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"My City Need' Something": Making Safe Inner City Green Spaces in Philadelphia's Hunting Park

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Introduction

My city need something

We need it real bad

I'm tired of yellow tape

So tired of teddy bears

*

I swear my city need a better way.

And I don't think there's nothing left to say

I wrote this song

Cuz I know just how it feels

To lose somebody you love

And that's real

*

I swear we need something but I don't know what it is . . .

-"My City Need Something" by PnB Rock

Throughout my teenage years in Philadelphia during the 1980s, and even up until I became a teacher at Thomas Edison High School, Hunting Park always had a reputation as a dangerous place, even to

neighborhood folk and those who frequented the avenue through it. There had been muggings and murders, and it was rumored to be especially infested with drug dealers once the Crack epidemic hit. However, a few short years ago in 2009, professional baseball player Ryan Howard and tennis pioneer Billie Jean King decided, along with a host of community partners, that it was worth a $20 million investment. So even while all of the 11th grade students at nearby Thomas Edison may not know exactly what they want when they see the open green space eight blocks from the school, and probably had no input on its revitalization, it seems as though every one of them will enjoy the 87-acre public park for some reason.

Nonetheless, Hunting Park's history is a small segment of the larger 500-acre agricultural estate named "Stenton" belonging to William Penn's secretary James Logan. Bequeathed to Logan as a reward for his service, and subsequently to Logan's son, the land has been redesigned, sold off in part, transformed, and otherwise changed many, many times over its over 225-year history. Today the park attempts to be more than just a thoroughfare from one neighborhood to another, instead it is a space my students play in and use for other forms of recreation, along with countless neighbors in Juniata Park neighborhood who have a stake in maintaining it. Can a park as integrated with Philadelphia's complex historical roots adapt to an evolving political climate with economic constraints, a transitioning population, immediate needs and new concerns, and remain just as hospitable to the community for whom its recent renovations claim a benefit? I think it can, like many public parks in Philadelphia's system of green spaces, but we have to ask each and every time what decisions were made to change the park and by whom? In remodeling Hunting park this time, as well as in past renovations, the benefits can be plentiful, but where the public is concerned, and in particular, public funds, there always seems to be some controversy. In Hunting Park we can see a parallel between larger issues of public use with decision making and consensus building that challenge students of the process to ask important questions about society and how we can learn to live together through the sometimes complicated realm of democracy that is still being worked out on a local and even a grand scale.

The public history project in this curriculum unit will allow students a structure within which to explore crucial questions in the development of the built environment so that they may serve as tomorrow's leaders and decision-makers when it comes to public policy and citizen-engagement. We will learn to participate with the development of this park as public historians in order to share in its stewardship as well as in its enjoyment, using the language of Public Historians to express the process of doing so articulately and succinctly through a close reading of political, social, and environmental studies, and culminating in an art and poetry performance project that addresses aspects of the results of our research and close readings.

Rationale

At Thomas Alva Edison High School & John C. Fareira Skills Center, between Front Street and American, Hunting Park Avenue and Luzerne Street, 96% of the students qualify for the U.S. government's free lunch program, so we all get one, and breakfast, too; 28.5% receive Special Education services in the form of Individual Education Plans and 29.1% are English Language Learners; however, the dominant factor with which my students identify above all else is their ethnicity: .7% identify as Asian, .9% as White; 23.6% as African American, and a majority 74.1% as Latino.[1]

At Edison, students are primarily Puerto Rican; some are also from the Dominican Republic; and another quarter African American; all our students, however, are inner city kids living predominantly below the poverty

line, and they bond in conventional ways: associations through the neighborhoods from where they live, recreational activities including sports teams and clubs, and fashion. What is there to do, though, when the school hasn't enough money to fund clubs and extensive extra-curricular activities for the nearly 1400 students and the school district is underfunded to the tune of $190 million?

When I began graduate school in 1999 I tutored English Language Learners inside Edison's bilingual library. Once hired as a teacher in the School District, I taught only a mile away on the other side of Roosevelt Boulevard at Olney High School, a rival public school that shared siblings and neighbors with kids at Edison; we also shared nearby Hunting Park. Ten years on the persistently dangerous list of high schools before I even set foot through the main door, my solution was to take my kids out of the building on field trips as often as possible; while our home base was the school, we tried to get as far away as we could from it. Now back at Edison, similar problems such as overcrowded and dangerous hallways seem so distracting that the effort to arrange off-campus trips gets lost in the shuffle. In this unit, however, we utilize the support of our Principal, a former teacher and Assistant Principal at Edison, to explore the neighborhood, imagining ways that engaging with the neighborhood's past can inform ways to make our own improvements. What can my students see that I and other adults have missed? What do students know that we do not? In this unit, students will learn about the history of the public place in order to enrich their spirit of inquiry, motivate them to perform independent research, and stimulate them to contribute to the built environment, in order to give our city something that it needs.

