

# Excellence In Exhibition Label Writing Competition 2021

The Annual American Alliance of Museums Excellence in Exhibition Label Writing Competition is an annual competition that invites writers, editors, and museum visionaries to submit their best labels for judging by a diverse selection of jurors from the museum and heritage sector. Despite the wide-spread use of technology in museums today, labels remain the primary tool for sharing ideas, information, and stories with the public. As such, the goal of this competition is to spark conversations about this integral interpretive tool by highlighting examples of excellent label writing from our community. Due to the extraordinary circumstances brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, for the first time in the history of the competition, online exhibit submissions were eligible for entry, diversifying our pool during an especially challenging year. The 2021 competition also marked the first year in a new partnership between AAM and the Museum and Exhibition Studies Program at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC).

This year's panel of jurors included Dan Spock (Independent Museum Consultant), Donna Braden (The Henry Ford), Adrienne Lalli Hills (Oklahoma Contemporary) and Brittany Hutchinson (Virginia HC Museum). Each juror was tasked with meticulously reviewing all of the more than 100 labels submitted for consideration. In the end, 11 individual labels were chosen that we are proud to share with the AAM community. This year's recognized labels will be added to the competition's online archive for use by current and future museum professionals.

We want to thank our jurors for their time and commitment to this process. Without their magic and wisdom this competition would not be possible. Thanks are also due to AAM, CurCom, NAME, and EdCom for their continued support and partnership with this competition. We sincerely hope that this year's selection of labels inspires you to consider new perspectives, approaches, and ideas to communicate with your audiences and we invite and encourage you to participate in next year's competition.

All the best,

**Jojo Galvan Mora**

Competition Project Manager

Museum and Exhibition Studies Master's Candidate. Class of 2021

University of Illinois at Chicago

**John Russick**

Competition Project Director

Senior Vice President

Chicago History Museum

# 2021 Juror Biographies & Statements

## DONNA R. BRADEN

*Senior Curator and Curator of Public Life, The Henry Ford*

Donna R. Braden, Senior Curator and Curator of Public Life at The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan, has spent more than four decades in the museum field. Both at The Henry Ford and as an independent consultant, her career has cut across numerous aspects of museum practice, including material culture expertise, collections development and analysis, historical research, interpretive planning, exhibition development, and visitor studies. Braden has published widely and presented at numerous conferences on topics ranging from the exhibition process to creating dynamic interpretive manuals to visitor-focused labelwriting to what museums can learn from Walt Disney. She is the author of the recent book, *Spaces That Tell Stories: Recreating Historical Environments*, co-published by Rowman & Littlefield and the American Association for State and Local History. She received her bachelor's degree in Anthropology from Ohio State University in 1975, with distinction in American Cultural History, and obtained a master's degree from the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture in 1977, with a certificate in Museum Studies, from the University of Delaware. In 2013, she obtained a second master's degree, in Liberal Studies, from the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

For the last four decades I have been a label-writer and editor, increasingly incorporating visitor studies into the process. Two years ago, in developing a workshop entitled "Exhibit Label Makeovers" for the Association for Midwest Museums, I was able to re-read all the major published works on visitors and label-writing, confirming much of what I've already come to learn about what constitutes a well-written label:

- Labels should enhance the overall visitor experience at a place where visitors voluntarily devote their own time and effort. They should not be fatiguing or overly didactic. Visitors are not at museums to take a test.
- Visitors expect positive rewards in label-reading, as in other aspects of their museum visit: uplift, enlightenment, inspiration, provocation, and/ or personal meaning.
- Reinforcing Judy Rand's insightful writings and presentations about labels, they should be readable (well-organized, well-written, copy-edited, and proofread), relevant (connecting to visitors' own experiences and interests), and understandable (not overly technical or abstract).

## DAN SPOCK

*Independent Museum Consultant*

Dan Spock has worked in museums for over 36 years, starting as a planetarium guide. He has worked as an exhibit designer at The Boston Children's Museum and an exhibit developer at the Museum of Creativity project. For 20 years Spock led the museum program at the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS). While there, Spock's team produced dozens of exhibitions, some of which have received national award recognition. From 2017 to 2019, Spock was the Senior Vice President for Audience Engagement at the Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte, NC. Today he works as an independent museum consultant.

