

it was devoid of the stories of those whose labor enabled it to exist. That experience had to have been one of my inspirations to start The Slave Dwelling Project” (275). *Drayton Hall* has the potential to inspire and then successfully guide many more people from all walks of life into and through the linked projects of advocacy for historic preservation and the field of public history.

Heather L. Hodges, The Historic New Orleans Collection

The Museum: A Short History of Crisis and Resilience by Samuel J. Redman.

New York: New York University Press, 2022. v + 223 pp.; acknowledgements, notes, index, about the author; hardbound, \$24.95, eBook, variable.

The Museum: A Short History of Crisis and Resilience offers the groundwork for fertile discussions among public historians, particularly those interested in or working in museum practice. Author Samuel Redman, currently an associate professor of modern US history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, identifies four specific periods of crisis for US museums: the 1910s through 1930s, shaped by World War I, influenza, and the Great Depression; World War II; the 1970s; and the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Within each topic Redman uses an example from a single museum or small grouping of museums as a case study for his exploration of how museums face crises.

With a conversational tone, relatively short length, and endnote-style citations, *The Museum* offers an accessible overview for nonacademic readers of some of the biggest problems that museums in the United States have and continue to face. It can be difficult to communicate the breadth of challenges museums and cultural institutions contend with to visitors and stakeholders who do not have knowledge of everyday museum work. Having an entertaining and easily digestible document with which to introduce some of the challenges museums confront could be useful to museum practitioners, especially as we look to engage support from the greater public to move our institutions forward. Using examples of crises, both physical (for example, fires at the Smithsonian Institution during the Civil War and at the Museum of Chinese in America in 2020) and existential (such as art strikes in the 1970s and questions of censorship and diversity during the culture wars of the '80s and '90s), Redman illustrates “the museum” as not simply a warehouse of objects but a living cultural component that reacts and is reacted to over time.

The very term “the museum,” however, proves problematic. Redman does not offer a definition of “the museum.” The institutions referred to range from large, government-funded museums to small private ones, encompassing national histories, local histories, art, nature, anthropology, and more. Twice Redman uses the Smithsonian Institution as a case study to draw a conclusion about the larger state of museums. For instance, in chapter 3, “The Smithsonian and Museums during the World War II era,” Redman details the ways in which the Smithsonian Institution

(which he refers to interchangeably as “the Smithsonian” and “the museum,” despite the fact that at this time the institution consisted of several separate buildings and museums) worked with the United States government and armed forces in support of the war effort. He states, “During WWII . . . The Smithsonian Institution embraced the opportunity to become a tool for making war in the hope of emerging as a stronger force in democratic life in the United States after the war” (76). This assertion is folded into a larger argument that World War II pushed “museums” in general to think about how their work was relevant to society. What relevance might mean could differ, however. Redman notes that intellectuals, such as Francis Henry Taylor, Theodore Lowe, and A. E. Parr, advocated for “the museum” to be “a vehicle for peace as well as environmental and cultural preservation” (79). Although he finds that some museums ignored this advice and participated directly in war efforts, his focus on the Smithsonian leads him to form too broad a conclusion about this process. Redman does not sufficiently consider here that the Smithsonian was and is a museum complex that is a trust instrumentality of the United States government. Decisions about the Smithsonian’s role in World War II made by those working there at the time, including some federal employees, cannot be understood in the same way as decisions made by museums whose funding and governance was wholly separate from the government. In this case and elsewhere, the Smithsonian’s specific structure and funding do not represent US museums generally.

Redman clearly possesses a vast knowledge of museums in the United States and, given his desire to write a “short” history, as well as his assertion that the book was conceived and written during a fairly brief period, it seems likely that certain complexities (such as differences in funding, size, and scope) in defining “the museum” were deliberately left out to keep the work concise (175). Overall, *The Museum* has important points to add to current discourse about how museums should look to past crises to learn how to deal with current ones as well as prepare for future ones. Often, thorough evidence to support these points is lacking; this can be seen as an opportunity for public historians to use Redman’s work as a jumping off point for more detailed investigations. For instance, further examination of the long-term effects of New Deal-era work-relief programs that employed workers without museum skills or training in museums cataloging, collections management, and collections-based research (discussed in chapter 2) could be illuminating. Could there be a link between the roots of those positions in the New Deal and Redman’s assertion that even today “staffers considered to be laborers or clerical workers, especially women and people of color,” are often the lowest paid, the least-respected, and the first to be dismissed in times of economic crises (165)?

Redman himself perhaps captured the best summation of his book when he concluded “museums are not perfect, but they do offer valuable touchstones for ongoing conversations” (173). As a book that can provide readily accessible examples of historical problems US museums have faced, it will prove useful in sparking

practical discussion and debate among public history practitioners about the deeper meaning behind those crises and different responses to them. It also prods us to define “the museum,” to think about how the crises identified can affect museums of different types, topics, and communities disproportionately, and how the ramifications of those effects reverberate today.

Bethanee Bemis, National Museum of American History

A Cultural Arsenal for Democracy: The World War II Work of US Museums by Clarissa J. Ceglio. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022. xiv + 224 pp.; illustrations, notes, index; clothbound, \$90.00; paperback, \$28.95.

Spend even just a bit of time picking through the history of American museums and you will quickly discover that something transformative happened during the middle part of the last century. What’s much harder to discern though is what that thing was exactly. Sure, we know about the New Deal, we know about World War II, we know about the turbulent postwar years. And we can all kind of guess how those flashpoints must have mapped themselves onto the nation’s exhibitionary complex. But it’s precisely that tendency to guess, Clarissa J. Ceglio contends, that has obscured what on closer inspection turns out to be an important forgotten moment. *A Cultural Arsenal for Democracy* is Ceglio’s attempt to unveil that moment and to remind us amid today’s latest round of culture wars that “museums have a longer, more complex history . . . of believing that they should be involved in civic matters” (xi).

What has been missing in our guesswork it seems is an appreciation for how an ongoing debate among exhibit makers shifted, though inconclusively, during the war years. On one side were proponents of object-based epistemology. Ceglio borrows this phrase from historian Steven Conn who popularized it some decades ago in describing a late nineteenth century dispute between universities and museums over the evidentiary value of objects. Back then, Conn argues, museums perceived knowledge as fully residing in objects—rather than, say, in text—and thus believed that, within exhibit spaces, things should be left mostly alone to speak for themselves. Ceglio picks up the story in the 1930s during which a progressive turn convinced some people that, if couched within just the right kind of storytelling, museum objects could be more powerful, and maybe even could encourage audiences toward active citizenship. Ceglio calls this position “social instrumentalism” after the title of a book written in 1942 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Theodore L. Low. And it’s within social instrumentalism, the argument goes, that we find the antecedents of recent efforts by museums to encourage civic activism through all manner of narrative, sensory, and affective exhibit craft.

Ceglio makes the point by digging through an array of unpublished reports, correspondence, newspapers, old issues of *Museum News*, and the institutional