Objectives

Enduring Understandings

I believe in the life long learning process; my students at Edison (or anywhere for that matter) should not graduate from our school in order to "get out of the ghetto" and never return. Instead, I believe that those who learn anything must recognize the responsibility to give back to the community that taught it to them. Even though we begin in North Philadelphia, students will learn processes that will endure no matter where they go; in other words, "Act locally, think globally", as the 1960s activist Abbie Hoffman once said. Students in this unit should understand that while the topography may change wherever they go, their approach to learning can be the same: keep an open mind, imagine what other points of view there may be, and cooperate with others to learn more than you can learn alone. A Public History study, and public historians generally, attempt to present history for community dialogue, inspire a nuanced conversation which has the potential to raise awareness of the collective decisions we make about our environment, and provoke discussion of how we contextualize lessons in that communal space called our mutual history. Public historians believe that "history and historical-cultural memory matter in the way people go about their day-to-day lives".[2]

Content Objectives/Assessments

I believe writing is thinking made real; it's where the rubber meets the road. Nonetheless, there is a lot of preparation that goes into a well-written idea, an articulate point of view, a clear expression of belief or a persuasive argument. As an English teacher in the state of Pennsylvania I am bound by a professional obligation to meet the expectations of the PA Common Core State Standards where it indicates that we should "Analyze the interaction and development of a complex set of ideas...over the course of a text (...in an

informational text: see the Appendix of this unit for more specific details and links). Furthermore, while my students in 11th grade English Language Arts are not subjected to Benchmark tests or Keystone State Exams, I endeavor to prepare them for college level thinking, reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Each teacher must make an effort to cultivate in his or her students a scholarly ability to accomplish much of our work through a collaborative process, in addition to independent work, and this unit should engender in all students a sincere ability to do so.

Our main graduation requirement at Edison HS is that students engage in an authentic research project. This expectation has traditionally taken the form of a 5-10 page cross-curricular essay on a topic of each student chooses for him/herself; the unit presented here can be an excellent introduction to exploring research methods as they pertain to any content aspect of a local park environment, and I attempt to provide the framework of public history as an organizational approach that encompasses a variety of learning styles.

Essential Questions

How can we reframe questions to see our mutual history in new ways? How have certain voices been left out of the narrative around what we as a human society have built in our environment? How can we present history to an audience outside of the academy, and even outside of our classroom? These essential questions provide necessary guidelines to inquiry, as well as to the production of history that is conscientious of the complexity o historical writing, as well as to a nuanced perspective on how it can be shared with others.

The Historical Context: Hunting Park

As an English teacher with a social conscience, and as a citizen who has lived in Philadelphia for forty-five years, I've come to believe that the parks are a fundamental asset to our individual and community well being. Now there seems to be an effort to validate and quantify that assumption. While Philadelphia has the largest inner-city park system in the world, and I have always enjoyed it for running, walking my various dogs over the years, and escaping the congestion of my neighborhood, I see a need to enhance the value others might place in the parks as well, in order to sustain their public space for generations to come. I'm getting older, and the more I teach, the more I see truth in the proverb "We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children". Perhaps the recent appreciation I've made of life's temporal nature through a near-death bicycle accident in one of the parks has allowed me to embrace the notion that appearances are temporary, and Hunting Park has taken on many different topographical appearances over time. In a public history project, students must learn an appreciation for the history of the city's effort to maintain these parks, as well as examine why they should invest their time and interest into critical analysis of the city's park development and maintenance over the course of their own lifetimes. What we inherit, be it an object, a tradition, a name, a language or a place, is to be questioned and evaluated, but also cherished and respected, even if it is let go.

Up until my research here, I had crossed "Hunting Park" on its avenue by the same name as though it were mainly a scenic thoroughfare, and in fact it is one: Hunting Park Avenue has been frequently trafficked territory for many citizens coming from Northeast Philadelphia all the way West to where it ends at the Schuylkill River (its "Terminus") or begins, if you are heading away from the river and its "Impetus" where it flows towards the center city of Philadelphia. While it has a direct line to the Schuylkill one way, in the other

direction Hunting Park Avenue heads East all the way towards Philadelphia's other liquid thruway: the wider and more commercially trafficked Delaware River. The corridor from one river to the other has never developed into the commercial region to which it aspired when Tastykake's grand factory at Fox Street and Hunting Park Avenue opened in 1914[3] and ran six days a week, 24 hours a day and employed nearly 500 working class folks in filling the nation's dentists offices with patients and the immediate neighborhood with a delicious vapor that told me which nights they were baking their famous artificially-flavored and preserved pastries. Due to the presence of an increasing number of residents all the way from river to river, the park has been a constant source of discussion with the people who surround it: Is it safe, or unsafe? What's in there? How can I use it? What is its future? Students can discover a lot of information to appreciate forced and voluntary cohabitation between various cultural groups by studying a park that parallels larger trends in American history.