Spock is an ardent advocate for participatory museum programs suffused with pluralism, and informed by visitor research. His work is rooted in an ethos that values museum-goers as active learners. He has explored the informal means by which the public experiences and values the past as natural pathways for engaging with history in a museum context.

Exhibits produced under Spock's leadership have ranged from multidisciplinary, high immersion, interactive and media rich approaches designed for a general family audience, some of which have traveled nationally, to intensive community-based collaborations, to site-specific interpretive centers and trails, to more traditional art or photography shows. Live public programs have been developed to serve various audience segments ranging from families with children, to school audiences, seniors, young adults, recent immigrant communities, and communities of color.

Spock has consulted and lectured at a variety of museums and learning institutions, has published writings on many museum subjects, and has a BA in Art from Antioch College

- **Concision.** A great label is both brief and smart. They are elegant, cleaving to a point. They are written in clear, direct prose with an absolute minimum of digressions, clauses, qualifications and parentheses. Great labels steer clear of jargon and excessive wordiness.
- **Provocative and evocative.** Labels should be interesting. They should challenge conventional thinking and reach beyond a strictly rational thesis to something that elicits a broad range of emotions including increased curiosity. Great labels may raise more questions than they answer.

# 2021 Juror Biographies & Statements

- **Fresh.** A really good label represents new scholarship without coming across overly didactic or preachy. Wherever possible, they should present original ideas rather than restating commonly held beliefs, platitudes or common sense. A label should be written with flair and passion for the material which is not the same thing as flaunting curatorial erudition.
- **Diversity.** When there are voices previously underrepresented in a museum, and the subject has special import for a particular group of people, those people should have representation and acknowledgement of authorship.
- **Relevant.** A good label anticipates questions many people are likely to have rather than speaking to an exclusive group of insiders. A good label leads with what matters, like with good journalism, the lede isn't buried to such an extent that interested people never find it or read it. A good label has a reader in mind and speaks to that reader in the present moment when the moment connects directly or indirectly to the thing it describes. A good label treats museum goers with respect without pandering to or patronizing the reader.
- **Work with images and objects.** Good labels communicate with images as well as text. A picture can say many things words cannot say. Images and text are used in a mutually supportive communicative context not merely repeating what can be seen or said. An object label should answer a question a reader is likely to have upon viewing the object, never merely containing the musings of the curator intended for the cognoscenti or describing what can already be clearly seen by a viewer.
- **Factual.** As much as possible, a great label should be supported by the facts. Where facts are impossible to ascertain, the ambiguity of definitive knowledge should be acknowledged.
- **Legible.** A good label is designed to be read easily, not decorative or fussy, not tiny or placed too far outside of the context of direct viewing or experiences. A good label is easy to find and read for the curious.
- **Storytelling.** Objects with great stories involving real people and issues should have their stories told whenever possible.

## ADRIENNE LALLI HILLS

*Associate Director for Learning and Engagement at First Americans Museum*

By day, Adrienne Lalli Hills leads the department of learning and community engagement at First Americans Museum. And by night, she has been an independent consultant and board member and

volunteer for informal learning organizations and initiatives. How'd she get here? Her professional journey began 15 years ago with a master printmaking internship in the dusty outskirts of Santa Fe, which led to part-time gigs at a local art museum, onward to a science center and children's museums, into school programs, toward a completed master's degree in teaching, to museum interpretation, managing tinkering spaces for families, to directing a community arts school, and—finally—leading a department of education. She carries these experiences with her like Batman's utility belt: perhaps a bit cumbersome, but filled with tools ready to deploy for the next challenge (or label) awaiting a creative solution.

What makes a good label?

