



Museum Grants for African American History and Culture

Sample Application MH-251746-OMS-22

Whitney Plantation Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$243,144
Amount of cost share:	\$332,883

The Whitney Plantation Museum will create an exhibition and related programming focusing on resistance and freedom-seeking in south Louisiana before and during the Civil War. The museum will partner with Cornell University, the University of New Orleans, and Freedom on the Move to research exhibition content, then develop supplemental online materials, programs for the general public, and curriculum materials for K–20 teachers. This project will benefit visitors to Whitney Plantation and those interested in learning about self-emancipation and resistance by enslaved Africans and African-Americans. The project team will measure success through the successful installation and launch of the exhibition, combined with program attendee surveys and teacher feedback.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the current Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

Proposal Narrative:

Exhibiting Resistance: Freedom on the Move at the Whitney Plantation

Abstract

The proposed exhibition at The Whitney Institute, doing business as Whitney Plantation, in partnership with Freedom on the Move (FOTM), Cornell University and the University of New Orleans seeks funding to create an exhibition and related programming focused on resistance and freedom-seeking in south Louisiana before and during the Civil War. An innovative museum that narrates the history of slavery from the perspective of enslaved people, Whitney is the ideal space to develop such an exhibition. In conjunction with Freedom on the Move and two of FOTM's university partners, the exhibit will highlight the stories of self-liberating people who sought spaces of freedom, temporary or permanent, in south Louisiana--a region that was home to the Deep South's largest and wealthiest plantations. The need for this project is threefold: to continue to highlight and center the variety of Black experiences under slavery in the United States, including those who resisted, (2) to provide an accessible entry model into this history for other museums, historic sites, libraries, and classrooms, and (3) to support Whitney in its educational mission to share the stories of black survival and resistance in new ways, after the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Ida. The project includes the creation of an exhibition, supported by research from both FOTM and Whitney Plantation, development of online supplemental materials, and programming for the general public, including a specialized tour, curriculum materials and training for K-20 teachers. The project will also create digital materials that will allow the core exhibit to "travel" to other historic sites, libraries, and museums. In Year One, the scope, community engagement, and research for the exhibition and supplement materials will be conducted. In Year Two, the exhibition will be designed and fabricated, along with the curriculum. Finally, in Year Three, the exhibition will be launched at Whitney Plantation, alongside a slate of public programming, including in-person and virtual workshops on the developed curriculum. This project will benefit multiple groups, including visitors to Whitney Plantation interested in learning about freedom seeking and resistance by enslaved Africans and African-Americans, scholars, K-20 teachers and students, other cultural institutions, the FOTM team, and Whitney Plantation. Project success will be assessed through the exhibition installation and launch, documented visitor responses, program attendee surveys, and teacher feedback.

Project Justification

Program Goal and Objectives The proposed exhibition at The Whitney Institute, doing business as [Whitney Plantation](#), in partnership with [Freedom on the Move](#) (FOTM), Cornell University and the University of New Orleans, will address Goal 1: "build the capacity of African American museums and their ability to serve their communities." Its primary Objectives include **1.1** (Develop, enhance, or expand public programs, exhibitions, and/or school programs) and **1.4** (Foster collaborations among museums and institutions of higher education.) Whitney Plantation seeks funding to create an exhibition focusing on resistance and freedom-seeking in south Louisiana before and during the Civil War. Located in St. John the Baptist Parish, 45 miles above New Orleans, Whitney stands apart from other plantation museums along the lower Mississippi River because it narrates the site from the perspective of the enslaved people who lived, toiled, and died there rather than from the perspective of enslavers. Since opening in 2014, Whitney Plantation has attracted over 400,000 visitors, most seeking an unvarnished history of slavery made vivid by the testimonies and stories of enslaved people themselves. The partnership with Freedom on the Move and two of FOTM's university partners, will deepen Whitney's focus on resistance and resilience of enslaved people. It will enhance and expand the museum's K-20 engagement and through this collaboration with FOTM also strengthen its ties with local and national research universities.