The Public Past

The land which became Hunting Park was a small parcel within the Stenton Estate, a 500 acre agricultural holding belonging to the Logan family, after which the Logan neighborhood on the opposite side of Roosevelt Boulevard is named. George Logan, a doctor who lived from 1758-1821, was grandson to James Logan (1674-1751), the secretary to Pennsylvania's founder William Penn.[4] "Pennsylvania" means quite literally "Penn's Woods" and while part of what became the city of Philadelphia had been an earlier Dutch settlement, much was unchanged woods by European standards. The natural landscape had been altered in some spaces by Native people's agricultural planning, and George Logan set about actively farming Stenton, though bought and sold off various pieces as parcels when he needed a favor or fresh influx of capital. George Logan hired laborers and local craftsmen to build the "Logan House" in the 1790s, which sits near Old York Road and Hunting Park Avenue today. With its origin as a nobleman's estate, the land it sits upon marked a long tradition of giving land when money was in short supply, or even because the currency varied from region to region. While the built environment of the park has evolved since then, the house seems to have been a more or less permanent fixture in the area. Logan the grandson sold the remaining plot, located within what is still called the "Northern Liberties" district, and the remaining plot became the Hunting Park Horse Racing course in 1808. The racecourse remained active until betting on horse racing was outlawed in Philadelphia in 1854.[5]

Slaves were in all likelihood housed on the Stenton Estate, since "manumission", or granting freedom to all slaves came only gradually in the late 18th to early 19th century. Slavery took root in Pennsylvania much as it had in New York and Virginia, but the record of black slave labor has been left out of the narrative about Hunting Park, and the Stenton Estate earlier; in fact "Laws governing unfree labor structured social hierarchy in colonial Pennsylvania, and as a consequence slaves and indentured servants occupied the lowest rungs."[6] I imagine the neighborhood people surrounding Hunting Park, composed largely of black and Latino citizens, would be intrigued to learn of this broader story to the historical record. At Independence National Historic Park, across from the liberty bell in the center of Philadelphia's booming historical tourist industry, the discovery of President George Washington's slave quarters became an important way that marginalized groups were drawn to historical study at that attraction, and presented a much more nuanced narrative around American leadership of the time.

The primary focus at Hunting Park over the course of its lifetime has been recreational activity, not historical study, but it is a complex story of land use, both private and public. In 1854 the Pennsylvania General Assembly consolidated all the remaining townships, districts, and boroughs within the Philadelphia County, including the Northern Liberties district adjacent to what can simply be called Northeast Philadelphia. The

Walnut, Fisher, Lovering, and Cope families purchased the property in a real estate venture for nearby land and presented it to the City of Philadelphia as an official public park;[7] Philadelphia City Council accepted the proposal in 1855, according to city records, and William Saunders, a historically significant horticulturist and garden planner for other reasons, who lived from 1822-1900, laid out Hunting Park as it stands today in his 1858 design.[8] In 1871, by another act of the Pennsylvania Assembly, the increasingly expansive "Fairmount Park Commission" acquired vast swaths of the area surrounding the city's public watershed; the Commission assumed responsibility for Hunting Park, among other open green spaces. The several landowning families who collectively donated Hunting Park unloaded a burdensome source of tax responsibility for themselves upon a larger, government entity and began the process of making parks public to all social classes in the city. What had once been a private estate became a public park, and along with the park came an accompanying responsibility for the people to manage it.

But which people did the park serve? It seems that the horse raceway allowed for some sordid acts of gambling by the men of the time, and the public record seems to show dramatic criticism that might suggest it was closed down because it invited the wrong sorts of people, in addition to the wrong sorts of behavior, to congregate in the midst of what had been a Quaker paradise. Instead the land had become a source of scrutiny and stimulated laws around gambling, leading to "blue laws" of semi-Puritanical and mostly Methodist origin. These "blue laws", which lasted until the end of the Prohibition period during the 1930s Great Depression, prohibited the sale of alcohol on Sunday's Christian Sabbath, which was exactly when everyone clamored to watch the horse races in what became Hunting Park.[9] Once the laws against gambling passed, the park became largely abandoned.

One unanswered question students should be asked to investigate is whether or not continued private ownership could have diminished the poverty that fell on the park in much later years. If we compare, as students in public history, the evolution of Central Park in New York's Manhattan, we can see how three urban planning themes arise out of Hunting Park's absorption into city government possession to complicate free expansion of shared public space: one, class warfare escalated over park use, expressed occasionally through rioting and public property destruction; two, the modern significance of litigious battles, expressed through legislation around public behavior such as commerce in the park, vagrancy, sexual conduct, dress, traffic, entertainment and ownership of personal property; finally, environmental concerns, such as those with water, sanitation and plantings, which arose as a third theme in what have become staples in public debate around park use in the United States.[10]

In Philadelphia's case, the 1871 Act included the provision to establish Hunting Park Avenue along Juniata Street and west of Broad Street along the alignment of Nicetown Lane, eventually connecting citizens in the Northeast sections with East Fairmount Park and the Victorian graveyard "Laurel Hill Cemetery" that to this day looks over the Schuylkill River. In Victorian times the public graveyard served as a space for upper class promenades and picnics, and the graves that could have been planted nearer to Hunting Park went there, instead. The ambitious scale of the "allée" as a physical link from Fairmount to Hunting Park was a significant statement to what was then the city's suburban population of upper-middle-class, White Anglo Saxon Protestants, and became the next substantial work the Fairmount Park Commission executed after the creation of East and West Parks on either side of the river. The roadway was designed in the grand Parisian style (100 feet wide) as an organic extension of both the "Fair Mount Park" and "Hunting Park", and was intended as a leafy boulevard for park visitors. At the Hunting Park terminus, designer William Saunders' central "cartway", for while this predated the automobile was certainly traversed by various horse-drawn buggies and "carts", and created a grand entrance into Hunting Park and its central pond. It is unclear to what

extent the city implemented his full design between Fairmount Park and Hunting Park, but pedestrians from Juniata Park and Hunting Park neighborhoods can still see the remains of his original intent in the South side of the park's great stand of trees near 13th Street.[11]