- A good label gets to the point and anticipates visitors' burning questions about the object it accompanies
- Eschewing superciliousness or obfuscation, a good label is uses plain language and avoids cliché and specialist jargon
- Like a thoughtful host at a house party, a good label doesn't assume prior knowledge. It sufficiently yet concisely introduces new people, artists, and movements (i.e., "American painter Elaine de Kooning")
- A good label doesn't exist in a vacuum—it is the extension of a thoughtful interpretive plan and careful collaboration among colleagues

## BRITTANY HUTCHINSON

Brittany earned her BA in anthropology with a concentration in bioarchaeology from Wayne State University. Her research included diet reconstruction, and the manifestations of work-stress of the enslaved and Late Woodland era populations. She completed additional bioarchaeological training at Arizona State University's Kampsville Bioarchaeology Field School. Brittany earned her MA in Museum Studies and Historic Preservation from Morgan State University. She continued her training at the University of Maryland's Annapolis Field School. She also worked as an archaeologist with The Hill Project, an initiative focusing on a free-Black neighborhood in Easton, Maryland. Brittany's research interests include cultural expressions of marginalized people and their connections to urban history, landscape, and public policy. During the competition, Brittany was an assistant curator at the Chicago History Museum. Most recently, she landed at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture as a curator.

Writers and editors:

**Julie Schumacher**, writer

**Lisa Thomas**, exhibit developer

**Josh Coles**, Museum Director, reviewer

**Margaret Frisbie**, Executive Director

**Friends of the Chicago River**, reviewer

## ***A River and Its City***

McCormick Bridgehouse and

Chicago River Museum

*Chicago, IL*

Audience type: **General Audience**

Label type: **Introductory**



## **Author Statement**

This large interpretive panel is located directly opposite the museum entrance. As the first interpretive content encountered, our goal was to invoke curiosity and excitement as well as orient visitors geographically and temporally. As part of the museum's mission to foster both a sense of wonder and a sense of responsibility for the Chicago River, the panel helps invoke a river system once untouched.

### **Before there was a city, there was a river**

**If you stood here 350 years ago, you would be knee-deep in mud. To the west, you could see miles of prairie; to the east, the sand dunes of Lake Michigan; and across the river, wetlands teeming with life.**

Today, you stand in the McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum, dedicated to the dynamic and evolving relationship between Chicago and its river.

Discover the rich natural history of the Chicago River system. Explore its critical role in early trade and travel. Learn how residents tried to shape and control the Chicago River. And see how, today, we work to protect the river as a vital part of our city and our natural world.

Whether you're a curious resident of the region or a visitor from afar, Friends of the Chicago River invites you to find out what's inside.

Writers and editors:

**Eric Ray**, writer

**Editors:** Cesar Mendez, Diana Moy,  
Lydia Pagel, Cassie Cox, Nicolas Havlik,  
Mark Lockwood, Tim Roberts, Jenni-  
fer Carpenter, Stephen Garrett, Kate  
Saling,

## ***Our Mountains, Our Place. Nuestras Montañas, Nuestro Lugar***

Franklin Mountains State Park  
*El Paso, TX*

Audience type: **General Audience**

Type: **Artifact**

### **Praise from Jurors**

What a delightful way to frame a geologic story! Interpretive panels for landscape can tend toward the erudite and dull, but this is a fresh approach to natural history narratives. Ending with cheeky reviews is further...icing on the cake.

*Adrienne Lalli Hills*



### **Author Statement**

The Franklin Mountains themselves are omnipresent in El Paso. The labels in the exhibition attempt to connect the mountains' physical wayfinding ability with a spiritual or metaphysical wayfinding ability. Everyone comes to the mountains seeking something—adventure, solace, quiet, connection. What else might visitors find while on their trip?

The Franklin Mountains have never had a comprehensive visitor center before, which provided a wonderful opportunity for interpretation. Unfortunately, being a new building, we did not have the ability to test labels on park visitors - only many internal stakeholders.

### **Have a Piece of Cake! ¡Toma una rebanada de pastel!**

Start with layers of ocean sand.  
Empieza con capas de arena de mar.

Bake with volcanic lava until the top is hard.  
Hornea con lava volcánica hasta que se endurezca la capa superior.

Add more layers of ocean sand.  
Agrega más capas de arena de mar.

Season with seashells and creatures to taste.  
Sazona con conchas marinas y otras criaturas al gusto.

Let rest for a few hundred million years.  
Deja reposar unos cuantos cientos de millones de años.