Needs Problems and Challenges The need to develop such a program right now is threefold. **First**, in centering the experience of enslaved people in the plantation museum setting, the Whitney has developed exhibits related to topics such as family and labor. The museum also has not been afraid to foreground

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comprehensive evidence of the violence of the system of slavery. While curators have traced specific individuals and families enslaved there through the archives, and highlighted those stories for visitors, the interpretive experience at Whitney has not given adequate attention to maroons and freedom-seekers, which is a major topic of interest among its visitors, particularly as they seek to link present-day struggles for civil rights with the past. **The proposed exhibit will explore the long history of resistance against slavery and other regimes of repressive violence, with particular focus on freedom seekers in south Louisiana.** The museum already hosts a memorial to the freedom fighters who launched the 1811 Slave Revolt, which originated in St. John the Baptist parish and nearly reached New Orleans. Using Freedom on the Move, the museum will build on that story and extend it, highlighting the daily, unrelenting nature of resistance among enslaved people before and during the Civil War. FOTM's database contains thousands of advertisements from this region, many referring to the river parishes as the "German Coast" after the German planters who settled there in the 18th century. These ads reveal the persistent efforts of enslaved people in south Louisiana to find freedom. Over the nineteenth century, runaways such as [Harpe](#) regularly mapped pathways through nearby swamps and woods. Many followed these trails to Union lines in 1862, once federal troops occupied New Orleans. Some of those freedom-seekers were among the Black soldiers who enlisted out of the Federals' Camp Parapet on New Orleans' western boundary, and fought at Port Hudson and other battlefields. And this legacy of resistance has continued. The community solidarity that sustained freedom-seekers under slavery has in more recent decades also spurred movements for civil rights and environmental justice on Louisiana's Cancer Alley, and against police violence.

Second, IMLS funding will help the museum to turn an unexpected crisis into opportunity. The Whitney was just beginning to build out its education department (with the hire of Amber Mitchell as Director of Education in June 2021) when it suffered major damage from Hurricane Ida in Fall 2021. With damage to several important structures and Whitney staff diverted to the financial and rebuilding emergencies brought by the hurricane, our educational outreach stalled. The partnership with Freedom on the Move will allow Whitney to restart our halted educational outreach initiative, particularly for younger visitors, while other key staff remain focused on hurricane recovery. **The education effort will focus on developing, with support from our partners at FOTM, UNO, and Cornell, both an exhibit and a rich set of educational resources related to it.** Members of FOTM's team are working with The Hard History Project (HHP) now, with major funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), on a K-12 Public Engagement grant focused on New Orleans, through which six core public school teachers will be developing project-based curricula in concert with HHP and FOTM historians. Their students will be using FOTM in the classroom and on field trips to Whitney and the French Quarter of New Orleans. The materials and curricula produced through the NHPRC pilot will be the foundation for the educational resources accompanying the proposed exhibit. They will also build upon FOTM's evolving [Educator Portal](#) while focusing on the specific histories and daily experiences of individuals and families once enslaved on the grounds. The network of New Orleans educators developed by HHP and FOTM, combined with Whitney's robust regional network, will be key to successful K-20 outreach related to this exhibit.

Third, museums and institutions around the country recognize a need to enhance and expand content related to Black resistance to systems of oppression. This project can serve as a model for such sites, meeting evolving visitor demands and expectations that center on issues of racial justice. A robust investment will produce a replicable and adaptable suite of resources, grounded in the latest practices of public history and engagement. **FOTM will not only help design Whitney exhibit content, but also the core of this other product: online resources offering best practices and downloadable templates enabling institutions to design site-specific versions of the resistance exhibit.** The Whitney exhibit will also incorporate two foundational pieces already completed by the FOTM team, using NHPRC funding. FOTM historical geographer Christy Hyman created [a visually and narratively engaging ArcGIS Storymap](#) centered on escape in south Louisiana. And in collaboration with digital museum designer Chris Danemayer, FOTM built a museum kiosk,

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easily adapted to specific locations, to introduce the public to the FOTM database. Compatible with any Elo-type tablet, the kiosk allows for simple searching and browsing. To accommodate different physical settings, the kiosk does not require an internet connection.

