



Michael Scognamiglio



In high school, Michael engaged with a number of international service-learning experiences including programs in the slums of Mumbai to a town in Peru. At Penn, Michael turned his attention to the world right around him. As the Philanthropy Chair of Sigma Alpha Epsilon, Michael organized a brand new event for the fraternity—Preppy Games—that benefitted Variety Philadelphia, a group providing disabled children with educational and recreational support. The event, with corporate sponsors Jack Wills, recruited 100 participants and raised \$5,000. Michael worked as a Project Leader with West Philadelphia Tutoring Project to tutor students at the Rhoads School on Math and Reading Comprehension. Michael's Capstone Project is combined with the English Honors Program, and looks at the work of a playwright in a deindustrialized fishing community. His other activities at Penn include the Excelano Project, a campus spoken word poetry group, and writing for 34st Street Magazine

CAPSTONE PROJECT

“The Performance of Obsolescence: Deindustrialization, Memorialization, and Theater in Gloucester, Massachusetts”

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Walter Licht, School of Arts and Sciences, Department of History

In 1979, esteemed New York Playwright Israel Horowitz co-founded the Gloucester Stage Company in the small fishing town of Gloucester, Massachusetts. The professional company performed in the back of Blackburn Tavern, a lively local bar named for Gloucester legend. The stage company eventually relocated to its present performance space: an abandoned warehouse overlooking Gloucester’s picturesque harbor. The warehouse, used by Gorton’s of Gloucester as a fish-processing plant from the 19th century, had remained industrially dormant for decades. 1986 marked the opening of the theater, and the inaugural production in the new space was Horowitz’s own *North Shore Fish*— a play following the lives of workers in a Gloucester frozen fish processing company struggling to stave off obsolescence.

This paper seeks to position Gloucester, Massachusetts (and other global fishing towns) in a genealogy of deindustrialized communities that include the collapse of mining and steel towns after the 1960s. This positioning is vital in the political climate of ecological regulation and quotas to shed light on the economic and social effects that bring about a climate of helplessness and anger when men and women are unable to work (and, inseparable in the Gloucester narrative: to live). Secondly, the paper uses the language of place studies to unpack the role of memorialization as a dialogue with public memory. The purpose of spaces that seek to engage with the memory of a lost time— including memorials and museums— are assessed for their progressive utility in telling a unified community narrative. Lastly, the paper looks at the plays of one playwright in particular—Israel Horowitz—to imbue flexibility in the rigid definition of “memorial” and look at how artistic expression can offer a uniquely invigorating contribution to the community.