Cut cake in half for display, drizzle with new sand and river water.  
Corta el pastel a la mitad para exhibirlo, espolvorea más arena y agua de río.

#### **Recipe Reviews:**

- \*\*\*\* Looked dry, but had amazing layers.
- \*\*\*\*\* Loved the way you could see how it's made just by looking!
- \* Interesting recipe, but takes way too long to make at home.

#### **Opiniones de las Recetas:**

- \*\*\*\* Se veía muy seco, pero tenía magníficas capas.
- \*\*\*\*\* ¡Me encantó poder ver cómo se formó con solo mirarlo!
- \* Receta interesante, pero toma demasiado tiempo hacerla en casa.



Writers and editors:

**Paul Morando**, Chief of Exhibits, Writer and Editor

**Melissa Weissert**, Museum Curator, Writer and Editor

**Sarah Bowen**, Museum Specialist, Writer and Editor

**Cornelius Abelsma**, Museum Curator, Editor

**Roger Wright**, Exhibits Coordinator, Editor

## ***Soldiers' Story***

National Museum of the United States Army  
*Fort Belvoir, VA*

Audience type: **General Audience**

Type: **Biography**

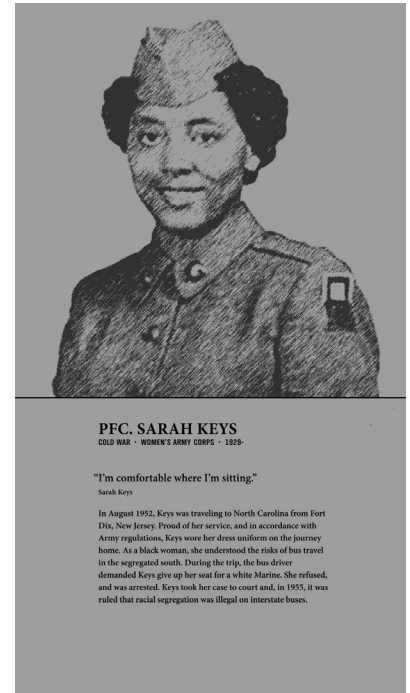
## **Praise from Jurors**

Lovely story miniatures, clean, direct, not fussy. A near-perfect balance of expository information and story detail. Emotionally gripping. The use of first-person quotes humanizes the narratives. Descriptive details contribute to a larger interpretive point.

*Dan Spock*

## **Author Statement**

The theme of the Museum is "Every Soldier has a Story." With this exhibit, we wanted to highlight the stories of every-day men and women whose names might not be in the history books, but whose service and dedication as Soldiers made a difference. We hoped that in these brief, short biographies, along with a quote and image of the person, visitors could connect with the Soldiers and see them as individuals who had the same dreams, goals, and struggles as all of us. The biggest challenge was capturing these stories concisely while educating visitors to large moments of history.



## **Pfc. Sarah Keys**

Cold War • Women's Army Corps • 1929-

"I'm comfortable where I'm sitting."

Sarah Keys

In August 1952, Keys was traveling to North Carolina from Fort Dix, New Jersey. Proud of her service, and in accordance with Army regulations, Keys wore her dress uniform on the journey home. As a black woman, she understood the risks of bus travel in the segregated south. During the trip, the bus driver demanded Keys give up her seat for a white Marine. She refused, and was arrested. Keys took her case to court and, in 1955, it was ruled that racial segregation was illegal on interstate buses.

Writers and editors:

**Writer:** Tamera Lenz Muentz, associate curator

**Editors:** Lynne Ambrosini, former deputy director and the Sallie Robinson Wadsworth chief curator

**Deborah Emont Scott**, Louise Taft Semple President/CEO

**Anita Buck**, contract editor

**Elise Solomon**, director of learning and engagement

## A Splendid Century: Cincinnati Art 1820-1920

Taft Museum of Art  
*Cincinnati, OH*

Audience type: **General Audience**

Type: **Object**

### Praise from Jurors

Creative use of perspective and framing.  
Long but worth reading.

*Brittany Hutchinson*

Love the construct: here's the typical label, but here's more to the story. The really compelling narrative is below the surface and it is now being revealed. Provides contemporary relevance to today's museum-goers. Also provides good model for updating exhibit labels in older exhibits.

