Guantánamo Public Memory Project

The Guantánamo Public Memory Project seeks to build public awareness of the long history of the US naval station at Guantánamo, Bay, Cuba from multiple perspectives and to foster dialogue on the future of this place, its people, and the policies it shapes.
How did we get to Gitmo?

“Guantánamo” has become an international symbol of America’s War on Terror, and a lightning rod for debates about torture, detention, national security, and human rights. But the US naval station at Guantánamo Bay—also known by its military acronym “GTMO” or its nickname, “Gitmo”—was part of American politics and policy for a century before 9-11. It has been used to shape American empire, confront Cold War conflicts, and shape new approaches to immigration and public health. It has been “closed” several times, only to be put to new use. Long before the first enemy combatant arrived, thousands of others lived in this “legal black hole”—Caribbean refugees stranded there in tent cities; military families who remember it as a treasured American home; and scores of Cuban exiled workers cut off from their families across the fence line.

In 2012, students at 11 universities around the country asked: what can GTMO’s history tell us about what’s happening now—there, and here at home? They dug through historical and visual archives; talked to people who worked there, lived there, were detained there, or advocated for those who were; and explored how GTMO relates to issues, people, and places in their own communities. Each student team created one or two of the panels in this exhibit, sharing their discoveries—and the difficult questions they struggled with.

Now you can add your community’s voice to the national dialogue by hosting the exhibit, inviting your students to contribute public memory projects, hosting public dialogues, or joining the on-line discussion.
Exhibit Components

Exhibit comprises 13 light-weight 70”x80” banners and:

- **Video testimonies**: Over one hundred 3-5 minute audio portraits of people who experienced GTMO first-hand from diverse perspectives, including refugees held there, military children who grew up there, Cubans who worked there, and “enemy combatants.”

- **“Shape the Debate” text-message voting activity**: opportunity to add your take to the growing national dialogue and see your feedback shape the debate on exhibit monitors.

- **Mobile multimedia**: access video testimonies and deeper digital content through your smart phone.

Additional Resources

- **Web platform**: at www.gitmomemory.org, including interactive map, blog, and timeline.

- **Teaching resources**: curriculum and extensive resource library with primary and secondary sources, including documents, images, and video footage.

- **Dialogue kits**: detailed discussion guides for you to host conversations about GTMO and the questions it raises in your own communities.

- **Speakers’ bureau**: list of experts – from scholars to people with direct experience – on a diversity of issues.

- **Opportunity to engage students and communities** by creating their own public memory projects or participating in online discussions.
I 1 August 1994, when President Castro lifted an emigration ban, thousands of Cubans set to sea, many on makeshift rafts. These “rafters” or balseros, fled extreme food rationing, rampant power shortages, and the political repression of Cuba’s post-Soviet “Special Period in Peacetime.”

Fearing an immigration crisis, President Clinton reversed US policy of automatically granting Cubans who left the island asylum. He ordered the Coast Guard to intercept and send approximately 32,000 Cubans to the “safe haven” of GTMO.

GTMO officials first told balseros they would never enter the US, but did not explain how long they would be held or where they would go. Already overwhelmed by thousands of Haitians detained at GTMO, US military personnel struggled to accommodate the Cubans. Many balseros suffered extreme heat, hunger, violence, and acute boredom during their detainment.

But conditions gradually improved, and with help from aid agencies, balseros created a vibrant community that included art galleries, newspapers, and a radio station.

Ultimately, the US government admitted many balseros within a year of their arrival at GTMO. This stood in stark contrast to the treatment of Haitians detained there, the majority of whom were returned to a volatile Haiti.

The last balsero left GTMO on January 31, 1996. But the base continues to hold hundreds of Cuban refugees captured at sea—the current “wet-foot/dry-foot” policy only grants asylum to Cubans who make it to US soil. Recently improved facilities now stand ready to house potential future refugees.