Whitney Plantation will thus continue to be an innovator in the public history of Black America. Like the Whitney's permanent exhibit and on-site interpretation, this exhibit will focus on Black personhood, placing enslaved and self-liberating people where they belong: right at the center of the story. Without minimizing the challenge confronted by those who worked to escape as individuals, or to bring slavery down collectively, the focus will also highlight solidarity, family, and strategies of escape and resistance. This grant will enhance what Whitney Plantation does. But it will also provide resources that can enhance what other institutions are doing and make it possible to explore histories of resistance in their own locales.

Target Groups

Visitors The Whitney Plantation serves a broad audience. Visitation rose steadily in the first five years of operation from 2015-2019 prior to the pandemic. In its first full year of operation, the museum greeted 35,000 people. In 2019, visitation was just over 100,000. Visitors range in age, but the greatest share of visitors -- 48% -- are young adults between the ages of 19 and 34. Visitors' diversity in terms of race and geographic region demonstrate that Whitney's key audiences include all Americans and many international visitors. Just over 30% of the museum's visitors are African American, 46% are White, and Asian, Latinx and Native American people make up the remainder of the visitors. Sixty percent (60%) of the museum's visitors live more than 120 miles from Whitney Plantation, while over 20% live outside the United States. The museum's proximity to New Orleans makes it an attractive destination for the many diverse visitors who come to southern Louisiana.

K-12 Teachers and Students In the first five years of operating between 2015-2019, prior to the pandemic, students on education tours represented approximately 8% of visitors. Since opening, Whitney Plantation has been unable to meet the large demand for school visitation. Since our team will include a museum educator (A. Mitchell) and K-12 education consultant (Shuster) in the design and conception of this exhibit, young people will be one of the key target groups. Whereas many historical projects bring in K-12 experts after the fact, to create curricula based on pre-existing content, Whitney's collaboration with FOTM will be built with young people and teachers in mind. In addition to exhibit visits, students will benefit from an innovative curriculum around the theme of resistance, using FOTM's archive, which will facilitate classroom learning. These resources will include interactive maps and creative project ideas that allow the students to engage directly with the FOTM archive and documents specific to Whitney, gathered by Dr. Ibrahima Seck's research team. All of these resources will draw on models developed via FOTM's NHPRC-funded engagement with New Orleans teachers and students in 2021-22. These educator resources will improve the young visitor experience to the museum and better connect teachers and students to the narratives Whitney provides, to the theme of resistance among enslaved people and their descendants, and to the stories of self-liberation in FOTM's archive.

Descendant Communities The parishes on either side of the lower Mississippi River are home to historically Black communities descended from those once enslaved on River Road plantations. Given the size, number, and close proximity of slave labor camps in this region before the Civil War [[see Norman's Plantation Map, 1858](#)], descendant communities with a stake in the narratives Whitney shares with the public go far beyond direct descendants from one plantation. Thousands of Black residents throughout south Louisiana, including New Orleans, trace their family histories to enslaved people living in the riverfront parishes between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Since the 2018 publication of a rubric for [Best Practices for Engaging Descendant Communities](#) in the interpretation of slavery at museums and descendant sites, the faculty team of FOTM (two of whom were direct participants in the summit that wrote the rubric) have been eager to work with the Whitney Plantation, descendants, and students at UNO and Cornell to implement these guidelines and suggestions.

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Whitney Plantation is already implementing elements of the rubric. This project will create space for the museum and university partners to collaborate more deeply with the region's descendant community.