Even in what were then the suburbs to Philadelphia, the city's street plan allowed for a grid of numbered streets one direction and named streets the other way; these simply increased in number and variety as time passed and the city expanded. City planners added two open-air pavilion structures sited within Saunders' plan in what are typically referred to as "enhancements" and another collection of shrubs and trees. Many of these trees represent a distinctly European taste and do not nearly replicate the species native to the region, and some of these were destroyed by a blight upon Chestnut trees at the time. [12] Could further invasive species plantings have changed the landscape forever from what it once was? Clearly it was never in its agricultural state a grassy golf-course like knoll; nor was it as flat as it seems to have been then as now, however one aspect that could be explored is what were native to the region, and what plants and botanical experiments arrived later? Has the soil been so transformed by development as to be depleted of what is a safe habitat for anything but recreational sports? There is a uniformity throughout the parks in Philadelphia, perhaps due to a need to keep it simple and affordable, but doing so also suggests a cultural point: rather than make each neighborhood's park unique, city planners stressed a desire for equality and hence uniformity; today, we could change the emphasis to promote diversity. A diverse flora and fauna, drawing on the Wingohocking Creek that has been forced underground into massive storm drains, could lend a variety that would celebrate the social and cultural diversity Philadelphia has to offer. Even along 5th Street nearby, the largely Puerto Rican community solicited donations from local businesses in order to afford constructing some fifty metal palm trees, placed every 25 feet or so along the sidewalk, in order to remind residents of their island roots. Hunting Park could be decorated similarly with local artwork and sculptures, in order to reflect the local talent and ethnic heritage.

From 1904-1949, the Hunting Park Avenue corridor through Nicetown and Juniata Park nearly doubled in size, as city planners sought to increase textile production with factories as a substitute for the decrease in papermaking production. Clean drinking water had evolved as a necessary commodity with Philadelphia's growth outward from Center City, since water had become increasingly polluted by factories beginning with David Rittenhouse's papermaking complex aside the Wissahickon Creek in Germantown (the first of its kind in the "New World"). Industry had rapidly consumed the area along the Schuylkill River until the Fairmount Park Commission came along and transformed the built environment and mill architecture into vast green space. As more and more people set up residence in these outer regions of the city limits, the Commission sought also to preserve sources of drinking water for the city, and bought so much land as part of a new city plan it became the largest inner-city park system in the world. Water flowed from "Fair Mount" (later site of the Philadelphia Museum of Art) after being pumped up to the top of the hill by the Water Works (opened in 1815, it was decommissioned in 1909). Philadelphia's physical infrastructure underwent significant development during the early 20th century, and the question of how to ensure safe drinking water for a ballooning population required a dramatic response. Ever since the beginning of the First World War in 1914 the European immigrant population bolstered the labor force in factories and immigration records, filling neighborhoods around the city with a plethora of new residents, motivated to make "a better life" for themselves, perhaps, but also in need of city services.

Photographs of the time document the transformation of an agricultural to an industrial base. Concerns with squalid conditions from unplanned growth stimulated construction projects all around the city, and all around the nation as part of the "City Beautiful" movement, included a large lake and bridge inside Hunting Park in 1914 inspired by European waterways. Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Boulevard (also known today by its

"Route 1" moniker) was constructed from 1909-1910 and the parcel of land north of The Boulevard, all the way to Wingohocking Street, became an adjacent and apparently contiguous park. Then as now, urban planners sought to capitalize on the plentiful water supply; could there be more of a display using today's technology or could there be other beneficial uses of water – not just display – today?[13]

Nonetheless, by the 1920s several structures were added to the landscape in Hunting Park, including a bandstand pavilion overlooking the lake (or "pond" depending upon who is writing), a tennis pavilion, and a carousel. The City of Philadelphia Park Commission built "comfort stations" and other "amenities" as the city would call them, a word that connotes a benevolent gift to the area, and may indeed be accepted as such, at least then; whether or not the amenities, which made the park pleasant to look at, represent the right choices for the use of the park, will later be decided by my own students, and by the enduring criticism of later times. In any case, the 1915 Fairmount Park Commission Annual Report provides some context for understanding this growth: "The park is greatly appreciated by the rapidly increasing population of the neighborhood and is attested by the presence of large numbers of church, school and family picnic parties and the almost constant use of all the baseball diamonds and tennis courts to their utmost."[14] The residents of the time, primarily Jewish residents in Olney and everything from Italian and other European immigrants in Hunting Park, Nicetown, and the contiguous neighborhoods the park served to connect, tell us a lot about the change within American cities in general. The 1915 Commission report was concerned about them posing a social problem -- not because they were seen as spillover from a European society that had become war-weary and battered -- but instead over their occupation of an area of the city slated for the expansion of the central city.[15] The expansion of a population of very recent immigrants only increased exponentially at the end of the Second World war, and the spaces in maps of open space during the time rapidly changed into dense urban streets. Some historians and current park planning agency leaders speculate that this intensive use continued after the 1920s as the Boulevard continued to spur growth in the neighborhood, and the 1920s period can be considered an important heyday for parks all around the nation. The most significant documentation of parks in the 1920s surrounds New York's Central Park, but Hunting Park also flourished, primarily because an improved Boulevard meant more effective traffic through the Northeast areas, both by train and by an increase in automobiles.[16]