*Donna Braden*

## Author Statement

How do you make art of the past relevant for today's generation, which is deeply invested in diversity, equity, and inclusion? In recognition that no century is truly "splendid" for everyone, I expanded the labels for 16 of the works in the exhibition in a series called "More to the Story." These labels and the works of art they accompany share the stories of underrepresented groups including women, Black people, and Indigenous people. The labels go beyond what viewers see on the surface of the work of art to reveal compelling narratives accessed through the artists and subject matter.

### Lilly Martin Spencer

(b. 1822 Exeter, England–d. 1902  
New York, New York)

### Self-Portrait, about 1840

*Oil on canvas*

On loan from the Ohio History Connection,  
Columbus, Ohio

An 18-year-old Lilly Martin Spencer portrayed herself as confident, playful, and pensive in this self-portrait. Lying on her stomach in the grass, she props her head against her hand as a curl falls over one eye. Spencer's youthful talent caught Nicholas Longworth's attention, and he offered to fund her art training in Boston. She instead chose to move from Marietta, Ohio, to Cincinnati, where Longworth invited her to his home and introduced her to other artists and patrons. After several years in Cincinnati, bolstered by success with her paintings and Longworth's support, Spencer relocated to New York in search of bigger opportunities.

### MORE to the STORY

In the mid-19th century, women were expected to marry and devote their lives to family and home, but Lilly Martin Spencer's progressive French parents—a women's rights activist and a socialist—encouraged her artistic abilities. After emigrating to New York from England in 1832, they enrolled nine-year-old Lilly in drawing classes before moving to Ohio. Later, Spencer told her mother, "To . . . succeed in my painting . . . I am not able to give my attention to anything else."

By 1850, only about 10 percent of American women—mostly unmarried—were employed outside the home, many as teachers, nurses, or domestic servants. Despite marrying and having a large family, Spencer became a professional artist—an exceedingly rare accomplishment for a woman at that time.

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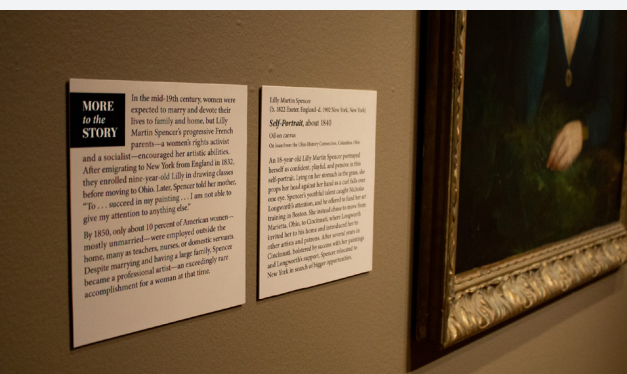
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Writers and editors:

**Maria Kiamesso DaSilva**, writer

**Ashleigh David**, writer

**Erin Spicola**, writer

**Lauren Cooper**, editor

**Jessica Bicknell**, editor

**Kate Quinn**, editor

## *Living with the Sea: Charting the Pacific*

Penn Museum of Archeology and  
Anthropology  
Philadelphia, PA

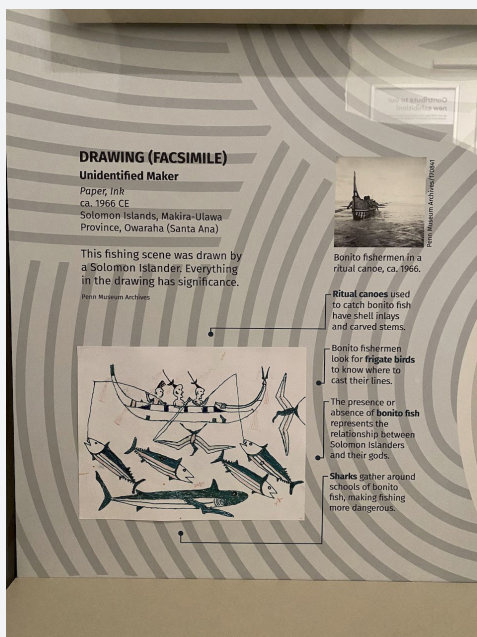
Audience type: **General Audience**

Type: **Object**

### Praise from Jurors

Elegant interpretation of imagery  
through indigenous knowledge without  
excess verbiage or pretentious prose.  
A haiku of interpretive clarity and  
concision.

