



Provenance: Objects as Sources of History

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What is provenance?

- ▶ Provenance
 - ▶ The origin or source of something
 - ▶ Information regarding the origins, custody, and ownership of an item or collection¹
- ▶ Vital to museum collections
- ▶ Basics of provenance can be found in most museum collections management systems

¹ Society of American Archivists. "Provenance." <http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/p/provenance>.

Objects as Historical Sources

- ▶ Historical objects are primary source documents – you just have to dig!
- ▶ Any object can be a source of history
- ▶ Write down every question, follow every lead
- ▶ Ask yourself:
 - ▶ **WHAT** is the object?
 - ▶ **WHERE** was the object made/where did it come from?
 - ▶ **WHO** made it?
 - ▶ **WHY** was it made?
 - ▶ **WHEN** was it made?
 - ▶ **HOW** was it made/HOW did it get here?

What can objects tell us?

- ▶ Portrait paintings
 - ▶ Give insights to historical themes and styles
 - ▶ Example: John Singer Sargent
- ▶ Photographs
 - ▶ Literally capture a moment in time
 - ▶ Ask: what was the motivation behind the photograph?
- ▶ Anthropological objects
 - ▶ How foreign cultures were viewed at certain time periods
 - ▶ Reveals racism, ignorance
 - ▶ Example: Toi moko and Maori culture
- ▶ ANY object can be a source of historical information!

Example: Fighting African Elephants



- ▶ **What:** taxidermied male African elephants (*Loxodonta africana*)
- ▶ **Where:** Aberdare Range, Kenya
 - ▶ Now at the Field Museum, Chicago
- ▶ **Who:** Carl Akeley
- ▶ **Why:** scientific study, display
- ▶ **When:** 27 July 1906
- ▶ **How:** shot, skinned, mounted.



What questions does this prompt?

**These questions will guide your
research!**

Questions? Comments? Concerns? Contact me!

- ▶ Email: alli_rico@outlook.com
- ▶ Twitter: @alli_rico
- ▶ Interesting sources:
 - ▶ [MFA Provenance](#)
 - ▶ [Provenance Mapping Project](#)
from NEMA's 2013 Conference
(project to do with students)