University Students and Community Partners This project also is designed as a space for university students and community partners to collaborate. Professors Mitchell and Baptist will teach undergraduate and/or graduate courses centered on the public history of enslaved people's resistance, with special focus on south Louisiana and Whitney Plantation. They will use as a template the public history framework built by the [Humanities Action Lab](#) (HAL) which relies on collaborations between university students and community partners to create site-based historical content exploring social justice issues. Mary Niall Mitchell (as a HAL professor) and Amber Mitchell (when a graduate student) both are veterans of HAL projects. The HAL model also will strengthen the framework for the template we aim to produce for historic sites and museums in other locales. Ed Baptist also brings long experience with Cornell's community-engaged teaching initiatives and a partnership with Cornell's Public History Initiative. This collaboration will have the logistical support of the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies at UNO and its Public History program, the Public History Initiative at Cornell, and the David Einhorn Center for Community Engaged Teaching and Scholarship at Cornell.

Beneficiaries In addition to the target groups above, long-term beneficiaries include these stakeholders and constituencies:

Whitney Plantation Museum As part of Whitney Plantation's strategic goal to focus on black perspectives of slavery--especially resistance-- and strengthening our educational offerings and resources, participation and collaboration in this project is an essential move forward. In partnering with UNO and Cornell, staff at Whitney will be able to continue to expand educational experiences for public audiences, while building sustainable growth practices for our Education department internally. Additionally, teacher resources, when combined with a new exhibit, seeds public interest in similar materials for future, while also creating space for Whitney to experiment with scalable programming beyond direct student intervention. This exhibit and its educational resources it will afford for educational outreach will give the museum a larger foundation on which to build a robust education program aimed at young visitors, teachers, and others interested in expanding their knowledge of slavery and resistance.

Peer Institutions and Museums More broadly, Whitney Plantation has made a successful intervention in the contested space of plantation museums. Most such sites have practiced what [two of the most systematic observers of these spaces](#) concluded was best described as "symbolic annihilation" of the enslaved people who comprised the vast majority of the people who lived and often died in those spaces. Whitney has made it clear through its existing displays that the violent exploitation of the hundreds of people enslaved at the Whitney Plantation was the basis for the plantation's wealth. Whitney Plantation returns the focus of interpretation to those people. Museum professionals, donors, and supporters who are interested in transforming the interpretation of slavery in historic spaces will be interested in a Whitney exhibition focused on resistance and self-liberation. They also will gain tools to support a shift from histories of the planter class towards more accurate interpretations of the sites as spaces of slavery and resistance. The proposed exhibit will enhance Whitney Plantation's focus on enslaved people's resistance, strategies for survival, and efforts for self-liberation. This emphasis will deepen and widen the museum's audience while serving as an adaptable model for other sites. The records of this process will be developed and documented in ways that will help other communities and museums. By creating a useful template for similar processes in different, distinctive places, the public gains a broader and richer tapestry of resistance to slavery.

Student Collaborators Graduate students at Cornell and UNO training to enter the field of public history will gain experience on the cutting edge of the museum field. As house museums, presidential plantation homes, and other historic sites dramatically revise and re-envision the narratives of the places they occupy--telling the stories of enslaved people rather than silencing those stories--students planning to enter the field need first-hand experience with descendant communities, community engagement, and K-12 outreach. This project

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will afford graduate students field experience that will prepare them for workplace success. Undergraduate students will gain experience working collaboratively with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. They will acquire many of the skills required of public historians and encounter an array of possible careers within the field. In a broader sense, students will learn how to tell local, community-engaged stories with a national scope.

Project Work Plan

Year I, Part 1: July-December 2022

Decide on overall design goals; Collect bids and Identify designer/design group; Identify specific technical requirements for the download files; Hold online working group to identify best-practices for technical and logistical aspects of the project; Amber Mitchell, Mary Niall Mitchell, and Baptist will work with a focus group of Whitney-assembled community members to plan coursework focused on community-engaged aspects of exhibit development. Public History graduate students from UNO will assist with workshops and logistics.

Year I, Part 2: January 2023-June 2023

Research Whitney-specific elements of Whitney exhibit; Research thematic elements of resistance and self-liberation drawn from current scholarship; Identify key images, secure any permissions; Begin design download files; Teach project-oriented UNO/Cornell courses in public history.

