

**History 493**  
**Repairing the Past: Readings in Historical Justice**  
**Wednesdays, 2:30-4:20**

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Office Hours:  
Mondays, 10am-12pm  
Thursdays, 1:30-3:30pm  
(and by appointment)

Since the end of World War II and especially in the last thirty years, demands for recognition of historical wrongs and redress for past grievances have proliferated in communities and countries around the world. We live in an era when states have begun making official apologies for all kinds of old wrongs, when a growing number of nations have offered some kind of monetary reparations for state violence or persecution, when decades-old historic wrongs have found their way back into courtrooms, and when more than thirty countries have created truth commissions that seek to repair the damage caused by historic wrongdoing. This seminar focuses on this wave of initiatives for historical redress. The course will explore the philosophical, historical, and political questions that arise from demands for justice for historic wrongs. Questions we will consider include: What explains the emergence of a worldwide movement for historical justice in the post-WWII era? What are the benefits or limitations of the many different mechanisms that nations have used to try to redress historical injustice? What burdens does the past impose upon the present? Are there dangers to a society or community in focusing too much on past injustice? Are there dangers in seeking to bury the past without addressing historic grievances? Can a community or group suffer collective trauma, and if so, how can that trauma be repaired? We will read works by historians, political scientists, philosophers, and legal scholars that grapple with these questions as they examine the work of historical repair being done by truth commissions, material and symbolic reparations, public apologies, criminal trials, commemoration, and artistic works. The course includes readings about a range of countries, including Germany, South Africa, and especially the United States.

**Required Texts:** Books are available at the bookstore and on reserve at Mudd Library. Many of these titles are also available as ebooks from Mudd. All other readings are posted on the blackboard site.

Al Brophy, *Reparations: Pro and Con* (2006)  
Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (1999)  
Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (2000)  
Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (2018 edition)  
Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)  
Renee Romano, *Racial Reckoning: Prosecuting America's Civil Rights Murders* (2014)  
Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (2018)  
Richard Vernon, *Historical Redress: Must We Pay for the Past?* (2012)

**Learning Objectives:**

- Understand the emergence, scope, and significance of the historical repair phenomenon
- Develop and defend own position on whether, how, and why the past matters in the present
- Analyze benefits and limitations of different modes of historical redress
- Learn to read quickly for argument, content, and use of evidence
- Identify, summarize, explain, and critique arguments in readings from different disciplines
- Develop skills synthesizing different scholarly works
- Improve written and oral communication skills

**Course Requirements:** Your grade in History 493 will be based on the following assignments and requirements. Please note that all assignments must be completed to receive credit for the class.

**1) Participation, attendance, blackboard and contemporary connections postings (30%)**

*Repairing the Past* is a discussion-based seminar with a heavy reading load (typically 200+ pages of reading a week). Please leave yourself time to prepare adequately for class and come see me if you need help with developing strategies for staying on top of the reading. Students are expected to arrive at class having read the material carefully and ready to engage thoughtfully and respectfully in a discussion with classmates. Student participation is vital to the success of the class. I consider the ability to express oneself in discussion as important as written expression. If for any reason you are uncomfortable speaking in class, please come to see me at the beginning of the semester to talk about strategies for becoming an active participant in class. Attendance is mandatory. Any unexcused absences will lead to a deduction of five points from your participation grade in the class. Absences will only be considered excused in case of illness, family emergency, or other exceptional reasons.

*Blackboard Postings:*

As part of your weekly participation, every student is expected to post to the course blackboard site every week. When there is student-led discussion facilitation, student discussion leaders will post questions for discussion by 5pm on Tuesday. Other students must post a thoughtful response of approximately 300 words to one of the questions raised by student discussion leaders by Wednesday at noon. I will post a blackboard question on weeks where there are no student facilitators. Please look over the postings of your peers before coming to class, if possible. These postings will not be formally graded but will factor into your course participation grade.

