media engagement is not abundant, only that they have multiple facets for engagement. *BackStory* has a dedicated and active Facebook page, as well as Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr accounts.[32] Looking at the audience interaction throughout their various outlets, it is evident that, in both the amount of engagement and the tone of it, it is overwhelmingly positive.

Dan Carlin's Hardcore History

Dan Carlin's Hardcore History is an independent podcast started in 2005 by Dan Carlin under his own company, Orator LLC. Other than Carlin, the *Hardcore History* team includes possibly fictitious producer Ben Neb and art and web designer Nick (no last name given).[33] In total, the podcast spans 61 episodes over 12 years.[34] Although that may not seem like a lot up front, the episodes average around 3-5 hours long, with the most recent 12 episodes available through iTunes Podcasts coming in at a little more than 52 hours of content.[35] Episodes take anywhere from around 4 to 7 months to produce, with the newest episodes available for free. Older episodes are pay-to-access content; in 2014, Carlin stated that episodes are available freely

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[32] "BackStory," Facebook, accessed January 30, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/pg/backstory/posts/; "_backstory_," Instagram, accessed January 30, 2018, https://www.instagram.com/_backstory_/; "BackStoryRadio," Twitter, accessed January 30, 2018, https://twitter.com/BackStoryRadio; "BackStory Radio," Tumblr, accessed January 31, 2018, http://backstoryradio.tumblr.com/.

[33] There is a long-running joke in the show that producer "Ben Neb" (note the last name is just Ben backwards) may or may not exist, which is not verified, but based on his listing on the website "about" page and a returned email from "Ben," I have chosen to list him as a part of the team.

[34] Dan Carlin, "Home," accessed January 29, 2018, https://www.dancarlin.com/.

[35] See Appendix 1 for full episode numbers, titles, and lengths: iTunes, "Podcasts," accessed January 25, 2018, https://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/.

for around two years before being moved into their paid archive.[36] There are some older episodes also available for free, although those are listed as being on sale, so there may be a recycling sort of element where older episodes are sometimes available for free.[37]

Dan Carlin is a journalist, former radio host, and University of Colorado graduate who holds an undergraduate degree in history. He now hosts *Hardcore History* and *Common Sense,* a podcast that is devoted to politics and current events. *Hardcore History,* as described on their Facebook page, "takes [Carlin's] 'Martian', outside-the-box way of thinking and applies it to the past…. This is a difficult-to-classify show." [38] As they themselves stated, *Hardcore History* at its core is about history, but goes about it in a currently unclassified way. With the freedom of being an independently produced podcast, essentially meaning not tied to a larger production company or sponsoring foundation, Carlin can take any approach to the content he wants without the pressure of an outside producer, hence the slogan "History like you've never heard it before."[39]

Some features of *Hardcore History* episodes are that they may include auxiliary information related to the topic discussed in the episode, and many of the episodes include "Carlin's research and book list." On the webpage for the episode *The Celtic Holocaust* for example, Carlin includes: a list of various tribes, names, and places; a map detailing locations and movements mentioned; and three books referenced for the episode.[40]

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[36] Dan Carlin, "Hey Everyone…I'm Dan Carlin host of the 'Hardcore History' (and 'Common Sense') podcasts…feel free to Ask Me Anything," Reddit, 2014,
https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/19hkqe/hey_everyoneim_dan_carlin_host_of_the_hardcore/.

[37] I have not been monitoring *Hardcore History*'s website for long enough to make any certain claim as to when older episodes go on sale, or if there is any pattern to what is available freely.

[38] "About," HardcoreHistory, Facebook, accessed January 30, 2018,
https://www.facebook.com/pg/HardcoreHistory/about/?ref=page_internal.

[39] "HardcoreHistory," Facebook, accessed January 30, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/HardcoreHistory/.

[40] Three books may seem minimal compared to Carlin's other work, but this was a standalone episode (one episode, about 6 hours of content). For Carlin's series on World War I (six episodes, about 26.5 hours of content) he read

Methods

Both *BackStory* and *Hardcore History* talk about history with a capital 'S' for story, focusing a lot of their content on the concept of storytelling. How they go about doing this, however, is drastically different from one another. While *BackStory* presents its information in a more common podcasting format, *Hardcore History* lives up to its title in that it produces a unique and somewhat intense podcast experience. Despite the wildly different methods both podcasts employ, they have both been extremely successful.

BackStory, as previously mentioned, follows a more standard type of podcast format. I say "standard" because *BackStory's* format could be compared to other popular podcasts such as *Planet Money, More Perfect,* or *Revisionist History.* [41] This is not to say that *BackStory* is unoriginal in any way, only that this style of podcasting is very popular.

A typical episode is around 40-50 minutes long, and broken into a variety of segments that all revolve around the same theme. The team and any guests they bring on to the show then explore those segments through interviews, discussion, storytelling, sampled audio, music, and more. Each segment typically has a short interlude before the next, which may contain a quick introduction of any guest hosts, or an idea about or preview of following segments. For example,

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around 50: "The Celtic Holocaust," Hardcore History, Dan Carlin, accessed January 30, 2018, https://www.dancarlin.com/hardcore-history-60-the-celtic-holocaust/.
[41] "Planet Money," National Public Radio, accessed January 31, 2018, https://www.npr.org/sections/money/; "More Perfect," Radiolab, WNYC Studios, accessed January 31, 2018, https://www.wnycstudios.org/shows/radiolabmoreperfect; "Revisionist History," The Slate Group, accessed February 28, 2018, http://revisionisthistory.com/seasons.

BackStory's January 19, 2018 episode *All That Glitters?: Legacies of the California Gold Rush*, contains six separate segments related to the main topic and five guest hosts. [42]

The style of *BackStory* creates a much more curated program than *Hardcore History,* with carefully selected topics to highlight, guest hosts to bring on, historic audio clips, music, and most obviously, editing. It is very common for podcasts to be edited, a process that adds to the production quality and ease of recording so that segments can be recorded at different times, portions re-done until satisfaction is reached, and music and audio cues added to enhance the listener experience. In contrast, *Hardcore History* barely edits its hour-long episodes. Carlin records the podcast in small chunks, eventually piecing them all together in post-production after re-recording segments where he finds inaccuracies or does not like the way something sounds, but does not employ any extra effects or segments for the show.[43] These facets of organic, or unscripted, yet informed speech lead to Carlin's signature style of storytelling.

Hardcore History follows a wildly different format to *BackStory*, with episodes ranging around three to five hours long, with one host, told in a "theater of the mind" style. There is a lot to unpack about Carlin's method of storytelling, but something to mention is that it was not always like this. Carlin's trademark way of storytelling and enthusiasm for history are the same of course, but *Hardcore History* had more humble episode lengths in the beginning, only getting longer and longer as time went on and audiences wanted – and could handle – more.

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[42] See Appendix Table 2 for segment and guest breakdown: "All That Glitters?," BackStory Radio, accessed January 31, 2018, http://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/gold-rush.
[43] Kaitlin Parente, "Dan Carlin Q&A," USA Today: High School Sports, May 13, 2015, http://usatodayhss.com/2015/dan-carlin-qa.

First, it is important to understand the way in which Carlin hosts his podcast: with no script and in a "theater of the mind" style.[44] The best description of "theater of the mind" that I have come across surprisingly came from a role-playing game forum post, which describes it as, "[a term that] comes from radio jargon, where the term indicates the collected ability, style, tools and techniques by which radio performers conjure vivid imagery in their audiences' minds through sound alone."[45] Carlin, working off of nothing but notes that "are usually page numbers of primary sources or other text-based quotes [he] want[s] to read," employs this "theater of the mind" style so vividly and deftly it keeps listeners intrigued for literal hours at a time.[46] The length and depth that his episodes go into, though, come at a cost.