Exhibit comprises thirteen 70”x 80” banners each with the following components:

**BIG QUESTION**
the larger issue students grappled with when studying this history

**TIMELINE**
content

**QR CODE**
Visitors scan with their smartphone to access video testimonies and other additional content

**SMS QUESTION**
Visitors are invited to vote and comment via text message on a current debate GTMO’s history raises. Votes and comments are continually updated and shown in an exhibit monitor

**OUR POINT OF VIEW**
Students share “where they’re coming from” and how their backgrounds framed their approach
Sample exhibit banners:

**GUANTÁNAMO HITS HOME**

**How Has GTMO Affected America’s Laws and Values?**

**“It must be against some law for you to do this to me.”**

- Cuban and Haitian seabirds—equally uncaring for the world.

- Haitian and Cuban seabirds—impressionable material.

- Guantanamo Bay has been used to house detainees from various countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan.

- The United States has been criticized for its treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay, with allegations of abuse and violations of international law.

**SHAPING AN EMPIRE**

**What Are the Consequences of Global Expansion?**

“Cuba ought to be free and independent, and the government should be turned over to the Cuban people!”

- When Cuban insurgents began laying siege to Spanish colonial power on the island of Cuba, the Spanish imperialists were forced to respond.

- In 1898, Spain surrendered the island of Cuba to the United States, marking the beginning of the United States’ imperialist expansion.

- Since then, the United States has maintained a significant military presence in Cuba, including the installation of Guantanamo Bay as a naval base and detention facility.

**OUR POINT OF VIEW**

- Cuba is a country that has been profoundly impacted by the United States’ imperialist expansion.

- The United States’ actions in Cuba have led to resistance and popular uprisings, including the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

- Despite these challenges, Cuba has maintained its own unique identity and resilience.

**DOWNLOAD PDF OF ALL PANELS AT:**

picture-projects.com/load/GTMO/panels.pdf
**Themes**

Each exhibit banner focuses on a different theme or time period in GTMO’s history.

1. **Introduction**
   
   Overview of the exhibit with monitor displaying continually updated visitor responses to “Shape the Debate” questions. (32”-40” monitor required in front of or positioned near this panel).

2. **Where is Guantánamo?**
   
   An orientation to the base’s geography and built environment.

3. **What are the Consequences of Global Expansion?**
   
   How the US came to control the territory of Guantánamo Bay after the War of 1898.

4. **What Laws Apply in a State of Exception?**
   
   The peculiar 1903 lease with Cuba that created GTMO’s “legal black hole,” and who it has impacted in the decades since.

5. **How Do Policies Build Places?**
   
   The development of the base’s infrastructure through WWII.

6. **How do International Tensions Shape Everyday Lives?**
   
   Daily life for military families and Cuban workers on the base during the Cold War.

7. **Who is a Refugee? What Makes a Refuge?**
   
   Experiences of Haitian refugees feeling Haiti who were interdicted at sea and held at GTMO from 1991-1994, including those in the infamous “HIV prison camp.”
8. Safe Haven or Prison Camp?
Experiences of Cuban Refugees held at GTMO from 1994-1996, exploring refugees’ diverse assessments of their time in tent cities.

9. Is the US Sacrificing Civil Liberties to Secure Its Safety?
The legal battles over GTMO and its relation to debates over detention in the US. Includes statistics on GTMO prisoners since 9-11.

10. How has GTMO Affected America’s Laws and Values?
Domestic repercussions of GTMO, including Islamophobia and “Little Gitmo” at Terre Haute, Indiana.

11. What Does Art Reveal About GTMO?
Art created by people detained at GTMO in different moments and for different reasons, with context of how the art was created and the role it played in detainees’ experiences. Includes video on art of Cuban refugees with testimony from Cuban artists. (19”-22” monitor required in front of or near this panel)

12. How Do Memories of GTMO Survive?
How the military families who grew up at GTMO remember the base as a treasured home and maintain close ties with each other through reunions.

