Contesting the Past: Historical Memory in the United States

History 332
Mondays 2:30-4:20
Spring 2009

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Office Hours:
Mondays, 9:30-11:30
Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00
(and by appointment)

“He who controls the present controls the past. He who controls the past controls the future.”

George Orwell, 1984

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 explore 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 process, and often a contested one.

History 332 will have one required field trip, one optional (but highly recommended) field trip, one required evening film viewing, and one required evening discussion session. As an advanced, upper-level seminar, students will be expected to read 200-250 pages per week. A central contention of this course is that the past is all around us, exhibited in a wide variety of forms, with potentially far-reaching consequences. Students will be expected to rigorously engage with the course readings, to undertake individual research, and to share their daily encounters with history in the realm outside the classroom. 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.

COURSE READINGS
The following books are available at the Oberlin bookstore and on reserve at Mudd:

Richard Flores, Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity and the Master Symbol
Richard Handler and Eric Gable, The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg
Tony Horwitz, Confederates in the Attic
Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies*
Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*
Emily Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory*
Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America*
Robert Toplin, *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood*

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 PAPERS (25% of final grade):** Each student is required to write a reading paper of no more than 500 words for 9 of the 11 class sessions with assigned readings. The reading paper should focus on an aspect of the week’s themes or readings that interests you, although you cannot write about only one reading if there are multiple readings for the week. Reading papers should address all of the readings for the week in some fashion. Papers should not summarize the reading. Reading papers should instead set up a problem or issue that would be interesting to discuss in class. All papers must end with two questions that would be a good starting place for class discussion. Reading papers should be typed, double-spaced, and they must include a word count. All reading papers must be uploaded to the Assignments section of the blackboard site by 9:00 p.m. on the Sunday before class. Late reading papers will not be accepted. Readings papers will be graded on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. These papers combined shall count for 25% of your total grade.

- **RESEARCH PAPER (Paper, 45% 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. Papers must be based on original research of some kind. They should also draw on relevant secondary sources and course materials to locate and contextualize your topic. We will discuss the process of defining good research topics in class. The following deadlines are associated with the research paper:
Friday, February 27: A short description (no more than 1-page) of your proposed topic, your planned methodology, and your potential research plan must be deposited in the Assignment section of the course blackboard site by 5:00 p.m. These will be returned in class on March 2nd.

Friday, March 13: A bibliography of the most important primary and secondary sources that you will be using in your research must be submitted to the Assignment Section of the blackboard site by 5:00 p.m. Bibliographies will be returned in class on March 30th.

Thursday, April 30: First drafts of research papers due by 5:00 p.m.. Each paper will be read by me and by one of the students in the class. Submit one copy of your first draft in the box for History 332 in the History Department Office, upload one copy of your paper to the Assignments Section of the blackboard site, and email a copy of your paper to your peer reviewer by 5:00 p.m. Peer reviewers will be assigned, and review guidelines distributed, in class. First drafts with comments will be returned by Wednesday, May 6th.

Monday, May 4th: Each student will give a formal oral presentation of his or her research during our final class meeting on May 4th. Presentations should last no more than 10 minutes and should be prepared in advance (grading guidelines will be handed out in advance).

Wednesday, May 13: Revised final copies of the research paper must be submitted by noon on Wednesday, May 13. Papers may, of course, be submitted earlier. Turn in the paper to the History Department office by noon.

The research paper will count for 45% of your final grade; the grade on the oral presentation will count for 5% of the final grade.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Students with more than one unexcused absence will not be able to receive a grade above a “B.” Students with more than two unexcused absences will dropped from the class roster.

Late papers:
Late papers will be downgraded 1/3 grade for the first day they are late and an additional full letter grade for each additional day. Late reading papers will not be accepted. Extensions will be given only for medical reasons or family emergencies.

Plagiarism and cheating:
All work for this course must be done in compliance with the Oberlin Honor Code. Any cases of plagiarism will be dealt with immediately according to the letter of college
policy. Plagiarism is passing the work of others off as your own work. You must acknowledge when you use the ideas of other people (whether that be other students or published materials from websites, to books, to the media). If you have questions about how to footnote, just ask!