Preparation, research, recording, and editing an episode of *Hardcore History* can take months. This, one can assume, stems from the fact that the *Hardcore History* team is so small. From 2015 to 2017, Carlin and the *Hardcore History* team were only able to produce two episodes per year, with an average of five months between episodes.[47] Compared to *Backstory,* which puts out new episodes every Friday, *Hardcore History* moves at a glacial pace. This is not indicative of quality in any way, but creates a stark comparison between the production capabilities of each podcast producer.

BackStory is working with a large team of people on every episode, affording production of content at a faster rate. When the episode does not revolve around a current news topic, which

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[44] Dan Carlin, "Hey Everyone…I'm Dan Carlin host of the 'Hardcore History' (and 'Common Sense') podcasts…feel free to Ask Me Anything," Reddit, 2014, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/19hkqe/hey_everyoneim_dan_carlin_host_of_the_hardcore/.
[45] "Origin of the term 'Theater of the Mind'," Role-Playing Games, StackExchange, last modified April 13, 2017, https://rpg.stackexchange.com/questions/92447/origin-of-term-theater-of-the-mind.
[46] Dan Carlin, "Hey Everyone…I'm Dan Carlin host of the 'Hardcore History' (and 'Common Sense') podcasts…feel free to Ask Me Anything," Reddit, 2014, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/19hkqe/hey_everyoneim_dan_carlin_host_of_the_hardcore/.
[47] Episode release dates listed in Appendix Table 1

the team turns out quite quickly, episode production is a longer, drawn-out process. Although *BackStory's* production time is much quicker than *Hardcore History,* each in-depth, documentary style episode may take up to nine weeks to produce.[48]

Part of the production time for both podcasts, as mentioned above, is research. The two podcasts go about it in different ways based on their hosts' background knowledge and their episode format.[49] *BackStory,* being comprised of senior academic historians with specializations in various fields, has a lot of background knowledge that they are able to call upon. *BackStory* also calls upon outside experts, including other historians and scholars, as guest hosts to bring their knowledge to the show. *BackStory* is transparent in that they always introduce who they are bringing on, and the majority, though not all, of their episodes cite or refer to further readings and consulted sources. The show has been met with numerous positive reviews; the only critiques I was able to garner were that there are some minor errors or more generalized facts.[50]

Carlin's *Hardcore History* by comparison has to do a lot more research for his marathon episodes and series. With an undergraduate degree in history, Carlin is no novice when it comes to historical research, and he chooses topics that he has some background knowledge about, but he does not possess the same level of expertise or specialized knowledge as the *BackStory* team.[51] This is not to say that he does not produce factual, well-sourced content, only that he has to do more extensive research to be able to provide it. And again, with a small team, Carlin has to do all of the research for *Hardcore History* by himself, usually in the form of reading books.

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[48] Appendix Figure 1: Nathan Connolly, Alexandra Serpikov, January 22, 2018.

[49] I refer to background knowledge here as meaning both in their own personal knowledge and the knowledge of sources to turn to for more information.

[50] Larry Cebula, "Don't toucht hat dial! A review of BackStory Radio," History@Work, August 2, 2010, http://ncph.org/history-at-work/dont-touch-that-dial/.

[51] Benjamin Hart, "America's Best History Teacher Doesn't Work at a School," *Huffington Post,* November 12, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dan-carlin-hardcore-history_us_5643b5b5e4b08cda34875511.

For example, Carlin read near 50 books during the production of his six-episode World War I series, "Blueprint for Armageddon."[52]

Carlin's work has received some criticism though, such as from Graydon Tunstall, Ph.D., professor at the University of South Florida. Tunstall has written about World War I and listened to one of Carlin's episodes on the subject. While he did praise Carlin's work, he also called out specific missteps, such as about the Battle of the Somme, saying that Carlin missed major points.[53] Along with Tunstall, Leif Jerram, Ph.D., senior lecturer in urban and European history at the University of Manchester in England also found that Carlin was not "deeply examining the…historical forces that shape events."[54] What Tunstall and Jerram seem to be criticizing of Carlin's work goes beyond factual inaccuracies, and comments on the lack of a larger historical context in his work. This is a valid criticism to make, but it may also be that of academic historians imposing their own standards onto the work of more of an enthusiast than an academic. Carlin does admit to his own potential inaccuracies, often calling attention to the fact that he is *not* a historian and that storytellers often include their biases to the stories they tell. In this way Carlin is transparent in his process, along with the book reference lists he includes with the majority of his episodes.

Intentions

BackStory Radio involves the work of a number of historians, so the assumption would be that this podcast would aim to put forth historically accurate and educational content. This

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[52] Kaitlin Parente, "Dan Carlin Q&A," USA Today: High School Sports, May 13, 2015, http://usatodayhss.com/2015/dan-carlin-qa.
[53] Benjamin Hart, "America's Best History Teacher Doesn't Work at a School," *Huffington Post,* November 12, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dan-carlin-hardcore-history_us_5643b5b5e4b08cda34875511.
[54] Benjamin Hart, "America's Best History Teacher Doesn't Work at a School," *Huffington Post,* November 12, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dan-carlin-hardcore-history_us_5643b5b5e4b08cda34875511.

assumption would be about half correct, at least from the vantage point of current *BackStory Radio* host Nathan Connolly, Ph.D. As part of my research for this thesis, I interviewed Connolly and sought information about his motivations in doing the podcast.[55] Connolly responded to this question not on the terms of being strictly educational or accurate though, but that his own motivations came from a perception of incumbent scholarly duties to engage the public in conversation about the past, and how it relates to our present. He expanded this idea to also revolve around the deconstruction of stories and myths that we tell ourselves in our very media- or news-heavy society.

Engaging in history as a means to generate public conversation and impact can be risky, as it can veer quickly into the political realm, but *BackStory* handles the balance quite well. They do not shy away from current news and politics, but they attempt to connect these topics to a larger historical narrative rather than push any specific political agenda. Dan Carlin is not one to shy away from speaking on political matters either, as a political commentator and host of another podcast, *Common Sense,* which deals with current events. Carlin has even mentioned that he believes that "every storyteller brings his own set of biases to the story," so it is unclear how much of *Hardcore History* is influenced by his personal biases, but with his other outlets and focused narration of the past on *Hardcore History*, it seems that he can leave political motivations on the sidelines.[56]

Carlin states that he created *Hardcore History* for "other 'history geeks' like me," and that his habit of recounting history stories manifested into what is now the podcast, essentially

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[55] Appendix Figure 1: Nathan Connolly, Alexandra Serpikov, January 22, 2018. I am cognizant though of the fact that this is only one host's answer and views on the podcast, and cannot speak to the opinions of all members of the team.

[56] Benjamin Hart, "America's Best History Teacher Doesn't Work at a School," *Huffington Post,* November 12, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dan-carlin-hardcore-history_us_5643b5b5e4b08cda34875511.

turning his passion into a career.[57] Carlin seems like he has no outright educational goals for his

podcast, that he started the show to communicate his own interests and "weird views" on history,

assuming that other like-minded people would enjoy it.[58] That is where *BackStory* and *Hardcore*

History seem to differ the most, in that *BackStory* has a clear idea, or intention, of public

conversation and impact in a broader sense, and *Hardcore History* is made more for

entertainment and fascination. There is nothing wrong with this divide in intention, but it is

important to see how these goals shape the way that content is produced.