*Dan Spock*



### Author Statement

Living with the Sea evolved from the “Year of Data,” a university-wide theme about collecting and interpreting data. Our team mined the archives for drawings, photographs, and first-person accounts created by American ethnographers and craftspeople in the Pacific Islands in order to bring context to the objects on display. Drawing on the “data” theme, many of the labels are presented in an infographic style that breaks down the meanings behind symbols on the objects. Throughout the project, we focused on highlighting the voices of the original craftspeople and bringing in perspectives from contemporary communities in the Pacific Islands.

### DRAWING (FACSIMILE)

#### Unidentified Maker

*Paper, Ink*

ca. 1966 CE

Solomon Islands, Makira-Ulawa  
Province, Owaraha (Santa Ana)

This fishing scene was  
drawn by a Solomon  
Islander. Everything in the  
drawing has significance.

Penn Museum Archives

**Ritual canoes** used to catch  
bonito fish have shell inlays  
and carved stems.

Bonito fishermen look for  
**frigate birds** to know where to  
cast their lines.

The presence or absence of  
**bonito fish** represents the  
relationship between Solomon  
Islanders and their gods.

**Sharks** gather around schools  
of bonito fish, making fishing  
more dangerous.



Writers and editors:

**RaeLana Vee Poteat**, Curator of Political and Social History;

**Doris McLean Bates**, Chief, Editorial and Graphic Design Section

## You Have to Start a Thing

North Carolina Museum of History  
Raleigh, NC

Audience type: **General Audience**

Type: **Introductory and Special Labels**

## Praise from Jurors

Good, clear writing. Concise, interesting. The strongest part of these labels is the encouragement to closer looking at evidence, an image decoding process, revealing patterns of opposition and support re: woman suffrage. Sometimes, however, the labels run on a bit too long, taking us down a rabbit hole of close inspection that veers too far away from the big idea.

*Dan Spock*



## Author Statement

This exhibit is part of statewide commemorations of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. But the team didn't want celebratory label copy—the struggle for woman suffrage in North Carolina was intricately tied to white supremacy, and women of color did not receive the vote here in 1920. The team wanted informative, engaging labels with a matter-of-fact approach for discussing uncomfortable truths. By using straightforward language and structuring some labels to guide visitors toward a careful examination of period primary resources, we sought to create the space for visitors to revisit preconceptions and to consider a call to action.

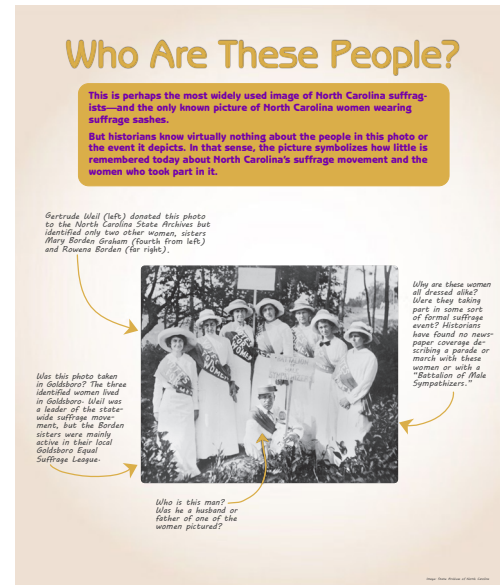
## Who Are These People?

This is perhaps the most widely used image of North Carolina suffragists—and the only known picture of North Carolina women wearing suffrage sashes.

But historians know virtually nothing about the people in this photo or the event it depicts. In that sense, the picture symbolizes how little is remembered today about North Carolina's suffrage movement and the women who took part in it.

Gertrude Weil (left) donated this photo to the North Carolina State Archives but identified only two other women, sisters Mary Borden Graham (fourth from left) and Rowena Borden (far right).

