

**History 332**  
**Contesting the Past: Historical Memory in the United States**  
Tuesdays 1:10-2:50, King 121  
Fall 2013

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Office Hours:  
Mondays, 1:00-3:00  
Tuesdays, 11:00-12:15  
(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. The past is all around us, exhibited in a wide variety of forms, with potentially far-reaching consequences. History 332 is a study of historical memory, or of how societies construct a collective memory of the past and of how and why those remembrances change. This class asks students to interrogate how communities or nations come to know about the past and why what we know about the past matters.

The course will focus on four key themes. First, we will consider how our understanding of history is shaped by the method or form of communicating it. How is learning about the past in a museum different than learning about it from a book? As we proceed, 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.

Second, the course will explore the political and cultural work done by particular representations of the past. Over the semester, we will ask how historical representations can influence the construction of personal and national identities; how they can become ammunition in political arguments about contemporary policies and events; and how they can be used both to legitimize the nation-state and to critique the myths around which nation-states are built. By examining public monuments, museums, reenactments, films, artistic productions, and commemorations,

we will explore how historical “truth” and “authenticity” are constructed and how memorialization is itself a contested process.

Third, while History 332 offers students an introduction to the field of historical memory, this class also seeks to provide students with a different vantage point for understanding the United States, and especially the nation’s vexed racial history. Race remains a divisive force in the nation’s historical memory and many of the readings this semester will consider how American racial politics have shaped representations of the past and how different groups have sought to reframe understandings of history as a way to maintain or challenge power hierarchies.

Finally, this is a research seminar; every student will be required to conduct independent historical research on a subject related to historical memory and to write a 15-20 page research paper. The class will also help students learn how to craft a historical research proposal, how to do primary source research, how to find relevant secondary source material, and how to organize and write long research papers.

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 in addition to the time required to do independent research.

## **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  
 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.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- ***ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (25% of final grade):*** *Contesting the Past* is a discussion-based seminar. Students will play a vital role in the success of the course by doing all of the required reading for the class and coming to class prepared to participate in a vigorous, thoughtful, respectful intellectual 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. Of course, you can only participate if you are at class. As this class only meets once a week, attendance is absolutely mandatory. Students

should inform me in advance if they will be missing class. Absences will only be considered excused in case of illness or other very valid reason. Any unexcused absences will affect your final grade, and if you have more than two unexcused absences, you will not be able to receive a grade above a “C” in the class.

- ***READING PAPER AND DISCUSSION FACILITATION (15% and 5%, respectively):***  
Four students will be in charge of each class session starting the week of September 17<sup>th</sup>. Two of the four will write a 4 to 5-page paper that addresses important analytic issues raised in that week's readings. Papers should not summarize the readings, but rather, should identify and analyze themes, exploring differences between authors (if there is more than reading assigned), connect the weekly readings to themes we have been discussing in class, and raise questions for further discussion. Further guidelines are available on the blackboard site. Students writing papers must post their papers to Blackboard (under the reading papers heading) by 6:00 p.m. on the Monday prior to Tuesday's class. These papers will be graded.

The other two students will serve as respondents to the posted papers, summarizing their main points and leading the class discussion. The two respondents should plan on meeting together before class to organize their plans for the discussion. Respondents will receive a check+, check, or check- for their organizing and leading of the discussion.

Over the course of the semester, each student will be responsible for writing one reading response paper and for leading one class discussion. All other members of the class should read the two posted response papers before the class session on Tuesday. They must also bring at least two discussion questions about that week's reading with them to class. I will collect questions at the beginning of class.

- ***FIELD TRIPS AND OTHER COURSE “EXTRAS”:*** Since history is all around us, it behooves us to go and see it when we can. This course will include the following “extras,” some required and some optional:
  - 1) There will be a walking tour of monuments on the Oberlin campus during class session on October 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - 2) On Saturday, October 12<sup>th</sup>, you will have the opportunity to visit the May 4<sup>th</sup> Visitor's Center at Kent State, a museum dedicated to the 1970 Kent State shootings. This field trip is optional, but highly recommended.
  - 3) On the evening of Saturday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, there will be a required class trip to Hale Farm and Village to participate in a program that offers a historical recreation of a fugitive slave's escape attempt.
  - 4) There will be one film screening, tentatively scheduled for Sunday, November 24<sup>th</sup> so we will have a common film to discuss in our class about history on film.
  - 5) The last class session on December 10<sup>th</sup> will start at noon (with lunch provided) so that we will have enough time for student presentations.

- **RESEARCH PAPER (Paper, 50% of final grade; Oral presentation, 5% of final grade):** The major assignment for History 332 is a 15 to 20-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. They should also draw on relevant secondary sources and course materials to locate and contextualize your topic.

Please note the following deadlines associated with the research paper:

**Tuesday, October 1:** Proposal for your research paper is due. The proposal should be no more than 3 pages and should include: 1) Your research question; 2) a description of your proposed topic; 3) a discussion of your proposed methodology; and 4) a preliminary bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

**Friday, October 18:** An annotated bibliography of the key primary and secondary sources that you will be using for your paper is due by 4:00 p.m. Bibliographies should be uploaded to Blackboard through the Assignments function.