Benjamin Filene's concept of the "passionate historian," which Carlin most certainly

embodies, speaks to the visibility of Carlin's success. Filene argued that the "outsider" history

makers imbue a certain quality to their work that relies on emotion, which can stir passion within

both the creator and their audience alike.[59] With Carlin's passionate oration of historical

narratives, he has captured his ever-growing audience of fellow "history geeks" and beyond in a

way that it seems more traditional public history has not. *BackStory* has been successful with its

focus on public conversation and connecting the past to today, but admittedly not to the degree

that *Hardcore History* has reached, and Filene's "passionate historian" could be the key as to

why.[60]

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[57] Benjamin Hart, "America's Best History Teacher Doesn't Work at a School," *Huffington Post,* November 12, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dan-carlin-hardcore-history_us_5643b5b5e4b08cda34875511; "Hey Everyone…I'm Dan Carlin host of the 'Hardcore History' (and 'Common Sense') podcasts…feel free to Ask Me Anything," AskHistorians, Reddit, accessed January 31, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/19hkqe/hey_everyoneim_dan_carlin_host_of_the_hardcore/.
[58] Kaitlin Parente, "Dan Carlin Q&A," USA Today: High School Sports, May 13, 2015, http://usatodayhss.com/2015/dan-carlin-qa.
[59] Benjamin Filene, "Passionate Histories: 'Outsider' History-Makers and What They Teach Us," *The Public Historian* 34, no. 1 (February 2012): 11-33.
[60] Here I am using the term "successful" as related to the podcasts popularity as seen through their social media followings. *Hardcore History* has roughly 230,000 more social media followers than *BackStory,* which leads me to conclude that *Hardcore History* is overall more popular, or has reached a larger degree of success. I do not mean to imply that the content between the two is not equally valuable, only that the podcasts differ in terms of popularity.

Engagement

Engagement has many meanings, but in this context it is meant to define the interactivity of podcasts and their public. Kate Preissler, Western Region Engagement Manager with the Trustees of Reservations describes her role as "[overseeing] any point of contact between our properties and the public," which succinctly describes engagement in a museum or public history context: contact.[61] For podcasts in particular, that contact is most commonly found over social media.

Nowadays it is highly uncommon for a production at the level of *BackStory* and *Hardcore History* to not have some sort of social media involvement, so it is no surprise that they are both active on Facebook and Twitter. Both podcasts have their own websites where listeners can leave comments or reviews on episodes, but on social media is where the real conversation thrives. As of January 31, 2018, *BackStory* has 22,330 followers between Facebook and Twitter alone, with *Hardcore History* coming in at 249,895. This does not account for overlap, but even with the idea that each individual follower follows both accounts and there are no singular-account followers, it is still thousands of people that these podcasts reach. These engagement platforms are important both for podcasts to be able to reach out to their audiences in a quick and easy way, and to find a sense of how audiences are reacting to the podcasts.

Social media as a way of engaging with audiences is relatively new, but unprecedentedly effective. Social media is widespread and instantaneous in terms of releasing content, so it is no

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[61] Kate Preissler, "Planning for engagement," *History@Work*, May 11, 2012, http://ncph.org/history-at-work/planning-for-engagement/.

surprise that it is an extremely successful notification, brand building, and communication tool. Both podcasts utilize platforms such as Twitter and Facebook mainly for notification of new episodes, and to share outside content that relates to their own. This sharing of content may relate to the fact that many social media accounts provide a mix of original and "curated" content to keep their audiences engaged.

"Curated" content would be the above mentioned related outside content, such as news articles on historical subjects or museums' posts about interesting artifacts. When a production shares material outside of what they originally produce, it helps keep audiences engaged by reminding them that the production is there (keeping their presence constant), and further enriching audiences experiences their original content through the knowledge of related interests. *BackStory* and *Hardcore History* do this very well, with *Backstory* promoting their original work alongside material related to their most recent episodes, and *Hardcore History* using curated content to keep audiences engaged during their long production times when they are not releasing new episodes.

As for the social media engagement of *BackStory*, Nathan Connolly commented, "we tend to engage our listeners by email, or when they...comment on the web page or on...our facebook stream. We have a really good media editor, Diana Williams, who is really in charge of our public outreach and...has done a phenomenal job of managing...the twitter presence and the facebook presence, so by and large it's actually through social media that we engage our listeners."[62] Having someone directly in charge of public engagement, as *BackStory* does, can be hugely beneficial in making sure of producing consistent, quality content through social media

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[62] Appendix Figure 1: Nathan Connolly, Alexandra Serpikov, January 22, 2018.

streams. It also allows for more consistent engagement with one's audience, as a dedicated position for public engagement means that attention and time do not have to be split between producing the content and interacting with one's audience. The balance between the two may be hard to strike, and *BackStory* handles it well. Carlin on the other hand is working with a much smaller team, and thus his direct engagement through these platforms is limited, but where Carlin *has* succeeded, and where *BackStory* has yet to tread, is engaging with his audience very directly through another platform: Reddit.

Reddit is a popular user-submitted content aggregation website where Carlin has hosted multiple "Ask Me Anything" (AMA) threads between 2014 and 2016, garnering a total of 1,962 comments between them. This particular forum-style post gives users the chance to submit questions and talk directly with the host if they choose to answer. These were hosted in specific "subreddits" or categories: AskHistorians, History, and Politics.[63]

Within these AMAs, Carlin was able to interact and engage directly with his audience in real time. Through other social media outlets, commenting presents the opportunity for similar interaction, but is usually used for discussion among audience members rather than hosts. Through forums like Reddit, and comments on other platforms as well, one can gauge a sense of how audiences are reacting to these podcasts.

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[63]"Hey Everyone…I'm Dan Carlin host of the 'Hardcore History' (and 'Common Sense') podcasts…feel free to Ask Me Anything," AskHistorians, Reddit, accessed January 31, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/19hkqe/hey_everyoneim_dan_carlin_host_of_the_hardcore/; "Dan Carlin here from the 'Hardcore History' podcast," History, Reddit, accessed January 31, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/history/comments/1fard6/dan_carlin_here_from_the_hardcore_history_podcast/; "I'm Dan Carlin, host of the Hardcore History and Common Sense podcasts AMA," Politics, Reddit, accessed January 31, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/politics/comments/3v7gki/im_dan_carlin_host_of_the_hardcore_history_and/.

To continue with the AMAs hosted by Carlin, it is clear through the comments that his audience really love and enjoy the show, many thanking Carlin for his work and calling the show excellent or mentioning they're huge fans.[64] Of course, this type of interaction (through the AMA, along with many others through social media) is aimed directly at the podcast's *existing* audiences, so it is probable that the majority of responses will be positive, and will not accurately reflect critics of the production. With that said, comments like the ones in this AMA thread give a good example of what audiences keep returning for, rather than ideas on how the show can garner a larger following or appease critics.

In terms of engagement, or contact, this interaction through Reddit is unique in that it gives a sense of how audiences are reacting to the podcast, but also creates a forum for discussion where Carlin can clarify his actions and intents on the podcast. This is unique in the sense that a lot of "interviews" or "questions and answers" style productions with content creators are hosted by one person/organization and audiences cannot submit questions themselves. Here, the audience is getting direct access to the host, allowing for a casual and more intimate style of interaction.