Why are the women all dressed alike? Were they taking part in some sort of formal suffrage event? Historians have found no newspaper coverage describing a parade or march with these women or with a "Battalion of Male Sympathizers."



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Was this photo taken in Goldsboro? The three identified women lived in Goldsboro—Weil was a leader of the statewide suffrage movement, but the Borden sisters were mainly active in their local Goldsboro Equal Suffrage League.



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Who is this man? Was he a husband or father of one of the women pictured?

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Writers and editors:

**RaeLana Vee Poteat**, Curator of Political and Social History;

**Doris McLean Bates**, Chief, Editorial and Graphic Design Section

## You Have to Start a Thing

North Carolina Museum of History  
Raleigh, NC

Audience type: **General Audience**

Type: **Introductory and Special Labels**

## Praise from Jurors

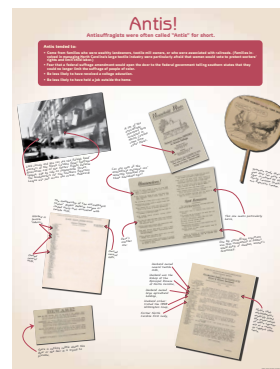
Awkward! This short injection invites and enlivens contemporary discourse about the suffragette movement. The following playful discussion that guides visitors as they “read” an historical image was so successful in piquing this juror’s interest in the subject matter, I’m now Googling similar images to investigate myself.

*Adrienne Lalli Hills*



## Author Statement

This exhibit is part of statewide commemorations of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. But the team didn’t want celebratory label copy—the struggle for woman suffrage in North Carolina was intricately tied to white supremacy, and women of color did not receive the vote here in 1920. The team wanted informative, engaging labels with a matter-of-fact approach for discussing uncomfortable truths. By using straightforward language and structuring some labels to guide visitors toward a careful examination of period primary resources, we sought to create the space for visitors to revisit preconceptions and to consider a call to action.



## Antis!

**Antisuffragists were often called “Antis” for short.**

Antis tended to:

- Come from families who were wealthy landowners, textile mill owners, or who were associated with railroads. (Families involved in managing North Carolina’s large textile industry were particularly afraid that women would vote to protect workers’ rights and limit child labor.)
- Fear that a federal suffrage amendment would open the door to the federal government telling southern states that they could no longer limit the suffrage of people of color.
- Be less likely to have received a college education.
- Be less likely to have held a job outside the home.
- ▲ Look closely and you can see the Raleigh headquarters of the North Carolina Equal Suffrage Association and of the States’ Rights Defense League, side by side on Fayetteville Street. The headquarters for the Southern Rejection League was just across the street. Awkward!
- ▲ A lot of the antisuffrage literature that circulated in North Carolina came from other places.
- ▲ Can you spot all the antisuffrage messages conveniently sprinkled into these household tips?
- ▲ Here’s another one.
- ▲ This one seems particularly harsh.
- ▲ One big antisuffrage argument was that involvement in politics would dirty, or cheapen, women’s femininity. Someone made their own Anti fan using a flyer circulated by the North Carolina Southern Rejection League.
- ▲ The membership of the antisuffragist States’ Rights Defense League included many men associated with textile mills.
- ▲ Worked in textile industry.
- ▲ Owned several mills.
- ▲ Owned several mills.
- ▲ Notice that antisuffragists explicitly listed the preservation of white supremacy as a reason to support their cause.
- ▲ Husband owned several textile mills.
- ▲ Husband was the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina.
- ▲ Husband owned large agricultural holdings.
- ▲ Husband orchestrated the 1898 Wilmington Coup.
- ▲ Former North Carolina First Lady.
- ▲ There is nothing subtle about this flyer or the fear it is trying to provoke.

Images: State Archives of North Carolina

Writers and editors:

**RaeLana Vee Poteat**, Curator of Political and Social History;

**Doris McLean Bates**, Chief, Editorial and Graphic Design Section

## *You Have to Start a Thing*

North Carolina Museum of History  
Raleigh, NC

Audience type: **General Audience**

Type: **Introductory and Special Labels**

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## What Will You Fight For?

Big questions aren't always settled quickly. American women fought for many decades to gain the right to vote. Women of color struggled for centuries to become full citizens. Today's North Carolinians don't always agree on issues. But voting gives us a chance to express our opinions and our hopes for the future.

