History 332
Contesting the Past: Historical Memory in the United States
Mondays 2:30-4:20, Wednesdays 2:30-3:30
Spring 2011

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Office Hours:
Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00
Wednesdays, 11:00-12:30
(and by appointment)

The great southern writer William Faulkner once remarked, “The past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past.” Faulkner recognized the importance, the immediacy, the “presentness” of the past in contemporary southern, and indeed, American culture. Representations of the past play a critical role in our present-day world. These representations can influence the construction of personal and national identities; they can become ammunition in political arguments about contemporary policies and events; and they can be used both to legitimize the nation-state and to critique the myths around which nation-states are built. In this upper-level seminar, we will investigate together the significance of various representations of the American past. By examining public monuments, visual images, films, museums, theme parks, and commemorations, we will explore how historical “truth” and “authenticity” are constructed and how memorialization is itself a contested process. This course contends that the past is all around us, exhibited in a wide variety of forms, with potentially far-reaching consequences. If you own or come across any kinds of representations of the past that you think might be interest to the class (ie, Colonial Barbie, the Magic Tree House books, commemorative coins, civil rights postage stamps, souvenirs), please feel free to bring them in to class to share and analyze.

Students enrolled in History 332 should expect this to be a major time commitment for the semester. As an advanced, upper-level seminar, students will be expected to read 200-250 pages per week. Each student will also be required to conduct independent historical research and to write a 15-page research paper.
COURSE READINGS
The following books are available at the Oberlin bookstore and on reserve at Mudd:

Derek Alderman and Owen Dwyer, Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory
Richard Flores, Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity and the Master Symbol
Richard Handler and Eric Gable, The New History in an Old Museum
Tony Horwitz, Confederates in the Attic
Jill Lepore, The Whites of their Eyes: The Tea Party’s Revolution and the Battle over American History
Sanford Levinson, Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies
Edward Linenthal, Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum
Kirk Savage, Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves
Robert Toplin, Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood
Patricia West, Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America’s House Museums

Items marked with a * in the syllabus are available on the course blackboard site under Course Readings. I highly recommend that you print out readings on the blackboard site and bring them with you to class.

REQUIREMENTS
Grades in this course will be based upon the following:

- **PARTICIPATION (25% of final grade):** Contesting the Past is a discussion-based seminar. Students are expected to arrive at class on time prepared to participate in discussion. If for any reason you are uncomfortable speaking in class, please come to see me at the beginning of the semester to discuss strategies for participation. Attendance and participation will count for 25% of your final grade.

- **READING PAPER AND DISCUSSION FACILITATION (10%):** Each student will sign up for one week for which they will write a reading response paper of 4 to 5 pages and help facilitate class discussion. Further guidelines will be posted on the blackboard site.

- **BLACKBOARD POSTINGS (10% of final grade):** Each student is required to post a paragraph response about the weekly readings to blackboard by 10 p.m. on Sunday evenings. The postings can focus on an aspect of the week’s themes or readings that interests you or they can identify a problem or issue that you would like to discuss in class. Please note that you do not need to post a response during the week in which you are writing a longer reading paper. Each student is allowed one pass on posting a response over the course of the semester—use your pass wisely! Every student—whether writing the longer paper, doing the regular posting, or taking their “pass”—should read through all of the blackboard postings before coming to class on Monday afternoon.

- **RESEARCH PAPER (Paper, 50% of final grade; Oral presentation, 5% of final grade):** The major assignment for History 332 is a 15-page final research paper. Papers can address any topic within the broad field of historical memory, with my approval.
WEEK OF FEBRUARY 28

Monday, 2/28: Public Monument II: Contesting History Written in Stone

Sanford Levinson, Written in Stone (entire)
Dwyer and Alderman, Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory, 3-94

Wednesday, 3/2: Campus Monument Walking Tour—dress warmly!

Dwyer and Alderman, Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory, 95-106

WEEK OF MARCH 7

Monday, 3/7: Master Symbols and Contested Landscapes

Richard Flores, Remembering the Alamo (entire)

Wednesday, 3/9: Research Proposal Due

UNIT 2: PRESERVING THE PAST IN HISTORY MUSEUMS

“It was natural to be nineteenth century in the nineteenth century, and anyone could do it, but in the twentieth it takes quite a lot of toil.”

—Malcolm Bradbury and Michael Orsler

WEEK OF MARCH 14

Monday, 3/14: Historical House Museums

Gary Kulik, “Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present”*
Patricia West, Domesticating History (entire)

Wednesday, 3/16: Field Trip to the Oberlin Heritage Society

Meet at the Oberlin Heritage Society at 2:30 sharp.

WEEK OF MARCH 21


Edward Linenthal, Preserving Memory (entire)
Tim Cole, “The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum”*
Optional: Alison Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: The ‘Object of Remembering’” from Prosthetic Memory.*

Wednesday, 3/23: Primary and Secondary Source bibliographies due
WEEK OF MARCH 26: SPRING BREAK

WEEK OF APRIL 4

Monday, 4/4: The "Authentic Past:" Living History Museums

Richard Handler and Eric Gable, The New History in an Old Museum (entire)

Wednesday, 4/6: Primary Source Analysis Workshop

Bring a primary source that you are using in your paper to class.

UNIT 3: HISTORY IN POPULAR CULTURE

"If history were thought of as an activity rather than a profession, then the numbers of its practitioners would be legion."

Raphael Samuel, 1994

WEEK OF APRIL 11

Monday, 4/11: Living in the Past: Historical Reenactments

Wednesday, 4/13: Meeting with Peer-Reviewers/Individual Meetings about Drafts

WEEK OF MAY 9

Monday, 5/9: Research Presentations

Wednesday, 5/11: Research Presentations

Friday, 5/13: Final Paper Due by 5:00 pm, History Department Office