*Contemporary Connections Postings:*

Twice during the semester, you are required to find a contemporary news media piece that relates to issues or themes we are discussing in class. For example, during the week on truth commissions, you might bring in an article about a truth commission process taking place today somewhere around the world. You should post these articles or links to them, with a brief commentary on how it connects to our class topic, on the "Contemporary Connections" wiki on the blackboard site before the class meeting. There will be some time during each class session for students who have found contemporary connections to talk about their articles. Please come to class prepared to do so.

**2) Leading a class discussion (10%)**

Once during the semester, you and a partner will be responsible for leading the first half hour of class discussion on the assigned readings. Discussion leaders must meet with me in advance of the class session to discuss their strategy. They will also be responsible for posting reading questions to the blackboard site by **5pm on Tuesday** before our Wednesday class. These questions should focus on issues that you want other students to consider before they come to class.

**3) Two reading response/connection papers (15% each)**

Twice during the semester—once before spring break and once after—each student will write a paper of approximately 1500 words (4-5 pages) that analyzes and explores the course readings for a particular week. Papers are due by 5pm Thursday on the day following our class discussions; if you are writing about the readings for Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, the paper would be due by 5pm on February 19. Papers should be uploaded to the blackboard site. You may choose which weeks to write about as long as one paper focuses on readings from before spring break and one on readings after break. You may, but are not required, to write a paper for the week in which you are a discussion leader. These papers should not simply summarize the readings for any given week. Instead, you should aim to identify

important themes and arguments in the readings, to draw connections and comparisons between different readings, and to consider the readings in light of past class discussions and readings.

#### **4) Final Synthesis Paper, due Saturday, May 16th at 9:00pm (30% of final grade)**

For the final paper for History 493, you will pick either a theme that has been evident over the course of many week's readings (for example, responsibility, guilt, trauma, forgiveness), a place (Germany, the US, South Africa, etc.), or a form of historical injustice (slavery, wartime atrocities, etc.) and creatively synthesize a minimum of four course readings and two additional outside readings related to that topic/issue in a final paper of 10-12 pages. Proposals for topics of your final paper will be due in class on Wednesday, April 8. Each student will meet with me individually to talk about your paper during our last week of class.

Your paper should seek to make the course readings speak to one another in insightful and thought-provoking ways and to add depth to your understanding of your chosen topic through your choice of outside readings. From week to week, you should read the books and articles with and against each other in order to explore larger historiographic, political, or historical issues. What can your chosen readings tell us, for example, about the ways in which specific countries—like the United States or South Africa—have approached the issue of historical justice? What are the range of ways in which the authors grapple with themes like political responsibility, trauma, the importance of truth to historic justice? How are certain readings in dialogue with others? What do they agree/disagree about? Do some of the authors complicate or enrich others? Papers should be at least ten pages, double-spaced and will be due on Saturday, May 16th at 9:00 pm. I am happy to read drafts turned in by 5:00pm on May 10th. Please upload final papers to the blackboard site.

#### **COURSE POLICIES:**

Classroom Conduct: Please come to class on time and once you are in class, please do not leave to go get a drink or use the restroom unless it is absolutely necessary. I will try to give a short break during each class session. Because I want everyone to be focused on the classroom discussion, there will be no note taking on computers in the classroom unless necessary for reasons of accommodation.

Oberlin Honor Code: All work for this course must be done in compliance with the Oberlin Honor Code, which means that it must be your own. Any cases of plagiarism will be dealt with immediately according to the letter of college policy. You must acknowledge when you use the ideas of other people (whether that be other students or published materials from websites, books, the media, etc.). If you have questions about citations, academic honesty, or the acceptability of collaborations, please see me. You should include the honor code ("I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code on this assignment") on all the written work you hand in for this class.

Educational Access: I am committed to creating inclusive learning environments and to designing a course in which all students can learn. If any aspects of the instruction or design of the course result in dis/ability-related barriers to your participation, please let me know. If you receive any specific accommodations, please provide documentation from the Disability Service Office.

Difficult Topics: Please be forewarned that a course on redressing historic violence will necessarily cover disturbing topics such as genocide and mass killings, sexual and racial violence, and torture. If you have concerns about the course content, please come meet with me.