In comparison to public history minded institutions, such as museums and libraries, this intimate interaction isn't found very often. Many larger or more established public history institutions speak from an anonymous perspective, one of "the institution" rather than any one flesh-and-blood person, which can lead to a sense of distance. The lack of a real personality to interact with prevents audiences from forming stronger, emotional ties, which can benefit

[64]"Hey Everyone…I'm Dan Carlin host of the 'Hardcore History' (and 'Common Sense') podcasts…feel free to Ask Me Anything," AskHistorians, Reddit, accessed January 31, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/19hkqe/hey_everyoneim_dan_carlin_host_of_the_hardcore/.

podcast hosts. This is not to criticize institutions that strive to present a more professional, distanced identity, or to insinuate that they should develop relatable personalities to garner emotionally invested audiences, only to point toward the difference between their more "traditional" appearance and how podcast hosts can present themselves. Overall, the fact that the podcasts have distinct, relatable, and reachable (to an extent) hosts allows them to facilitate more intimate-seeming engagement with their audiences.

Conclusions

Are Podcasts Public History?

The NCPH defines public history as "history [being] put to work in the world,"[65] and although that is a simple description, it leaves a lot of room for debate. By debate, I mean to say that one could argue that a wide variety of things are public history based on minimal requirements. Is an Instagram post about a historic structure by an average person public history? What if it has a fact in the caption? What if it reaches thousands of followers? I would imagine that the average response would be that no, this isn't public history, but under the vague definition of the NCPH it could be argued. What can be focused on in the NCPH definition is its implication that history is being put to work *for* someone, for audiences to interact with, which an Instagram post also achieves. *BackStory* and *Hardcore History*, too, produce historical content made for an audience, putting history "to work in the world." The NCPH definition does not outline this straightforwardly though, spurring questions such as those which guide this thesis. If it were clear what does and does not "count" as a form of public history, than the

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[65] "About the Field," National Council on Public History, accessed November 15, 2017, http://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/about-the-field/.

central question of this thesis, whether podcasts can be considered public history projects, would not require 25 pages of examination to answer.

Denise Meringlo, Associate Professor of History and Director of the Public History Graduate Program at UMBC, defines public history more concretely by the focus on an audience that the NCPH definition implies. She defines public history quite succinctly by what it is *not* in an episode of "UMBC in the Loop: BreakingGround," saying:

> [P]ublic history is not just an act of translation, so it's not just historians telling their stories to a different audience, and it's not just history plus, like it's not just the study of history with additional skills added, but instead public history is really an expression of public service, and I'm training students to really think about how the tools of history can be put to use, not simply for a community, but with them, and imbedded in their needs. So that's what public history is.[66]

What Meringlo is expressing here is a clear distinction between more academic styles of history that "translate" or re-iterate history to their audiences, while public historians seek to serve their audiences in a more in-depth way. Meringlo points to serving a community's needs, and in some way collaborating with them. Podcasts are generally not tied to their audience in a tangible way, such as through programs or activities like other public history projects, but they can still create useful contributions to and collaborate with their audiences. For example, *BackStory* has freely available teaching resources to serve their potential educator community, using their podcast as not only an entertainment source, but also as an educational resource. Also, outside of the two case studies in this thesis, many other styles of podcasts interact with audience feedback submitted by email or social media in their episodes, making a sort of collaborative content for their shows with their audience.

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[66] UMBCtube, "UMBC in the Loop: BreakingGround – Denise Meringlo," YouTube, June 12, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Suk3c4KRcOU&index=7&list=PLnj_pHJHgqkUzC6AnxIvitzDxsclVk32_.

Through thoroughly looking at *BackStory Radio* and *Dan Carlin's Hardcore History* – their methods, intentions, and engagement in regards to the NCPH's and Meringlo's definitions – I would say that these two podcasts are public history. Their methods rely heavily on research and consultation with experts; their intentions are to share the historical knowledge they're passionate about while serving a broad, public audience; and their engagement (though not in a physical space) is widespread, public, and actively creating conversation. While not *all* podcasts can boast the same standards to their work, these case studies can serve as models for effective public history-aimed podcasts.

What comes next though is the question of whether or not that is the best, or only, label for these types of projects. Initially public history was the main focus of this thesis, but throughout this process the question of what defines public history from academic or other forms of history practice came up time and again. In thinking through the dichotomy of academic versus public history, the idea that they are separate, distinct entities became muddled. Academic historians can take on public roles, such as being consulted for public history projects, on radio, in the news, etc. At the same time, public historians can pursue academic roles in being guests in a classroom, or searching out educational aims in more formalized settings. Taking on these different roles from time to time does not diminish historians' "primary" roles, instead breaking down barriers between the two, and possibly allowing for a new form of history practice that facilitates the transitions between these two roles.

Ailsa Barry, when talking about the cycle of a museum visit between the physical space and the web, brings up the idea of the "virtuous circle."[67] This model addresses the steps between the role of web content and physical interaction with a space in a similar way to how the variety of content between academic and public history feed into each other and are cyclical, yet distinct in their own way. What Barry also addresses is the "nebulous space" that exists in between leaving the museum and visiting online content, which is an undefined space that influences the cycle to continue. I believe that between academic and public history content there is also a "nebulous space," or similar influencers that continue the flow between these two that one can attempt to define. One such idea for an influencer is a new and different way of connecting with history, through the aid of History Communicators.

History Communicators

In 2010, Larry Cebula, History Professor at Eastern Washington University called *BackStory* a "model of what academic historians can do when they go public!"[68] Here Cebula is pointing to the academic, scholarly backgrounds of the *BackStory* hosts and their guests, and how it elevates a public history project. What he is also doing with this quote is indicating a firm distinction between academic and public history, which may not necessarily apply to podcasts, and evolving public history methods. In 2015, Jason Steinhauer introduced the idea of History Communicators, which he described as:

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[67]Ailsa Barry, "Creating A Virtuous Circle Between A Museum's On-line And Physical Space," Museums and The Web 2006, published March 01, 2006, https://www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw2006/papers/barry/barry.html.
[68] Larry Cebula, "Don't touch that dial! A review of BackStory Radio," *History@Work*, August 2, 2010, http://ncph.org/history-at-work/dont-touch-that-dial/.

> [L]ike Science Communicators, [History Communicators] will advocate for policy decisions informed by historical research; step beyond the walls of universities and institutions and participate in public debates; author opinion pieces; engage in conversation with policymakers and the public; and work diligently to communicate history in a populist tone that has mass appeal across print, video, and audio. Most important, History Communicators will stand up for history against simplification, misinformation, or attack and explain basic historical concepts that we in the profession take for granted.[69]

Some examples Steinhauer gives of this kind of work from Science Communicators brings up common household names, such as Carl Sagan, Neil de Grasse Tyson, and Bill Nye. All of these individuals have worked to communicate complex scientific ideas into something digestible for the broader public, and they have been quite successful. *Bill Nye, the Science Guy* for example ran from 1993-98 with 100 episodes, and was nominated for 36 Emmy awards, winning 19.[70] That speaks to the popularity of the series, but more substantially, studies have shown that the program had a positive influence on viewers' scientific knowledge.[71] With Science Communication as a model for what History Communication could be, one begins to see a more well-defined blend of public and academic history. It is not an idea outlining that only academic historians should perform public history work, or that public historians should turn solely to academic collaborators, but that there should be a middle ground. History Communicators would be a new generation of historians trained with the skills to, as Steinhauer puts it, communicate not only "*within* public history, but *on* it."[72]

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[69] Jason Steinhauer, "Introducing History Communicators," *History@Work*, January 29, 2015, http://ncph.org/history-at-work/introducing-history-communicators/.

[70] "Awards," *Bill Nye, the Science Guy*, Internet Movie Database, accessed February 28, 2018, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0173528/awards.