The women and men profiled in this exhibition fought for what they believed in. Looking back, we may find some of their language and motives jarring, but we can also see how their debate helped shape our world. So, take a moment and ask yourself, What cause am I willing to stand up for?

Writers and editors:

**Eileen Campbell**, writer

**Donna Linden**, editor

## ***Middle Ground: Reconsidering ourselves and others***

The Exploratorium

San Francisco, CA

Audience type: **Users of the city's Civic Plaza—a population diverse in income, race, age, education, and language**

Type: **Concept**

## **Praise from Jurors**

Aimed at non-museum goers in a public space, these labels should catch the interest of casual passers-by. They made me think twice about my assumptions and pre-conceptions, while still based on social science research.

*Donna Braden*

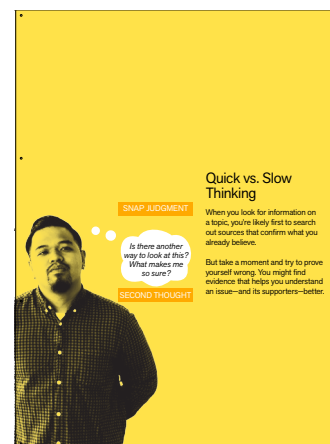
Labels were tested with an atypical, non-museum audience: outdoor passersby in a trafficked public location where the exhibit was located. It shows. The writing is concise, welcoming, informal, chatty. The topicality of this exhibit also set it apart and its highly public setting in the commons made this really relevant for a time of highly contested truth. An engaging and accessible unpacking of perceptual bias and the social construction of perception. Fostering critical thinking at a time when we really need it. Bravo!

*Dan Spock*

## **Author Statement**

People using this installation are not your typical museum-goers. We needed to write in an accessible style, free of jargon and assumptions about knowledge, and in a way that would speak to people about their lives and relate to this location. At the same time, we needed to present accurate, research-based social science. A social scientist on the team oversaw scientific content. We tested exhibits/labels onsite with the intended audience.

The quick-slow flapper labels communicate a main idea of the exhibition with both words and form: take a moment to go beyond your initial reactions to people.



*Quick-Slow flip label: top and under*

## **SNAP JUDGMENT**

See? It's just like I always say!

## **SECOND THOUGHT**

Is there another way to look at this?  
What makes me so sure?

## **Quick vs Slow Thinking**

When you look for information on a topic, you're likely first to search out sources that confirm what you already believe.

But take a moment and try to prove yourself wrong. You might find evidence that helps you understand an issue—and its supporters—better.





Writers and editors:

**Eileen Campbell**, writer

**Donna Linden**, editor

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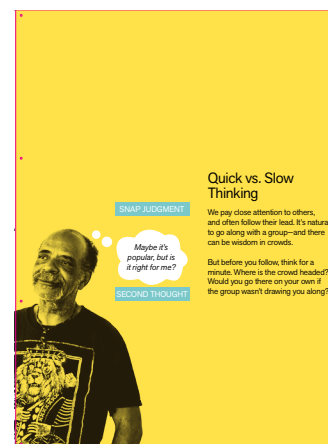
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*Quick-Slow flip label: top and under*

### **SNAP JUDGMENT**

Everybody's doing it!

### **SECOND THOUGHT**

Maybe it's popular, but is it right for me?

#### **Quick vs Slow Thinking**

We pay close attention to others, and often follow their lead. It's natural to go along with a group—and there can be wisdom in crowds.

But before you follow, think for a minute. Where is the crowd headed? Would you go there on your own if the group wasn't drawing you along?

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**Pull up a chair...**

**...let's talk**

## **Middle Ground**

**Reconsidering ourselves and others**

In the city, we walk among others. We watch people, form opinions, follow the crowd or not. All day, we decide how to be with people.

Scientists have learned much about such social interactions. They've studied bias and stereotyping, humor and generosity; they've looked at how we work together, and how we pull apart into tribes.

Ahead, discover some of what shapes our social lives. Play a bit; try things out. Pull up a chair and have a chat—what better topic than each other?