Extra Help: I am happy to meet students any time, whether you are seeking guidance on assignments or you want to discuss the reading or other topics of interest to you. Schedule an appointment during my office hours or email to schedule an appointment during another time.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### February 5: Introduction to History 493

#### February 12: The Ethics and Politics of Retrospective Justice

*Do we have a duty to address past injustices? If so, why? Is there a danger in too much remembrance? How have philosophers answered the question of whether and why historical justice matters? Is there a particular need or responsibility to revisit and redress collective trauma? What duty do we have to the dead and to those affected by the memory of past violence?*

Richard Vernon, *Historical Redress* (entire)

David Rieff, "The Cult of Memory: When History Does More Harm than Good," *The Guardian*, March 2016.

#### February 19: Why Historical Justice? The Emergence of a Movement to Redress the Past

*Why does historical justice emerge as a global phenomenon? What factors help why nations have become interested in revisiting the past? What different explanation do these authors put forth to explain the popularity of historical justice? What's the difference between historical justice and transitional justice?*

John Torpey, "An Avalanche of History: The 'Collapse of the Future' and the Rise of Reparations Politics," in Manfred Berg and Bernd Schaefer, *Historical Justice in International Perspective: How Societies are Trying to Right the Wrongs of the Past* (Cambridge, 2009), 21-38.

Pierre Hazan, *Judging War, Judging History*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 7-62.

Elazar Barkan, "Restitution and Amending Historical Injustices in International Morality," in John Torpey, ed., *Politics and the Past* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 91-102.

James Campbell, "Settling Accounts: An Americanist Perspective on Historical Reconciliation," *American Historical Review* 114:4 (October 2009): 963-977.

#### February 26: Setting Precedents: "Wiedergutmachung" in Germany

*How do nations that have engaged in horrific acts move forward and construct a national identity? Is it possible for the nation responsible for the Holocaust to craft a positive national identity? Why did West and East Germany adopt different approaches to "overcoming the past?" is responsible for the Holocaust?*

Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, Chapters 1-6, 9 (pp. 1-178, 232-240).

Leonid Bershidsky, "Why Germany Welcomes Refugees," *Bloomberg News*, Sept. 9, 2015.

Jake Goodwill, "I Can't Move Past the Holocaust and that's why I won't become a German Citizen," *The Guardian (London)*, November 3, 2016.

Mark Santora, "75 Years after Auschwitz Liberation, Worry that 'Never Again' is Not Assured," *New York Times*, January 25, 2020.

#### March 4: Trauma, Forgiveness, and Intergenerational Repair

*How do historical injustices continue to affect later generations? Can trauma be passed from generation to generation? What does forgiveness mean in relation to historical wrongdoing? Who has the right to forgive? Is their power in extending or withholding forgiveness? Should "forgiveness" be a goal for historical redress?*

Martha Minow, "Between Vengeance and Forgiveness" in *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Beacon Press, 1999), pp. 3-29.

Ricardo Ainslie, "Trauma, Community, and Contemporary Racial Violence: Reflections on the Architecture of Memory," in Michael O'Loughlin, ed., *The Ethics of Remembering and the Consequences of Forgetting* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 309-323.

Mona Sue Weissmark, excerpts from *Justice Matters: Legacies of the Holocaust and World War II* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 38-54, 65-78, 163-180.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, "What Does it Mean to be Human in the Aftermath of Historical Trauma: Re-envisioning The Sunflower and why Hannah Arendt was Wrong," 2016.

*Film Screening Before Class: "The Milk of Sorrow"* (2009, 1hr 35 minutes)

### **March 11: Case Study: The Trauma of Slavery**

*Are there certain histories that are so traumatic that they cannot be fully represented? How might art or literary representations offer different ways to address intergenerational trauma? Can fiction offer truths that the historical record may not be able to provide?*

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (entire).

Cindy George, "Do You Have Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome?" *Ebony*, September 1, 2015.