[71] Shalom M. Fisch, *Childeren's Learning From Educational Television: Sesame Street and Beyond* (New Jersey: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 86-87.

[72] Jason Steinhauer, "Introducing History Communicators," History@Work, January 29, 2015, http://ncph.org/history-at-work/introducing-history-communicators/.

A point to make before going further though is that Science Communicators, as Steinhauer wrote, are actively involved in policy decisions. This is one of the big ways in which Science Communicators, and Steinhauer's initial idea of History Communicators, differ from public history. Public history has no inherent ties to public policy, yet time and again public history has touched upon politics in some way. For example, Robert Kelley, in discussing early positions for public historians, noted the work of historians within the federal government, which implicitly ties their work to the political realm.[73] Also, *BackStory* host Nathan Connolly, Ph.D., when speaking about his experiences between podcasting and more traditional media outlets commented, "[I]n spite of all the ways in which people...have come to think about history as a quote-unquote objective field there are politics at every stage of the process."[74] From just this, it is easy to understand that public history's relationship with politics is complex at best. Steinhauer's proposal, in bringing together Science and History Communication, implies a more concrete connection to politics, which is a valid topic to dissect, but the purpose of this thesis is not to explore the political implications of public history., For now, I will just say that when talking about History Communication as an idea and an alternate route for public history, I am solely speaking about the methods apart from policy impact.

What I believe Steinhauer is promoting is a mastery of media and public personality combined with academic historical knowledge that is able to communicate history to a general audience. This is where podcasting can fall into the role of a History Communication project. Combining the NCPH's and Denise Meringlo's earlier emphasis on serving an audience or community, combined with Steinhauer's focus on engaging with audiences through media

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[73] Robert Kelley, "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects," *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1978): 16-28.

[74] Appendix Figure 1: Nathan Connolly, Alexandra Serpikov, January 22, 2018.

creates a space for podcasts to fill that can reach broad and diverse audiences in unprecedented

ways. Breaking away from more strictly traditional roles as academic or public historians,

historical podcasts have navigated untested waters to produce very successful results. In

speaking of *BackStory*'s success and his book, Connolly says:

> We're very fortunate that *BackStory* is, right now, one of the top one percent of all
> podcasts that are made in terms of just overall traffic. So we have 90,000 subscribers, we
> have over 100,000 downloads on most of our shows in any given month, and so...that's a
> reach. It's much greater than say, you know, the book that I wrote, that took me ten years
> to write, and that had maybe 1,000 copies that I sold, right, and I love my book,
> but...[podcasting is] just a different level of reach. So...in some ways, combining what
> work goes into...the kind that we write as historians, and the kind of impact one can have
> in, you know, social media, through podcasting, through more journalistic outlets. That to
> me is kind of the rough balance I try to strike.[75]

What Connolly mentions at the end, a sense of balance between more academic work and

more social, journalistic work, gets at the heart of the route that podcasts can forge for public

history projects in the future. The academic side can be converted into a more public realm

through Meringlo's and the NCPH's idea of specifically aiming to serve an audience or

community, while the journalistic tendencies can be examined through Steinhauer's idea of

History Communicators.

What Public History Can Adopt from History Communication

History Communication at its core facilitates the formation of an identity that the public

can build a relationship with, and grow to trust and respect. Looking again at the Science

Communicators, they are knowledgeable individuals who built public personas that are now

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[75] Appendix Figure 1: Nathan Connolly, Alexandra Serpikov, January 22, 2018.

household names. In terms of podcasting, this means audiences becoming attuned to and developing familiarity with the "voice" or host of the content. This is easier to identify with *Hardcore History,* as Dan Carlin is the sole host and thus the identity that listeners recognize as the core of the podcast. It is this formation of engaging personalities as a focus, rather than an anonymous institutional voice, that sets history communication apart from public history.

The value of having a relatable or appealing host at the center of a project, rather than focusing solely on content, is that it allows for a different type of audience building, as well as a wider range of content to present. In terms of audience building, personalities can serve as a more trustworthy entity than an anonymous institution or organization. Walter Cronkite for example, once regarded as the most trusted man in America, was a journalist and news anchor for CBS who became a household name for his style and manner of reporting.[76] Douglas Brinkley, historian and author of "Cronkite," also attributed much of Cronkite's success to being "able to seem comfortable and real," which is often how podcast hosts come across as they are recording on their own terms.[77]

This does not mean that anyone with an appealing personality is trustworthy though. Much like how Cronkite in part gained legitimacy through his recognition by a trusted institution like CBS, online personalities should retain some source of credibility. The *BackStory* hosts, for example, are all senior academics in their chosen areas of study, while Carlin holds an undergraduate degree in History. Although at different levels of academia, the hosts between the

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[76] Richard Galant, "The most trusted man in America," *Cable News Network,* June 5, 2012, http://www.cnn.com/2012/06/05/opinion/brinkley-walter-cronkite/index.html.
[77] Richard Galant, "The most trusted man in America," *Cable News Network,* June 5, 2012, http://www.cnn.com/2012/06/05/opinion/brinkley-walter-cronkite/index.html.

two podcasts do rely in part on their educational background as a source of credibility for their current work.

An important point to make is that while using an engaging personality to cultivate audiences is a valid method, there must be care taken to relate the credibility of the host to the content. In the case of history-themed podcasts, one must take extra care to have reliable and knowledgeable hosts; where for say a comedy or talk show style podcast, the pressure for a sort of academic credibility is lessened. What I am singling out of History Communication though, is that an engaging personality may seem more trustworthy in that it does not have to take an anonymous or detached stance like many institutions must, but that does not implicitly mean that the host is factually trustworthy.

In terms of having a wide range of content to present, the departure from being tied to an organizational mission by way of an independent host or set of hosts allows for less restrictiveness. Dan Carlin is perhaps a more fitting example of this as a truly independent content creator in the sense that he will remain the sole presenter, but it is entirely up to his discretion what topics he chooses to cover on *Hardcore History*. Carlin has complete authority and creative control over *Hardcore* History, and has no explicit mission to map his content to, allowing for broader opportunities for topics. This is in contrast to an institution such as the Canadian War Museum[78] or Bata Shoe Museum,[79] which have missions that they must tie their public work into, restricting the types of subjects they can explore. *BackStory* also has a mission that it adheres to in a way that *Hardcore History* does not. The fact that podcasts generally have

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[78] "Home," Canadian War Museum, accessed April 4, 2018, https://www.warmuseum.ca/.
[79] "Home," Bata Shoe Museum, accessed April 4, 2018, http://www.batashoemuseum.ca/.

more freedom in their subject matter aids in attracting more diverse audiences as they can present subjects that appeal to wider groups of individuals.

Overall, podcasts and public history can take from History Communication the idea of creating more relatable and recognizable identities. These identities, or personalities, act as more casual gateways to history that can appeal to wider audiences and seem less intimidating than a formal institutional identity.

So What is the "Nebulous Space"?

Throughout this thesis I have been examining the role of podcasts as a form of public history, which has led me to questions about the distinctions between different "modes" of history or "roles" for historians. It is in those further reaching questions that the "nebulous space" appears to exist, asking what if something doesn't fall into these two neat(ish) categories? Although History Communication creates a nice niche for podcasts to relate to, it may not be the catchall answer for the intersections between academic and public history. Podcasts can most certainly identify with positive characteristics of History Communication that public history can learn from, but it still does not define how these two roles interact with each other.