**General Courtesy:**
Please come to class on time, and once you’re here, plan on staying for the full class session. If you must arrive late or leave early, please let me know ahead of time. Be sure to TURN OFF your cell phone before class starts.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**February 2: Introduction—The Place of the Past in People’s Lives**

To be read before the first class:
Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, 15-36, 234-235*
Lowenthal, *The Timeless Past*, 35-52

**February 9: Historical Memory—Theories and Methods**

Michael Kammen, ”Introduction” from *The Mystic Chords of Memory*
David Thelen, “Memory and American History”*
Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, “Setting the Analytical Parameters”*
David Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory”*
Wulf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique Of Collective Memory Studies”*

**UNIT 1: MAPPING HISTORY ONTO THE LANDSCAPE**

“Every tacky little fourth-rate déclassé European country has monuments all over the place and one cannot turn a corner without banging into an eighteen-foot bronze of Lebrouche Tickling the Chambermaids at Vache while Planning the Battle of Bledsoe, or some such, whereas Americans tend to pile up a few green cannon balls next to a broken-down mortar and forget about it.”

--Donald Bartheleme.

**February 16: Writing History in Stone: The Politics of Naming and Monument-Building**

Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone* (entire)
Courtney Workman, “The Woman Movement”*
Joseph Rhea, “American Indians” in *Race Pride and the American Identity*, 8-37*
Derek Alderman, “Naming Streets for Martin Luther King, Jr.: No Easy Road”*

Please dress warmly—we will be taking a walking tour of campus monuments if weather permits
February 23: *Case Study—Memorializing Emancipation*

Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves* (entire)
Micky McElya, “Monumental Power”*

March 2: *Master Symbols and Contested Landscapes*

Richard Flores, *Remembering the Alamo* (entire)
Owen Dwyer and Derek Alderman, “Conclusion” of *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory* *

UNIT 2: PRESERVING THE PAST

“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

March 9: *Presenting the Past—History Museums in the United States*

Gary Kulik, “Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present”*
John Herbst, “Historic Houses”*
Mike Wallace, “Museums and Controversy”*

In Class: Field Trip to the Oberlin Heritage Society

March 16: *Case Study—The American Holocaust Museum*

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* *

March 23: *No Class—Spring Break*

March 27 or 28th (or April 3 or 4): Field trip to Hale Farm and Village

Hale Farm and Village is holding a special program, “Escape from the Underground Railroad” in the evening on March 27th/28th and April 3rd/4th. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in this historical recreation. Further details will be discussed in class.

March 30: *The “Authentic Past:” Living History Museums*

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

Optional: Warren Leon and Margaret Piatt, “Living History Museums”*
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

April 6: Living in the Past: Reenacting History

Tony Horwitz, Confederates in the Attic (entire)

Optional: Randal Allred, “Catharsis, Revision, and Re-enactment: Negotiating the Meaning of the American Civil War

Film Night—Date and Time To Be Determined

The class will gather sometime during the week of April 6th to watch a historical film. This film will serve as common ground for our discussion on April 13th.

April 13: Celluloid History

Robert Toplin, Reel History (entire)

Tim Cole, “Oskar Schindler” in Selling the Holocaust

April 20: Consuming the Past: History in Ads and Commercial Products

Mike Wallace, “‘Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at Disney World’”
Erica Rand, The Ellis Island Snow Globe, pp. 1-26, 224-238
Simone Zelitch, “Girls Just Want to Have Fun”

April 27: The Uses and Abuses of History in Political Discourse

Emily Rosenberg, A Date Which Will Live (entire)
David Marley, “Riding in the Back of the Bus: The Christian Right’s Adoption of Civil Rights Movement Rhetoric”
Sarah Vowell, “Rosa Parks, C’est Moi”

May 4: Final Presentations

May 13: Final Paper Due by Noon, History Department Office