13. Who Decides GTMO’s Future?
How GTMO has been “closed” before, and the variety of visions—both Cuban and American—for its future.
Multimedia and Visitor Participation

Multimedia content: Exhibit requires 2 monitors for content related to specific panels. Additional content can be projected from the web platform at www.gitmomemory.org, or venues can make the web platform available for visitors to explore on computers. Content includes:

- Video testimonies: 3-5 minute audio portraits from people who lived, worked, were detained at GTMO, or advocated for people there from the Cold War through the War on terror
- Interactive map of the base, including sites from Camp X-Ray to refugee tent cities to McDonald’s, brought to life with personal testimonies
- Timeline of GTMO’s history in images and testimony, from 1898 through the present.

Mobile multimedia: Using their smart phones, visitors can access video testimonies as well as deeper information on each panel’s theme by scanning the QR codes on each panel.

“Shape the Debate”: Visitor participation system that relies on mobile phones, requiring no equipment from the venue. Each panel includes a “Shape the Debate” question with instructions for how to text votes and comments on the big questions GTMO’s history raises, such as “Is the US an Empire Today?” and “Should the US judge the quality of refugees it admits? On what basis?” Visitors can see their votes and comments shape the debate in the monitor at the start of the exhibit.
As foreign policies change, should the United States maintain permanent foreign bases?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Answers</th>
<th>67% YES</th>
<th>33% NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES They are essential to maintaining our standing as a world leader</td>
<td>Submitted by SMS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO The expense is too great for bases that serve little purpose</td>
<td>Submitted by SMS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES History has shown us we must always be ready</td>
<td>Submitted by SMS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO The United Nations is capable of handling foreign policy and conflict</td>
<td>Submitted by SMS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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VIEW OF MONITOR CONTENT IN INTRODUCTION PANEL

Participating Universities
- Arizona State University, Tempe
- Brown University
- Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
- New York University
- Rutgers University, New Brunswick
- The New School for Public Engagement
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- University of California, Riverside
- University of Miami
- University of Minnesota
- University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- University of West Florida

This project was made possible by contributions from participating universities, plus the Lilla Foundation, the New York Council on the Humanities and the Open Society Foundations.

This Week in Guantánamo: 1903 and 2012

1903, December 16: Official control of Guantánamo Bay is “handed” to the U.S. in a ceremony on the battleship Virginia. At noon on that day the Cuban flag is lowered and the American flag is raised. Only one Cuban is present at the ceremony.

2012, December 12: The Justice Department has ruled that the Obama administration does not have to disclose video showing the forced extraction of Guantánamo Bay prison detainees because doing so would be detrimental to national security.

VIEW OF MONITOR CONTENT IN INTRODUCTION PANEL
How Your University Can Participate

Invite your university to join the national dialogue in one or more of the following ways:

- Teach a course on GTMO using our teaching resources: over 11 universities have used our database of primary and secondary multimedia resources and our sample curriculum to teach courses or units on GTMO’s history and the challenges of its public memory.

- Host the exhibit, and use it as a catalyst for conversation in your community. The exhibit is traveling through the end of 2014, but can be shown simultaneously in multiple venues, with conversations facilitated between host communities. Check out the exhibit schedule to identify potential conversation partners in other regions – or host it in 2015 and beyond.

- Host public programs using our speakers’ bureau of experts– from scholars to people with direct experience – on a diversity of issues

- Facilitate local dialogues using our dialogue kits to host conversations about GTMO and the questions it raises in your own communities

- Invite your students and/or communities to contribute to GTMO’s public memory by conducting additional oral histories, creating digital mini-exhibits for the web platform, or even creating an additional exhibit panel that gives your take on an underrepresented theme. Student work can be displayed at subsequent venues and on the website.
Participating Universities

Students and faculty from the following universities participated in creating the Guantánamo Public Memory Project.