To take from the earlier example of Walter Cronkite, Dan Carlin's journalistic roots, and remarks by Nathan Connolly, there may be another consideration for an influencer—journalism. Cronkite and Carlin show how influential journalistic methods combined with appealing performance can be, through the pairs' successful history in news and broadcast journalism. Connolly also remarked about the journalistic nature of *BackStory* in saying, "if we find a theme

or two that can connect to what may have happened to emerge during the news cycle of a given week, we try to at least make some kind of connection to that as well. So it really is a balance, between more journalistic considerations and deeper, historical...arguments."[80] Journalism, as it can be applied to history, facilitates the more storyteller-like aspects that *BackStory* and *Hardcore History* are known and revered for.[81]

Another idea for this "nebulous space" is alternative public history, as explored by Shakti Castro, Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator for BOOM!Health and a member of the NCPH Diversity and Inclusion Task Force. Castro explains alternative public history as "a way to consider history and engage with the public outside the scope of museums and historic spaces."[82] Castro herself exemplifies this through her work outside of the traditional "field" of public history at the BOOM!Health harm reduction center in the South Bronx. She explains that although her work is not typically what would be considered public history, she still uses her public history skills "to make information available and accessible to [their] participants, and help represent them and the work done [there] to the wider public."[83] What Castro seems to be relating is a sense of adaptability and transference between her more formal

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[80] I'd also like to point out that although Connolly mentions public history and journalism throughout our interview, he more prominently refers to his work as digital humanities; Appendix Figure 1: Nathan Connolly, Alexandra Serpikov, January 22, 2018.

[81] I'd like to note that I've only scratched the surface when it comes to history-themed or storytelling podcasts. In an earlier note, I mention how I originally had five case studies, including *The Fall of Rome Podcast, The Memory Palace,* and *More Perfect.* There are so many different history-themed podcasts, and a variety of storytelling podcasts that either directly or indirectly share history (I mean every story took place in someone's history). I simply use *BackStory Radio* and *Dan Carlin's Hardcore History* as successful models of history-themed podcasts, not as the only ones that exist.

[82] Shakti Castro, "Alternative Public History: What We Mean When We Say 'The Field'," *Public History News* 38, no. 1 (December 2017): 8-9.

[83] Shakti Castro, "Alternative Public History: What We Mean When We Say 'The Field'," *Public History News* 38, no. 1 (December 2017): 8-9.

public history skills and a wider application in other projects. Podcasts also fit into this idea, as a different landscape to adapt public history tools into.

Although journalism and alternative public history come closer to a new distinction in how podcasts function as, and in their own way, transform public history, they aren't quite right either. From this thesis I do not believe I'll be able to find a true answer, if there is one, to how academic and public history overlap, intersect, and flow into one another. Podcasting, which I do believe *can* fall under public history, provides a great case study for how academic and public history can be combined to create a new and different type of history outlet. Podcasting overlaps with many aspect of public history, but it's format inherently allows for new possibilities, such as being played and re-played multiple times, allowing podcasting a performative aspect that public history does not generally allow for. Podcasting also overlaps with academic history in its approach to research, yet differs in its audience and accessibility. Distinctions between academic and public history overlap time and again, but that may just be the nature of the way we have defined and evolved the practice of studying and sharing history over the last few hundred years.

Going forward, following the method of podcasting, maybe the space seated between academic and public history is the idea of storytelling. Storytelling crosses between the factual and investigative nature of academic history and the accessible and entertaining nature of public history. In essence then, all historians are storytellers, and podcasting provides a platform where stories can be told in new and engaging ways for generations to come.

1. Figure 1, Interview with Nathan Connolly from *BackStory Radio*

Recorded Phone Interview with Dr. Nathan Connolly

January 22, 2018 | 1:57 PM | 18:35 min duration

Note: Not transcribed: "mhm" or affirmative sounds that overlapped speaking

Ringing

NC: Hello?

AS: Hi, is this Dr. Connolly?

NC: ah, yes it is.

AS: Hi, this is Alexandra, I'm so sorry for the confusion

NC: Oh, no, please, I didn't-I didn't respond to your last email, so you were very respectful in actually not calling, but I should've let you know, please call so [laughing] I was just in the middle of something, um, how are you?

AS: Good, thank you, how are you?

NC: I'm great, I'm great, happy to help

AS: Thank you, um, before we start I just wanted to ask, do you mind if I record this call? Just so I can transcribe it later?

NC: No, of course, that's tot-that's totally fine, no problem at all

AS: Awesome, then I guess we should just jump right in! Um-

NC: Alright

AS: So, I looked a bit at your background-educational history-um, all the stuff you've been doing, I was wondering if you could kind of tell me what, uh, first attracted you to the history field?

NC: Um, So I was, uh, somebody who was very much interested-and, and still is very much interested in, um, stories and so, I mean, history I guess you could say is my way into non-fiction writing. Which basically is what I consider myself, um, a practitioner in. And so, for me, um, there's something about capturing the human experience, capturing the complexity of people's decisions, um, the kind of, um, evocative worlds that they belong to and try and capture those through writing, and so it-it has a lot to do with the imagination that gets triggered when you think about historical figures, events, documents, and there's always been this kind of magic in that for me. So that's what really drew me in to the field and has

kept me trying to push, you know, the envelope in different ways with, y'know, podcasting or digital humanities work or just y'know, writing books and such. So, yeah.

AS: Wow, a very romantic idea of it [*laughter*] Um, so, you mentioned your podcast, which is obviously what my thesis is more about, um-

NC: Sure

AS: So, I-I know *BackStory Radio* started in about 2008, but you didn't join until about 2017, is that correct?

NC: Correct, Correct, last-last-last calendar year was first, my first year on the podcast and it had been going for about 8 years with Ed Ayers, Peter Onuf, and, um, Brian Balogh, and when Peter retired, it-they looked to kind of change, update, the format of the show by adding me and Joanne Freeman from Yale.

AS: Mmhm, and, um, wh-what made you decide to join onto the project?

NC: Um, I think part of it was wanting to continue to grow as a communicator, and as somebody who really does believe, um, that history should, as often as it can, try to advance, y'know, popular consciousness about the past. I think, y'know, I-I have the benefit of-of being in a place where, um, y'know I get paid to basically do research, um, but then there's a big disconnect between the research breakthroughs that we make in the universities and what people actually believe about how things happened, and so trying to close that gap is, as far as I can-can, y'know, see, really part of our responsibility as creators of knowledge. I-I'm still very much invested in creating new knowledge but-but it is very strange to think about how many steps one has to take from the archive to, schoolyard story, or the bedtime story that people come to tell about how we got to a point, so-so I feel that a lot of my work is about trying to operate and be a part of as many different parts of that, uh, process of assimilating information into the general consciousness. Both creating new knowledge at the level of the source but also then trying, through the podcast, and through various media appearances, to really try and change the popular narrative about things that we, y'know, should very much know already, y'know?

AS: Yeah, I, uh, I did a little peeking at your [*laugh*] Johns Hopkins biography and I did see that you do a lot of, um, aside from your scholarly publishing work, um, in public debates and doing commentary for the New York Times and such, um, do you find that there's a noticeable difference between your outreach, and what you do with the podcast versus, um, I guess the other public history outlets you've used? Um-[if there's?]