**\*If time, visit to Afterlives of the Black Atlantic exhibit at the Allen Art Museum**

### **March 18: Modes of Historical Repair—Apologies**

*Can apologies offer a meaningful form of redress for past injustice? What makes an apology meaningful versus simply ceremonial? When are states willing to offer apologies? What makes them reluctant to do so? Can a collective like a state express meaningful remorse?*

Melissa Nobles, *The Politics of Official Apologies* (Cambridge University Press, 2008)), Chapters 1, 3-5, pp. 1-41; 71-154.

Jean-Mark Coicaud and Jibecke Jonsson, "Elements of a Road Map for a Politics of Apology," in *The Age of Apology*, 77-91.

"The Apology Broker," Rough Translations Podcast, June 13, 2018, 41 minutes. [linked on blackboard]

U.S. House of Representative Apologies for Slavery and to the People of Hawaii.

## **SPRING BREAK**

### **April 1: Modes of Historical Repair—Truth Commissions**

*Why are truth commissions such a popular mechanism among societies seeking to come to terms with their past? How should we measure the success or failure of truth commissions? What does the South African TRC illustrate about the benefits and limitations of truth commissions? What did the TRC offer to the victims of apartheid? What did it offer to the perpetrators? How did the TRC process affect South African culture and society?*

Onur Bakiner, "Promoting Historical Justice through Truth Commissions: An Uneasy Relationship" in *Historical Justice and Memory* (2015), 146-165.

Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 5, 8, 11-12, 15, 18-19, 21, epilogue (v-viii, 3-33, 74-88; 103-127; 150-172; 201-232; 259-317; 341-386 [read entire book if you have time!])

Watch "Long Night's Journey Into Day?" available on Kanopy Streaming

**April 8: Modes of Historical Repair—Criminal Trials**

*What kinds of redress of historical injustice are possible through a criminal trial? How does the law shape the process of historical redress? What brings a historical injustice back into the courtroom? How do US state trials compare to the international trials sought by the Spanish survivors of fascism? What do civil rights trials tell us about how the United States reckons with its history?*

Renee Romano, *Racial Reckoning* (entire)

Martha Minow, Chapter 3, "Trials" in *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (Beacon, 1998), 25-51.

Film Screening Before Class: "*The Silence of Others*" (2018, 1 hr 36 minutes)

**April 15: Modes of Historical Repair—Monetary Reparations**

*Is monetary or some other kind of material compensation a reasonable response to historical injustices? When are reparations feasible or necessary? Who should be responsible for making reparations—who bears responsibility for historical injustices? Who should receive reparations? Why are reparations often so divisive? What are barriers to reparations?*

Alfred Brophy, *Reparations: Pro and Con*, Chapters 1-7, pp. 1-179.

Choose **one** of the two following articles to read in addition to the Brophy:

Angelika von Wahl, "The Politics of Reparations: Why, When, and How Democratic Governments Get Involved," in *Historical Justice in International Perspective*, 39-65.

Catherine Lu, "Colonialism as Structural Injustice," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 19:3 (2011): 261-281.

**April 22: Modes of Historical Repair—Monuments**

*How does historical injustice affect the landscape? How should communities deal with monuments that commemorate a history of persecution or oppression? To what extent can a monument shape historical consciousness or serve as a site of social repair? How should we think about public space in considering repair from historic violence?*

Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone* (entire)

Cheryl Jimenez Frei, "Towards Memory, Against Oblivion: A Comparative Perspective on Public Memory, Monuments, and Confronting a Painful Past in the United States and Argentina," *The Public Historian*, Special Virtual Issue on Monuments (2017).

*Whose History? The Reckoning over Confederate Monuments and the Racial Terror of Lynching*, America Divided, Season 4, Episode 2, streaming on Kanopy

**April 29: Modes of Historical Repair—Museums and Education**

Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (entire)

Jonathan Capeheart, "'Bryan Stevenson wants us to confront our country's racial terrorism and then say 'Never Again,'" *Washington Post*, April 24, 2018.

Elizabeth Cole and Karen Murphy, "History Education Reform, Transitional Justice, and the Transformation of Identities," *ICTJ Research Brief*, October 2009.

**May 6: Conclusions and Individual Consultations about Final Paper**

**May 16: Final Papers due by 9:00pm**