Year II, Part 1: July-August 2023

Write text for exhibit and catalog; circulate the latter for pre-publication scholarly comment; Continue design and planning of Whitney exhibit; Evaluate year I courses; Develop preliminary plans for New Orleans /Whitney-based PROGRAMMING for opening; Draft framework for K-20 resources to accompany exhibit

Year II, Part 2: September-December 2023

Revise text for exhibit and catalog; Begin Whitney exhibit production; Finish design of download files; Teach project-centered public history courses at UNO and Cornell; Workshop K-20 framework and curricula with local teachers and virtual learning communities

Year II, Part 3: January-June 2024

Evaluate courses from year II; Communicate with potential future sites for traveling exhibit; Plan online guide with templates and best practices; Finalize text for exhibit and catalog.; Continue Whitney exhibit production; Plan in-person k-20 engagement with exhibit and alert teachers and school administrators; Finalize plans for New Orleans/Whitney-based programming

Year III, Part 1: July-December 2024

Finish online guide with templates and best practice; Develop schema for K-12, museum visitor, community, and scholarly evaluation of results; Mount and open exhibit; Make design/download files and best practices available online; Publish exhibit catalog; Teach UNO course/Cornell course; Community launch and New Orleans/Whitney-based programming, including speakers, workshops, and K-12 field trips.

Year III, Part 2: January-May 2025

Compile evaluations; Publish online guide with templates and best practices; Formalize schedule of future sites

Risks and mitigation One risk to the project could be unexpected personnel changes. For the principals involved, we rely heavily on the personal commitment of faculty members. Their intellectual work is portable between institutions. Other parties would have to be replaced by a hiring process. While this might delay the project for a few months, we believe that a strong work plan and the continued efforts of other participants would keep the project moving forward. Another risk is that of extreme weather events. However, the creation of an exhibition that “lives” digitally as well as physically helps to mitigate those risks, and the Whitney Plantation’s properties are insured.

Personnel and Resources Needed

Amber Mitchell is Director of Education at the Whitney Plantation. Amber will serve as the overall project manager for Whitney Plantation, ensuring that both the Museum and its collaborators are meeting the goals of the grant budget, goals of Whitney Plantation, and overall community. She will ensure that the growing Education team will be prepared to engage visitors and students on the topics related to FOTM, creating a first-class educational experience for onsite learners. She will also work with both the proposed exhibit designer, **Jenney Fazande**, on the needs of the exhibition, and with Kate Shuster and the Teaching Hard History team on teacher curriculum.

Ashley Rogers is Executive Director of the Whitney Plantation. Ashley will serve as administrative and collaborative support for Whitney Plantation, helping to coordinate Whitney Plantation's participation in the project. She will assist in the administrative needs of the project, ensuring that Whitney Plantation, its collaborators, and long term community partners are working together fully.

Ibrahima Seck is Director of Research at the Whitney Plantation. Dr. Seck will serve as content support for Whitney Plantation, ensuring that the history of the site and those who were enslaved on it are told accurately. He will coordinate with both Cornell and UNO staff on research.

Whitney Staff To Be Hired: In 2022, Whitney Plantation will add two roles to the Education Department staff who will assist in the implementation of the FOTM project:

Educational Programs Coordinator: This full-time role will help coordinate school group visits and their administrative needs. They will also schedule Educators to lead tour groups, assist in training, and assist in teacher professional development implementation. The Project grant will fund this role at 25% in Year 1, with Whitney Plantation contributing full salary as cost share in Years 2 and 3 of the grant.

Program Educators: Four part-time roles, this staff role will lead tours for student groups, including what is developed through this project. They will engage with students and teachers while onsite, leading them through the exhibit, encouraging participation in activities and conversation, and encouraging them to further connect via the FOTM website and resources.

Edward Baptist, professor of History at Cornell and lead FOTM faculty team member, will help coordinate FOTM and Cornell work on the project. He will work with Block and Kowalski to develop download files to support future exhibits on self-liberation. He will teach community-engaged courses as part of Cornell's Public History Initiative, focusing on developing the exhibit's engagement with local community and/or descendant groups.