NC: I do, I do-I mean, y'know, one of the things thats become most clear to me over the last year, um, has been that there is, uh, in spite of all the ways in which people have-have come to think about history as a quote-unquote objective field there are politics at every stage of the process, and-and so as somebody who's done podcasting but also, y'know, through *BackStory* we do pretty regular appearances on *Here and Now* on WBUR in Boston, um, and you know, there's a liberal take in the mainstream media, that we're supposed to for instance presume that the country, um, is built on equality and not slavery and racism, or that presumes that elected officials are operating with the best interests of the country in mind, or that presumes that institutions are going to be uncorrupted by individual agendas, because they are y'know, kind of fashioned in the mind of our founding fathers, right? So there are all these kind of [big-

something?] assumptions about how American institutions work, and actual engagement with the documented history of the country actually, complicates, right? And-and [runs afoul of?] and so the biggest kind of work I see myself engaged in is really trying to, um, change the way that we think about, um, our institutions and our kind of general narrative, and realize actually, that by having the more complicated position, relative to the past, we're not somehow unpatriotic, or y'know, undermining the integrity of, say, the country, or y'know our collective experiment in democracy, but that we are in fact making a truer story, and giving people more avenues for hope, and-a more accurate sense of how possibilities is open and closed, um, and really you know, hopefully providing a way for people to feel a much greater sense of participation in their communities, and in their politics and in their, y'know, institutions, um, I mean I think that the history that we have been uncovering as a group of scholars-y'know, working American historians, for a very long time is that one, future is never- the past and the future are never set, um, and that much about the past really should not be forgotten because it's very useful for how we come to imagine ourselves in our-in our current moment, so, um that's the work that I really am, um, committed to.

AS: Yeah, um, it sounds wonderful, um, you mentioned, uh, when you were speaking about participation, um, in I guess in various communities, I was wondering if you feel, with the podcasting, that there is a sort of participative element from viewers, or from listeners I should say, um, I know that some of the podcasts, um, do involve questions from audience callers, I just wonder, um, how you kind of, um, I guess deal with responses, or communication with the fan base, or with the listeners?

NC: Yeah, so, y'know, unfortunately we don't have the benefit of being an actual like, call-in show, where we could kind of catch, you know, people on the fly, and I think we've almost drawn down some of the effort to make it feel like a more conventional radio show, um, and so we tend to engage our listeners by email, or when they you know comment on the web page or on you know, our facebook stream. We have a really good media editor, Diana Williams, who is really in charge of our public outreach and, uh, has done a phenomenal job of managing, you know, the twitter presence and the facebook presence, so by and large it's actually through social media that we engage our listeners now, and not so much on the air, I mean there is the occasional of bringing on somebody we'll have a kind of pre-recorded conversation with, and then we'll edit it in such a way that allows for it to be a part of the podcast, but-but generally, you know, we find ourselves responding to individual listeners. And, you know, some of it is about basic fact checking, some of it is-is about bibliography, they'll want to know where to find more information, um, and, y'know, it-its actually been uniformly positive in the sense that we don't have kind of trolls who are coming into our, y'know, inboxes and just trying to uh, y'know, cause trouble. So-so-so the good thing is that people are genuinely kind of good-faith listeners, and I think it allows us to feel, you know, really invested, um, in a show that we are um really happy with. And from the production value, in terms of the seriousness the producers bring to it and you know, the-I think the engagement with the listeners is generally affirming, to an oth- what's already a positive experience.

AS: Mhm, yeah, um, you mentioned the production of the podcast itself, um, I was wondering if you could just enlighten me about the process, um, I guess you go through to kind of create an episode? I mean, how do you choose a topic, or what to research or highlight? Um, the kind of how you get to the-the final product I guess?

NC, *Overlapping:* Sure, sure

NC: Sure, Sure, Sure, so you know a team of, um, senior and-and assistant producers meet at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities in Charlottesville, and, y'know, they will basically come up with a calendar of, y'know, more highly produced shows, like documentary style shows and then shows that will be much more responsive to the news cycle, so there tends to be a kind of balance between programs that will take sometimes as much as nine weeks to produce, in total, um, when we're talking about, y'know, cultivating um, guests and figuring out you know, sound effects, and y'know thinking through, y'know, plotlines and all of that. And then other shows that we'll do that are pretty much y'know, news-news kind of hits over the weekend, we decide how we're gonna respond as historians on Monday, in time for something to then drop on Friday. Th-There's really two different kind of shows that we do, bu-but by and large, on the more heavily produced shows, it tends to be one host, working in conjunction with one producer to kind of figure out the themes that we want to highlight, then we'll arrive at some names of people to interview, there'll be a pre-interview with our producers followed by an interview with one of the host which will then again be recorded, um, and then, y'know the engineers decide kind of what makes most sense at the level of length, and y'know what resources to add to that particular interview, sound effects and such. Um, and then we give the other hosts, usually the two to three other hosts on the show a listen to what's been done already on that Monday, they get to- or sometimes on a Thursday the week before, and they get a chance to kind of, respond to that, have a kind of informal riff, and then there'll also be a script that, the producers are, y'know, working on. So it-it's a very, and again, this is all for one show, right, so it's a very labour intensive process. I mean we have as many as nine people on staff at any given time, working, on a single show. Um, and it-it really does require that level of investment, because you know, there are advertisements that have to be procured, and you know, read, and copied, and have to be edited and redone, um, and y'know they really are working up until the last minute but, you know, to their credit, they release the show like clockwork the Friday of every single week. Um, which I always think is so, really impressive. So, Um, but it-it tends to be a-a process where there's a kind of slow build in the beginning about what makes the most sense, just from the level of general, public knowledge and what can be advanced, um, and then by the time we get to the end of the production schedule, if we find a theme or two that can connect to what may have happened to emerge during the news cycle of a given week, we try to at least make some kind of connection to that as well. So it really is a balance, between more journalistic considerations and deeper, historical, um, arguments.

AS: Yeah, Wow, I-uh-I'm a big podcast listener myself, um, hence why I'm doing this thesis, so I always do wonder how that background goes, I mean it sounds so...it just sounds so intensive, I wonder how you, I mean, balance it with everything else.

Laughter

NC: Yeah, I mean it's, that's been the biggest challenge for me, I've been on sabbatical this year, and, you know, podcasts can take anywhere between, you know, 12 to 14 hours a week, especially if we have, you know, other appearances on public radio in the same week, and so thats, y'know it's a trade off, it's a trade off. I mean, part of it again is to make a calculation about, you know, how much of-of an impact you want to make as a scholar between what we write and y'know our public work. Um, and, y'know it's also I think true that people who sometimes can hear us on *BackStory* or on, y'know, public radio stations

would then be driven to our scholarship so that's kind of a secondary benefit, right, that they may be more inclined to read our work, otherwise they wouldn't have encountered us, you know? So -*cough*- for me it's a calculation. I could always work more on my-my-my written projects, um but I-but I do like when we have a finished product, I like the fact that there's a very clean division of labour, and, y'know, as collaborative efforts go sometimes people can step on each other or they can be a lack of clarity on who's supposed to be doing what, but with this experience podcasting I mean it's been extraordinarily crystal clear about y'know time tables, about workflow, and we have such a good sense of chemistry as a group that it really has made this a-a wonderful experience at the level of process, y'know, again it is a time demand but it's a genuinely enjoyable experience.

AS: It's a labour, but a labour of love.

NC: Yeah, you could say that, you could say that

AS: Yeah, um, I see that we are coming up a little closer to two o'clock, so if I can just ask, um, one last question, um-

NC: Sure

AS: with the podcasting, I'm just wondering, you just mentioned, y'know, you like-you obviously like podcasting and the process that goes behind it, um, and you've also kind of got that exposure to people who may seek out your other work, um, but I really just wonder your, like ultimately your motivations behind podcasting, um, is it to, you know, spread knowledge? Is it just something, um, you know you work a lot in academia so then this is something outside that you get to do, and is it-is it for fun, um just kind of, what drives you to do it?