By the 1930s, the park became, along with many areas in Philadelphia, the site of Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects and the lake was chlorinated for bathing. Automobiles became the primary mode of transportation and added to the increasing expansion of the city's urban environment, so that by the end of World War the Northeast section of the city required a new two compounded by a need to accommodate the underground flow of the Wingohocking waterway, but primarily inspired by a philosophy of inclusion with community as central to further development and grand city planning around the need to plan for recent immigrants and veterans returning from Europe and the second world war, both of whom were eager to begin families and take on a job. Alternatively, the effort to develop the Northeast was a concerted attempt to isolate the less desirable immigrants following WWII with parks as natural barriers; the exodus of earlier immigrants corresponded with this "Baby Boom" generation whose need for larger houses to accommodate the appeal of a suburban household, and a slice of the American pie, promoted in Levittown and other suburban communities around the nation. [17]

The last major facility enhancements for Hunting Park occurred during the 1950s-1960s, including construction of a recreation center, concession building, and modifications to the bathing lake, including the addition of a swimming pool that is still a popular attraction in the summer months of 2015. In the 1970s the Fair Mount Park Commission contracted David A. Crane, an influential architect and city planner, though much

less powerful and funded than Edmund Bacon, to redesign the Hunting Park grounds. There had already been some work done throughout the 1950s to erect exercise stations in the center, and near the pond, but this action left the perimeter somewhat neglected; Crane had the pond removed to encourage use of the park's outer regions of the park, and reverted some of the hills to earlier levels. One further yet seemingly mystifying change was that Crane and his team removed the carousel and its shelter, as well as a few other structures dating to earlier periods of development. His emphasis was upon recreation, and that focus remains to this day.

1976 was planned as a huge year in the life of the city, as Philadelphia coordinated a huge bicentennial festival, but according to many critics, all the focus was on Independence Hall in center city, and not enough on outlying inner city neighborhoods like those around Hunting Park. Mayor Frank Rizzo had been the police chief before his eight-year tenure in politics ended in 1980, followed by another run until his unexpected death in 1991, and his priorities were to reinforce the rule of law upon poor and in particular minority neighborhoods in the city. As the neighborhood around Hunting Park became one of an increasing number of neglected regions in the city, the park suffered too. By 1987 Crack had taken the city by storm and North Philadelphia suffered as much if not more than anywhere. Three short years later, following a major investigation into drug trafficking in Hunting Park, U.S Attorney Robert K. Reed described the situation as having been "total, total lawlessness". Within the neighborhood, however, law-abiding residents supported police and federal intervention, and the Latino community has been strong and involved for a long time; according to one resident, my schoolmate Eduardo Collazo's father, people throughout Hunting Park were "frustrated, afraid, just giving up", but by the time the community organizations began to hold nightly and weekly vigils, they were able to tell the city government representatives "You don't have to be afraid to invest in Hunting Park".[18]

The Grand Experiment

Urban planners are today attempting another grand evolution in the form of an extension to Interstate 95 at the entrance to Philadelphia from New Jersey, so that there might be (at least as it is touted to become) a seamless transition for cars passing from Northeast regions of the country like New York City points south of the river, in the direction of Delaware, and Washington DC. Today Washington DC is the nation's capitol, but until 1865 the capital was situated right on Independence Mall in Center City Philadelphia). Such development of the roadway beside Hunting Park, as well as the fact that Route 1 possesses the top two most dangerous intersections in the state according to reports available through the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation may never mean a safe passage into Philadelphia, but you might be able to get through the upper Northeast without polluting the wealthy suburban regions of Bucks County with too much traffic congestion for their taste. To its detriment, there are intersections every 200 meters or so along much of The Boulevard, and yet pedestrian traffic seems to cross at any spontaneous moment, whether there is an intersection, or not, and even if there is oncoming traffic. That alone seems to be a type of social experience and seems worthy of study. For our purposes it means that Hunting Park becomes even more of an oasis for pedestrians than ever before in the history of the Park, as automobiles have gotten increasingly prolific, and increasingly lethal. Perhaps the newest park developments will lead to a closer look at how the entire neighborhood can be improved, without completely erasing all evidence of the past in the process.

Such "erasure" as Public Historians would refer to elimination and replacement of facilities and structures, provides no explanation of how three years ago the renovation that brings us all into the present moment, and perhaps thrusts us beyond, chooses to memorialize all the history and transformations within the original plan created by William Saunders. Where will this park go if funding evaporates again, or as renovations again

become neglected once the grant ends? Can an overbearing and financially strapped government structure or even a privately funded entity that now manages the parks and the periodic donations from diminishing concerned patrons, be sustained? I believe this unit of study can help to be the check and balance to government decision-making, even if now such decisions are made by a benevolent organization that seeks to manage all the parks for the public good. Hunting Park, by the very fact that it is run by a community organization, seeks to be different. Can it? Should it? I think so.