Hub Institution

- Columbia University, Institute for the Study of Human Rights

University Partners

- Arizona State University, Tempe, Public History
- Brown University, Public Humanities
- Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, Museum Studies and Public History
- The New School for Social Engagement, Oral History
- New York University, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Museum Studies Program, Public History and Archives
- University of California, Riverside, Public History
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Public History and Art History
- University of Miami, Documentary Production
- University of Minnesota, History
- University of North Carolina, Greensboro, Public History
- University of West Florida, Public History
The exhibit is scheduled to travel to the following venues. However, if your institution wishes to host it during one of the times below, you may display an additional copy at the same time as another venue, with conversations facilitated between host communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Venue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 13 2012 – February 10 2013</td>
<td>Kimmel Windows Gallery, New York University, New York, NY</td>
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<td>February 18 – March 29 2013</td>
<td>Douglass Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 8 – May 12 2013</td>
<td>Cultural Arts Gallery, Indiana University-Purdue University</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Indianapolis, IN</td>
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<td>May 20 – Summer 2013</td>
<td>California Museum of Photography, Riverside, CA</td>
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<td>September 11 – October 9 2013</td>
<td>Herter Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 16 – November 29 2013</td>
<td>Phoenix Public Library, Phoenix, AZ</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 6 2013 – January 2014</td>
<td>International Civil Rights Center and Museum, Greensboro, NC</td>
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<tr>
<td>February – March 2014</td>
<td>Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, MN</td>
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<tr>
<td>April – May 2014</td>
<td>Historic Pensacola Village, Pensacola, FL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>University of Rhode Island Feinstein Providence Campus Gallery, Providence, RI</td>
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Exhibit Components

Provided:

- 13 Banners - W 70” x H 80”, 108 linear feet.
- Digital prints on durable soft knit polyester;
- Wall/ceiling hanging elements*: 6” invisible hooks
- 26 3/4” wood dowels, 13 with end caps for hanging
- DVD: Arts of Detention

For Panel 1 - “Introduction”
Mac mini computer to display url: http://gitmomemory.org/televisual-monitor/?panel=2&refresh=5

Additional equipment: (required, not provided)

For Panel 1 - “Introduction”
- 32”-40”1080p monitor
- Monitor stand**, Power outlet, Internet access

For Panel 11 - “Arts of Detention”
- 19”-21”monitor
- DVD player or monitor flash drive capability
- Monitor stand**, Power outlet

Additional equipment optional to display additional multimedia content, not provided

For end of exhibition (or as space permits)
- Computer (for website display and use)
  - with mouse, keyboard and sound card
  - Computer stand***, Headphones, Power outlet, Internet access

Exhibit Display

Detailed installation instructions can be downloaded at:
picture-projects.com/load/GTMO/instructions.pdf
- Hang panels 3 feet from ground level and at least 2.5 feet between panels
- Align timeline graphic near the bottom of the panels.
- Display panels chronologically from right to left as shown in graphic B.
- (Optional) A line may be painted behind the panel, aligned with the panel timeline as shown in graphic A.

* Alternative hardware may be used as desired. A good hardware supplier is www.rosedisplays.com. They have many hooks and make hanging hardware called “gotcha bars” which affix to ceiling and hold graphics via horizontal bars.
** Size for monitor stands may vary depending on the monitor size.
*** Computer stand should be high enough for a standing guest.
Shipping

Two 8 x 8 x 85” 2-piece Telescopic Boxes for domestic shipping are provided.

Weight: approximately 20 lbs each

Each box will contain 6-8 panels rolled around their dowels (in seam pockets at the top and bottom) wrapped in bubble wrap.
### Pricing and Specifications

**Contents**

13 (thirteen) 70” x 80” digital prints on durable soft knit polyester; wall/ceiling hanging elements: 26 1/2” wood dowels with 13 pairs of end caps; Mac Mini; Apple mini display port to VGA adapter. Additional equipment required (not provided): 32”-40” 1080p monitor with internet access; 19”-21” monitor, both monitors with stands.

**Size**

108 running feet, est. min. (with 2.5” minimum space between panels)  
Up to 180 linear feet as space allows.

**Supplemental Resources**

Associated curriculum; dialogue kits; speakers’ bureau (all provided)

**Participation Fee**

$7,500 per 12-week booking period plus shipping (shipping materials provided)

**Shipping Size & Weight**

Two 8 x 8 x 85” boxes of approximately 20 lbs each. Estimated cost for domestic shipping $50-500

**Security**

Limited

**Contact**

guantanamo@columbia.edu