Mary Niall Mitchell, Raphael Cassimere Professor of History and Ethel & Herman L. Midlo Endowed Chair at the University of New Orleans and faculty team member for FOTM, will help coordinate FOTM and UNO participation in the project. She will teach community-engaged Public History courses, working with the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies at UNO (of which she is the director) that will focus on developing the exhibit: including grad student support of research and engagement with community and/or descendant groups. She will also have the support of a **Graduate Research Assistant** to assist with planning, development, and programming. Mitchell will also be consulting over the three year period with the Midlo Center's Associate Director, archaeologist **D. Ryan Gray**, who has partnered with Whitney and is conducting on-going excavations on the grounds of Whitney Plantation.

Kate Shuster, Ph.D., has since 2016 directed the Hard History Project, a spinoff of Teaching Tolerance's Teaching Hard History initiative. She is an expert in educational evaluation and project design whose work has been widely cited and implemented over the last two decades. Her team focuses on K-12 engagement with museums and historic sites across the country, and with national media organizations, including PBS. With FOTM she has collaborated on two major NHPRC grants, and one IMLS grant with Historic Hudson Valley.

William Block, executive director of FOTM at Cornell, will help coordinate FOTM and Cornell participation in the project. He will work with Baptist and Kowalski to develop the download files that will

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support future exhibits on self-liberation. He will also help to plan and manage any conferences and seminars that arise from the project, and to lead additional fundraising and institutional alliance-building.

Brandon Kowalski, programmer-developer at Cornell, will develop the technical aspects of the download files. He will also help to generate any data files necessary to support the exhibit.

Tracking Progress Whitney, its FOTM university partners, and HHP collaborators will meet at minimum once monthly for the duration of the three-year grant period, with more frequent virtual and in-person meetings closer to the exhibit launch. These meetings will also include exhibit designers, once a firm has been selected. As with any exhibition, all partners will follow a rigorous, shared production schedule that allows for sustained collaboration between all partners as well as community engagement.

Project Results Our aim is to assist in the transformation of public understanding of the history of slavery and resistance before the Civil War. With a focus on the daily refusal of enslaved people to endure bondage, combined with individual stories of some of the thousands of people who resisted their enslavers by escaping, we will enrich and sometimes counter what museum goers think they know about the history of slavery in the United States.

The benefits of this will be far reaching. We have already witnessed the transformative power of Whitney Plantation and its focus on the experiences of enslaved people. Visitors take what they learn at Whitney and begin asking questions about the enslaved experience at other sites. Through Whitney, they see the silences and inadequacies of more traditional means of telling the history of slavery through sites and historic homes. But the experience also influences how they see racial struggles in the present day, as proven by consistent feedback from Whitney's visitors. Visitors to Whitney thus become an integral part of the transformation of public history surrounding chattel slavery. This collaboration with FOTM will build on that success. It will deepen visitors' understanding of how resistance shaped enslaved people's daily lives and will offer a means to communicate these new stories to visitors young and old. It will underscore the urgency of rewriting public narratives about slavery in the 21st century by including the ideas of descendant communities.

While FOTM and Whitney have both been strengthening public engagement through K-20 programming in particular, by working together to produce this template for traveling exhibitions we will greatly expand public awareness, access, and engagement with our respective projects.

Products. The three-year grant will produce a variety of content, including the following:

- Physical exhibit at Whitney, which will remain installed for 2 years.
- Digital exhibit with downloadable design elements and guide to best practices.
- Digital K-20 educational resources.
- Engagement with students and community via public history courses and public programming, including a launch event centered on self-liberation, resistance, and historical practices of community solidarity.
- Additional programming to continue over the course of the two-year run at Whitney, with support from UNO's Midlo Center and the Cornell Public History Initiative.
- Pending partnership with other institutions, the physical core of the Whitney-based exhibit will become the nucleus for a traveling exhibit focused on enslaved people's resistance in the US, the practices and concepts of solidarity, and the deep roots/long arc of grassroots struggles against racialized surveillance and policing practices.