NC: Right, yeah, yeah yeah yeah, um, well I think it's always, um, I think, incumbent, upon scholars to try to, um, think about their role at a given moment in time when they live. So, so for me I see-I see my role as two-fold, I-I see it as one of doing detective work, doing discovery and uncovering new material and asking new questions, um, but I also see it as, you know, really being keyed into the stories that we tell ourselves, about ourselves. And, and and trying whenever I have an opportunity to try to, um, bring to bear on those stories the historical record. Um, because there's a lot of myth-making that goes on, a lot of you know stories, I mean when you think for instance about y'know the, the president's statements about Haiti, and the countries of Africa and El Salvador, right, the previous week, and that, that notion, that-that-that story about who these countries are, who they [send?], that's a historical [argument?], right, and that's one that's really uninformed in his case and it's a story that is widely held by many of the people that the president, you know, purports to represent, and so that's an opportunity, right? To say, ok, what is it about the history of African nations, the history of Haiti, the history of Central America that needs to be brought to light for the general American person? You know, listener, viewer, reader, um, and you know, what can we do as historians to engage those narratives and debates and-and do it from a deep well of historical knowledge, and so I see podcasting as a way to at least do some of that work. Obviously, writing Op-eds is another way, writing a piece, you know, long-form journalism for like *The Atlantic* or something is another way that people try to do this, and so for me podcasting has proven to be a good way, at least in the short-term to, to build my skills as a communicator but also to try to y'know, impact the public conversation. We're very fortunate that *BackStory* is, right now, one of the top one percent of

all podcasts that are made, in terms of just overall traffic, so we have, 90,000 subscribers, we have over 100,000 downloads on most of our shows in any given month, and so that's-that's a reach. It's much greater than say, you know, the book that I wrote, that took me ten years to write, and that had maybe 1,000 copies copies that I sold, right, and I love my book, but I [*indistinguishable*] have been able to accomplish, but it's just a different level of reach. So, so in some ways, combining what work goes into a kind of y'know, monograph, the kind that we write as historians, and the kind of impact one can have in, you know, social media, through podcasting, through more journalistic outlets. That to me is kind of the rough balance I try to strike. And even if I decide not to do podcasting beyond a couple, or a few years, I-I really value the experience of, of learning how to, again, keep the language concise, to find ways to frame compelling stories, and I think those are skills that I think any professional historian should try to develop and cultivate.

AS: Mhm, wow, well you have definitely given me a lot to think about, um, I want to thank you for, for letting me speak with you-

NC: no, no problem

AS: this is definitely going to help my work and push it forward, um, I guess thank you

NC, *Overlapping:* Great, great-great-great

NC: And give my regards to professor Carroll, thank you

AS: I will

NC: Ok then, goodbye
AS: Thank you very much, buh-bye

2. **Table 1, Episode information, *Hardcore History*, accessed January 29, 2018**

#	Show Number	Show Title	Release Date	Length (hour:min:sec)
1	50	Blueprint for Armageddon I	10/30/2013	3:07:20
2	51	Blueprint for Armageddon II	01/30/2014	3:20:29
3	52	Blueprint for Armageddon III	04/24/2014	3:54:08
4	53	Blueprint for Armageddon IV	08/17/2014	3:55:51
5	54	Blueprint for Armageddon V	12/29/2014	4:29:57
6	55	Blueprint for Armageddon VI	05/06/2015	4:16:43
7	56	Kings of Kings	10/28/2015	3:32:40
8	57	Kings of Kings II	03/20/2016	4:15:42
9	58	Kings of Kings III	08/07/2016	5:00:30
10	59	(Blitz) The Destroyer of Worlds	01/24/2017	5:49:32
11	60	The Celtic Holocaust	08/09/2017	5:59:51
12	61	(Blitz) Painfotainment	01/27/2018	4:31:01
Total				**52:13:44**

3. Table 2, *All That Glitters?* Episode segment & host breakdown, accessed January 31, 2018

Episode:	All That Glitters?: Legacies of the California Gold Rush	
Air date:	January 19, 2018	
Segments:	Title:	Guest:
1	Shipshape and Frisco Fashion	Jim Delgado; Maritime Archaeologist
2	The Argonauts	H.W. Brands; Historian
3	Golden Ticket	None; main hosts only
4	Roaring Camp	Susan Lee Johnson; Historian
5	There for the Taking	Maythee Rojas; Scholar
6	'The Interest of the White Man Demands their Extinction'	Benjamin Madley; Historian

4. Table 3, Case Study Attributes, as of January 2018

Case Studies		
Research categories	*BackStory Radio*	*Dan Carlin's Hardcore History*
Basics		
Hosts	- Ed Ayers - Brian Balough - Nathan Connolly - Joanne Freeman - Peter Onuf (former host)	Dan Carlin
Team	- Nina Earnest, Associate Producer - Emily Gadek, Associate Producer - Melissa Gismondi, Assistant Digital Editor/Marketing & Development Associate - Ramona Martinez, Associate Producer - Brigid McCarthy, Senior Editor - Jamal Millner, Technical Director - Joseph Thompson, Researcher - Diana Williams, Digital Editor & Strategist	- Ben Neb (potentially ficticious), Producer - Nick (no last name given), Web Designer
Founding	2008, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (VFH)	2005, Independent (Orator LLC., Carlin's own company)
Data		
Episodes	215	61
Average Length (based off most recent 12 episodes as of 02/22/2018)	Approximately 00:46:08 (forty-six minutes, eight seconds)	Approximately 4:20:00 (four hours, twenty minutes)
Production Time (for one episode)	Approximately 1 – 9 weeks (one to nine weeks)	Approximately 4 – 7 months (four to seven months)
Engagement	Facebook	Facebook

Platforms	• Instagram • Tumblr • Personal Website	• Personal Website
Methods of Delivery		
Style of Podcast	More common, post-edit driven, short/curated format	More unique, one-take, long-format, theater of the mind
Driving Presenters	Mix of guest & main hosts	Main host only for main shows, though "addendum" shows can feature a guest host
Intentions		
Aims	Educational	Impassioned sharing
Framing	Historical narratives explored as they are known, and re-situated within a contemporary lens	Historical narratives explored as they are known, passionate retelling of events, tangents into related topics/questions
Content Creation Sources	Mix of experts, research, and existing background knowledge	Existing background knowledge, research

5. Table 4, Public History and Podcast Overlap

Elements of Public History		
	Public History	Podcasts *(BackStory Radio* and *Hardcore History)*
Who produces?	Academics, historians, museum professionals, community activists, government historians, etc. (all usually share some sort of scholarly background)	Anyone; in *BackStory Radio*'s case it is senior academics, and for *Hardcore History,* Carlin has an undergraduate history degree. Podcasts can be created by anyone though, including journalists, comedians, social media influencers, authors, everyday people, and so on.
Training required?	Typically it is expected that you have an academic background, the NCPH's website lists graduate and undergraduate programs concerning public history training	No training required outside of learning how to physically produce the podcast. This does not mean that people do not have training in their given subject, only that for podcasting it is not required.
Audience?	General public, local and international, on and offline	General public, local and international, on and offline
Specialized?	Multidisciplinary	Multidisciplinary
Collaborative?	Yes, between academics and general public	Yes, between academics and general public
Intentions?	Educational or awareness-raising, serving specific communities and audiences	Educational, awareness-raising, passionate sharing, serving specific communities and audiences

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