Some persistent questions remain: What ought to be done to address the lingering petty and more serious crime that happens at night? In the 1990s the community found the answer in taking back the streets through grassroots campaigns and vigils, so at least the park is not at all hazardous during the day. In 2015 these community groups have become even stronger, and significantly more connected to the mainstream political engines of city government, and have become well funded through both local campaigns to renovate and revitalize the area, and Federal initiatives to combat blight everywhere. North Philadelphia and Hunting Park specifically, seems to represent "everywhere", so was selected for its potential to show how investment could make a difference. The community-minded organizations and citizens are ready for that change.

Another new and fortunate issue has also arisen: Now that the park is much more desirable, how do we share it during both the day and the evening, and who becomes responsible to maintain it? The park's recent development began with big money from both celebrity grants and government sources, the famous two being the grants afforded by the Ryan Howard family to build the baseball field and Billie Jean King Foundation to remodel the tennis courts; the park is and will be dramatically more polished in its modern incarnation. Nonetheless, how can its current benefits and beauty be sustained? It is not easy to find green space in the built environment of North Philadelphia, especially in less prosperous neighborhoods like the areas surrounding Hunting Park. Despite the benefits it can provide by increasing quality of life and lifting property values the social and public benefits have proven to benefit the health and wellbeing of residents.[19] In a recent TV news report, Hunting Park's nearby neighborhoods were identified as having the highest rates of Asthma in the city; in other parks around the country, academic research is being done to measure the health benefits of such a transformation, and part of the Hunting Park Revitalization Plan includes a plan to improve physical health in the target area. Can we take advantage of these benefits without suffering from the potential problems of gentrification or higher property taxes homeowners cannot bear to afford? Instead of becoming a casualty to the attention the park and ultimately, its local community' has received in the windfall of refurbishment, the park could become a win-win situation for everyone, including students from my school if we can get as involved as the managing community group "Hunting Park United".

Hunting Park, which is today genuinely worth the brief trip from center city Philadelphia, or from any of the more closely associated areas, is a generally wide-open green area comprising about 87 acres in North Philadelphia, and while it has certainly changed through the years, it has always been filled with plants and playing fields. There is a swimming pool, too, at the lake's historic center, and on a warm summer day those fields will be filled with people playing soccer and baseball, and watching others do the same, and just enjoying being out of doors; the fear that violence is imminent seems irrational today, and yet it was only a decade ago in 2004 that the news media warned against a "Hunting Park Rapist". The desire to leave cities like Philadelphia when Crack hit the streets in the 1980s, and Philadelphians Bruce Toll and his brother began to remodel farm country in Bucks County into colloquially named "McMansions" so that whites could avoid the next wave of immigration and African Americans. During the 1950s Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North, in addition to the Hispanic immigration from Puerto Rico in the 1960s there was a huge population shift out of the city; today there is another change in human demographics in how people from the suburbs (or at least their children) have sought to return to the city and buy in. Potential gentrification could

be a future area of study within Edison High School's student body as time progresses. There is a terrific line from a poem by Tato Laviera that gives me hope:

the congas clean the gasses

in the air. The congas burn out

everything not natural to our people.[20]

Strategies

Typically I have a minimum of 25 students in my 11th grade English classroom on a daily basis; for this reason I am lucky to have a large room in which to spread out our work, and in order to prevent everyone from feeling too claustrophobic. We will work within and outside of these constraints; I believe in the classroom as a think-tank, or as a workshop, but study is about the world around us, and for this reason it is important to leave the four walls periodically and just get out.

Walking Tour

Classroom Seating

Team/Group Projects

Art in the English Classroom

History in the English Classroom

Writing in Multiple Modes

Evaluation, Assessment & Reflection

Activities

Lesson 1

Begin by asking students what they know about Hunting Park: What experiences have they had there? For what purposes do they use the park? If they do not use it, why not? Typically, I will have them write this down as a "Do Now" activity, on a 3 x 5 note card in order to keep their responses brief; if so, reserve the back side of the note card for a second, follow up question: How could the park be improved, in order to make its use more public, more useful to the surrounding neighbors?

Next, if you have access to a Smart board, or large-screen projection device, project a map of the area, in order to get the big picture impact. I have access to the 2009 Hunting Park Revitalization Plan, which

possesses a plethora of schematic maps, but if you are researching a different park with your students, Google Earth or Google Maps can be just as effective at providing an overview of the area. If your resources are such that there is nothing, not even an overhead projector, provide everyone with a map of the area to be studied. We will begin by getting familiar with the area, and I will use one of my students to help guide us through the territory, either using the technology or just verbally, as would a tour guide. As we do so, we will open the floor to comments from the entire class: what memories do you have of each space in the park? Begin to cultivate their natural enthusiasm for storytelling, and prod them with provocative questions, such as: Who was important to your earliest experiences there? What seem to be the big issues that have affected the park and its use over the years YOU have used it? What problems have arisen that seem to affect more than just YOU, but cause concern for a wider public? Teachers should emphasize the ways the "personal is political", and how to begin with oneself and our own experiences and expand outward from there, until our experiences overlap with the experiences of others.