**Friday, December 6:** 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 paper copy of your first draft in my mailbox in the History Department Office or outside my office, Rice 18, and email copies of your paper to me and to your peer reviewer by 5:00 p.m. Peer reviewers will be assigned, and review guidelines distributed, in class.

**Week of December 9:** Individual meeting with me and with peer reviewer about drafts. I will be scheduling individual meetings with each of you to discuss your draft sometime during the day on Wednesday. Peer reviewers should also plan on meeting to discuss their drafts sometime during the week.

**Tuesday, December 10:** Each student will give a formal oral presentation during our historical memory mini-conference at our last class meeting on December 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Final paper due, Wednesday, December 18<sup>th</sup> by 4:00 p.m.:** Revised final copies of the research paper must be submitted by 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 18 to the box outside my office, Rice 18.

## COURSE POLICIES

**Late papers:** Late reading response papers and discussion questions will not be accepted. Any other assignments turned in late will be downgraded 5 points for the first day it is late and an additional full letter grade for each additional day. Incompletes will only be granted for medical or family emergencies.

**Disabilities:** If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to Jane Boomer in

the Office of Disability Services in Peters G-27/G-28.

**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).

**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. Class only lasts for two hours, so please take care of any personal business before you arrive so you can sit through the whole class session. It disrupts conversation and is a distraction when students come and go in the middle of a class discussion, so if you do so, it will have a negative impact on your participation grade. Be sure to TURN OFF your cell phone before class starts.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### September 3: Introduction—The Place of the Past in People’s Lives

Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, The Presence of the Past, 15-36, 234-235\*  
David Lowenthal, The Timeless Past, 35-52\*

### September 10: Historical Memory—Theories and Methods

David Thelen, “Memory and American History”\*  
Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, “Setting the Analytical Parameters”\*  
David Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory”\*  
Paul Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting”\*  
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 Barthelme.

### September 17: Public Monuments I

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

### September 24: Public Monument II

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

### October 1: Oberlin’s Monuments—Analysis in Practice (Research Proposal Due)

*Campus walking tour: We will meet at the Memorial Arch at precisely 1:00 and go on a walking tour of Oberlin’s monuments. In preparation, please read:*

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

### October 8: Master Symbols and Contested Landscapes

Richard Flores, Remembering the Alamo (entire)

**October 9: Optional Lecture by Philip Deloria, 4:30-6:00, Craig Lecture Hall**

Philip Deloria (University of Michigan), "Reading Mount Rushmore: Nationalism, Landscape, and the Problem of Mountainous Sculpture"

**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*

**October 12: The May 4<sup>th</sup> Memorial and Visitor's Center, Kent State University**

*Optional Field Trip to do Walking Tour, tour Visitor's Center, and meet with "memory activists" at Kent State who lobbied for the May 4<sup>th</sup> site.*

**October 15: Historical House Museums**

Gary Kulik, "Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present"\*

Patricia West, Domesticating History (entire)

**Friday, October 18: Annotated Bibliography Due by 4:00 pm**

**October 22: Fall Break—No Class**

**October 29: Thematic History Museums: The American Holocaust Museum**

Edward Linenthal, Preserving Memory (entire)

Tim Cole, "The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum"\*

Alison Landsberg, "America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: The 'Object of Remembering'" from Prosthetic Memory\*

**November 5: The "Authentic Past:" Living History Museums**

Warren Leon and Margaret Piatt, "Living History Museums"\*

Handler and Gable, The New History in an Old Museum (can skim chapt. 6 and 8)

**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*

**Saturday, November 9: Required Field Trip**

As a class, we will participate in the program, "A Fugitive's Path: Escape on the Underground Railroad" at Hale Farm and Village. This is a mandatory field trip.

### **November 12: Analysis in Practice #2—Analyzing our Living History Experience**

This class will be devoted to analyzing our trip to Hale Farm and Village. We will also spend some time talking about the status of research papers. In preparation, please read:

Scott Magelssen, “Tourist Performance in the Twenty-First Century”\*

### **November 19: Living in (or visiting) the Past: Historical Reenactments**

Tony Horwitz, Confederates in the Attic (entire)

### **Sunday, November 24: Film Screening**

We will watch a film on a historical subject (probably *Lincoln*) at a time TBD, to serve as a common basis for discussion for class on November 26th

### **November 26: Celluloid History**

Robert Toplin, Reel History (entire)

Mark Golub, “History Died for Our Sins: Guilt and Responsibility in Hollywood Redemption Histories”\*

### **December 3: Consuming the Past: History in Ads and Commercial Products**

Mike Wallace, “Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at Disney World” and Disney’s America\*

Collection of short readings on American Girl Dolls

Leigh Raiford, “Restaging Revolution: Black Power, *Vibe* Magazine, and Photographic Memory”\*

### **December 10: Research Presentations starting at NOON**

We will hold our own historical memory mini-conference from 12:00-2:50, either in our regular classroom or an alternate space TBA. Lunch will be provided.

### **December 18: Final Paper Due by 4:00 p.m., outside Rice 18**