Finally, and following some keen summative observations from both the teacher, and if possible, the students in particular, we will begin the process of planning a trip to see the park: provide, trip slips, if your school is like mine, in order to get their parents' permission, but above all else, in order to explain the importance of getting to the place, in order to see it for ourselves, and that the objective of the project is to see how we, as a class, could contribute towards its use, as well as study its history and redevelopment. What are things we should look for? This is where some key themes, tropes, and vocabulary of public history becomes important, and students can work in groups with large poster paper in order to brainstorm some aspects of the park that they will look for, drawing in part on the earlier discussions in the class period. As they work, encourage students to accomplish 3 goals: (1) determine who in your group is interested in what; for example, what role can they take the lead in that will contribute to the overall understandings for which the group or the class is looking to learn answers? Assign these roles names in order to brainstorm them with the larger class towards the end of the period, or before we leave on our trip. Some options students can consider are: environmental studies (the trees, foliage, and natural growth); art (this student will look for existing public art, possible locations for future art, and any information on the history of art in the park); architecture (the student who assumes responsibility for this aspect of park exploration will study the built structures on the park, as well as in the park's past and potential future); recreation (this student will study what activities occur on the park land, looking for sports fields, courts, and facilities); finally, people (this student will study who is actually there, and what they are doing inside the park environs) (2) ask students to develop a materials list; in other words, what will we need to have with us to take notes? I suggest drawing much of what we see, but a complement to doing mandatory art studies can be using smartphones, if you have them, to record visual and also auditory aspects of the park while we are there together, or also if students return there outside of the class trip. In fact, students will create a "public history walking tour" as part of the unit's assignments, and ask: What should be included? How will the tour be created, led, and preserved? (3) The last and final aspect for students to explore is writing: how can a park inspire the imagination? What questions need to be asked as part of our exploration? Which questions are rhetorical (needing no immediate answer/s) and which are questions to pursue (in order to dig for answers)? What do YOU hope to find out through the process of studying the park, both collectively and individually?

Students should have time to gather as a whole group before the end of class, or perhaps during the next class period depending upon how the time has been used, in order to contribute to each other's understandings and but then regroup and post their posters for a "gallery walk"; what can they steal from one another to enhance everyone's effort/s?

Lesson 2

As a next lesson, take trips to the actual park. Upon arrival, walk the perimeter of the park together, discussing what the students see at the outset. Students should, of course, understand all safety protocols and expectations, but upon the end of the walk, eat lunch as a group, discussing several key elements of the tour: (1) Access: were students able to access all of the park, both physically and emotionally? In other words, were they able to traverse the territory, or were there physical impedimenta to doing so, such as fencing, gates, trash, construction, etc.? Furthermore, did they feel any emotional limitations, such as feelings of exclusion due to any safety concerns, cultural barriers, unwelcome signage, or rude staff and maintenance crews or threatening patrons? What were they exactly? (2) Who does the park seem to serve? Does it serve artistic, recreational, cultural, or natural purposes? What ethnic groups seem welcome in the space at this time? Who seems unwelcome? What evidence do you have for coming to the conclusions to which you arrive? (3) What improvements, restoration, or changes would you recommend to the park? Why do you recommend these changes? Plan to discuss all of the student questions back in the classroom afterwards, but have students compile their lists of questions (and ultimately, their answers) in note form during the trip through the park.

Next, dismiss students to exercise their investigative and illustrative skills. They should have determined a set of roles for themselves for work within the park during the course of this visit (see previous lesson…) but I believe ALL students should make an effort to engage with the park through drawing elements of it: perhaps a flower they find, the architecture, people, either up close (while doing an oral historical interview---?) or from a wide angle perspective, and schematic design interpretations either of what they see or how they imagine changes to the park's built environment. Give a generous amount of time, perhaps an hour, in which they can really become absorbed in their observations, analyses and drawings.

Finally, before leaving gather students together to discuss their work aloud collectively. Begin with their small teams/groups, in a brief conference of about 10-15 minutes; following their discussion, pool all observations together, so that their first impressions benefit all. Students will inevitably have some overlap in their processes and products, but there should be communality in the results of their thinking, so that we as a class contribute to each other's understandings of what we have seen and experienced, especially while it is fresh in our minds. Plan to review these discoveries later, and be careful to record your own thoughts as well as to allow students the opportunity to share out and record their classmates' commentary.

Lesson 3

Upon returning to the classroom, students will need to meet in their small groups/teams and cooperatively review and gather their information. Now: what to do next? Based upon what each group decides, students may choose to design and construct a short term public art installation; perhaps another project might be writing, designing, and building a series of signage; a walking tour that could be accessed online, or through an App.; other possibilities could be writing and performing a historical lecture or poem, either at the park or inside the Recreation Center; holding an athletic event, such as a public croquet or badminton competition; participating in documenting the biology of the park, or getting involved with the developing urban garden on the property, and then making a presentation of the results; writing a proposal to the Fairmount Park Commission in order to indicate aspects of the park that need attention or further consideration, including illustrations that would show what students had in mind; producing a video or film which seeks to reveal an aspect of the historical record at Hunting Park, for educative or entertainment purposes; authoring a series of blog posts or alternatively, creating a website that seeks to explore some aspect of the park's renovation,

history, or use. Every project should represent an element of public history: making the history of the park and its people relevant to today's people in the park by some publicly accessible means.

As students brainstorm, write, design and produce their projects over the next week or weeks, depending upon the time you have together in the classroom, a portion of instructional time can be spent teaching the history of the park in snippets. The Hunting Park Revitalization Plan of 2009 is a great place to begin: performing a close reading, asking questions akin to those illustrated in the content section of this unit, and starting with a close reading of the video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dyNgSs2s8A0 (see the Appendix for other videos on Hunting Park that will be useful in media study), which reveals a Chevy advertisement featuring their commitment to Hunting Park.

Some questions that might be discussed are: How do the producers of the video communicate their interests in the public use of the park? Is their expression of concern/investment/hope authentic? What tells you this? From what do you derive the conclusions to which you have arrived? Each video can be used as a warm-up to the classroom brainstorming and independent work time, or alternatively as something they watch for homework and respond to in writing, either in preparation for a larger group discussion or as material for the culminating project.

One way to compile and document the internal work students do is to have everyone write a project proposal, including a description, in writing and supporting visual media, of what is being proposed. Furthermore teachers may also want students to write a series of reflections on how the purpose(s) of the project evolve over the course of the unit, either as handwritten journal entries, blog posts to a web location, contributions to a specific class account or website, a additions to a Google Document or even completion of a Google Form.

Based on such videos, students may choose to direct their work (as "Activist Historians") towards some action they hope to stimulate in their audience, such as the closure of one of the nearby recycling plants, whose polluting byproducts have caused the highest Asthma rates in the city within the Hunting Park neighborhoods of Nicetown, Logan, Feltonville and Juniata Park neighborhoods (where sits Edison HS) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfNTU3n6Mmw (a "Reclaiming Hunting Park" video). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGCLfacOXCQ, a Youtube film revealing that the "Revitalization" of Hunting Park by Hunting Park United may leave room for some straightforward questions about the financial support and how much is used for the actual park, as opposed to administrative staffing and structural organization.

Perhaps also, in every classroom attempting to study and engage with a local park, a government or community representative could be invited into the classroom (or met at the park site!) for some discussion or additional insight into the decisions being made to maintain the park, educate the community, or present activities for the public. I reached out to several government agencies, as well as the Fairmount Park Conservancy. In Philadelphia, most parks are managed by community or civic organizations who manage to consult with city agencies to secure maintenance service, salaried employees and legal permits for various activities. The city's park system has flourished due to these community activists and philanthropists working together. Do they make considerate choices? Whose interests do they serve? Who addresses concerns when there are any? How are these questions of park maintenance resolved in your area?

Lesson 4

How does an English teacher work in writing within this curriculum, as opposed to a Social Studies Teacher? We have already discussed blogging, editorials can also be a good exercise for students. So can writing

articles for the local newspaper, website, or government newsletter. This is a “Public History” project, with an emphasis on the public nature of the work to be done. All students in Pennsylvania have had to research a topic concerning their community and write a ten page paper, perform a presentation of their findings, and complete 20-40 hours of community service until this very year. While this is no longer a requirement due to the new Keystone Tests to graduate, we continue to require students at my school to complete a project; Juniors need to practice the skills they will need, on some level, before they attempt this project in their final year. This final lesson is around the English component of reading and writing across the curriculum.

Students can begin by reading the essay on “Using Radical History Tours to Reframe Urban Crime” by Rebecca Amato and Jeffrey T. Manuel in the 112th issue of *Radical History Review*, from Spring 2012. If you are like many teachers, and I count myself among them, we need to motivate our students to action, in anything, on any topic, or at least find ways to get the ball rolling. A crucial line from the article is at the end of the first paragraph “Challenging students and the public to think in complex ways about the definition and meaning of ‘crime,’ for example, may well require scholars to reach beyond the traditional venues of the classroom or the written word.” There are many controversial gems within the text to provoke and challenge students to (re)consider their attitudes towards crime and by extension, poverty, community, public engagement and responsibility, as well as what it means to be a 21st century citizen and take on the world in which we all live, especially within a learning environment such as a school.

Another line in the Amato and Manuel article, found in the section on East St. Louis, Illinois suggests that neighborhood as an example of a positive public history tour that allows participants to perceive old things with new vision: “Redmond’s narration emphasized the tenacity and triumph of the city’s African American community, which persevered through persecution and segregation to create lasting cultural achievements.”[21] The essay goes on to say that “Although it was not the focus, the tour also acknowledged East St. Louis’s history of blight, job loss, white flight, and disinvestment.”[22] These kinds of ideas, which provide alternative perspectives on neighborhoods like the one around my school in Hunting Park, allow students to read privately how others may see their area, as well as how they can take ownership over the narrative of their own historical record, both in what they discuss as well as how they choose to discuss it with others. They are further challenged to write convincingly in different modes in order to speak to a wider audience than those with whom they might traditionally interact. Doing the work of public historians will bring them into a wider circle of scholarship and social interaction, broaden their view of others as well as of themselves; this should be at the forefront of any teacher’s mind in any subject when they seek to prepare their students for life beyond the classroom, the high school level, and their provincial worldview. They are essentially code-switching and attempting to become fluent in the language of public history, another role they can add to their growing list of survival tools as they become adults and assume leadership of the society in which we live; at best, they will become even more responsible citizens.

Appendix

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