

American Studies, 050:355
Museums, Monuments, and American Culture

Tuesdays, 2-5PM

<https://bit.ly/AndyUrbanZoomOffice>

Hickman Hall, Room 117

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Office Hours by Appointment, Online
he/him/his pronouns



President's Park, Virginia, photo courtesy of Mobilus in Mobili

Overview

This course examines the place that museums and monuments have in American culture. It focuses on how public acts of memorialization, commemoration, and interpretation produce collective memories, and the politics that surround how the past is remembered. At a moment when Americans debate whether monuments to slaveowners, Confederate generals, Christopher Columbus, and other historic figures should remain standing and how art and history museums can be made more inclusive to different groups and histories, so too will the course wrestle with these pressing contemporary concerns. In addition, we will also explore the complicated dynamics between education and entertainment; celebration and criticism; and vernacular and official forms of commemoration.

Required Readings

The required book for this course is Bryan Burrough, Chris Tomlinson, and Jason Stanford's *Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth* (ISBN# 9781984880093). I strongly encourage you to buy a hard copy version of this book, to bring with you to class, but it can also be accessed through the Rutgers libraries' website as an eBook.

The remaining course readings will be available either as pdfs in the "Files" section of our Canvas site, in folders corresponding to the dates they are assigned, or linked to in the syllabus. You are not required to print out .pdf readings although you may find it useful to do so.

COVID Protocols and Regulations

Our first two class meetings will take place online, in accordance with Rutgers' policy.

For in-person meetings, Rutgers is requiring masks in all classrooms and other meeting spaces regardless of the vaccination status of the students and instructors involved.

In keeping with Rutgers University policy, you will be required to wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth at all times during class. While I do not anticipate that this will be an issue, please note that students who fail or refuse to wear a mask will be required to leave the classroom immediately – with no exceptions. Masks are not mandated outdoors and based on what we decide as a class, we might hold – weather permitting – a couple of our class meetings, or portions of our class, outside. In the classroom, we will try to maintain social distance as much as possible.

Presently, Rutgers is instructing faculty to hold all non-instructional meetings online, unless a face-to-face meeting is somehow essential. Accordingly, my office hours will

take place on Zoom. To set up a meeting time, please just email me with your availability and we can schedule something.

If you are feeling ill or sick, please do not attend class in person. I can work with you to catch up via Zoom. (I'll preach for a second and note that even before Covid, it was not a great idea to attend class while sick. Practice self-care!) I am also aware that you may need to assist a friend, family member, or loved one who becomes ill or is facing other difficulties due to the pandemic. Throughout these challenging times, I have tried to be understanding and accommodating, and I will continue to do so. I just ask that you communicate with me so that we can come up with appropriate contingency plans.

If Covid causes multiple students to have to miss in-person teaching, we will discuss whether it makes sense to move – temporarily – to online instruction. We may also do this in the event of bad weather or other obstacles to holding class in person.

For the latest information and updates on Rutgers' various policies and regulations concerning Covid-19, please consult: <https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu/>.

Assignment and Grading Summary:

Additional assignment details and instructions will be provided in separate documents.

Intro Units Response Essay – 20% (due Friday, February 11)

Alamo Essay – 20% (due Friday, March 11)

Museum Ethnography Essay – 15% (due Friday, April 22)

Final Exam – 30% (take home, due Monday, May 9)

Participation and engagement – 15%

Grading Scale:

92-100=**A**; 87-91=**B+**; 81-86=**B**; 77-80=**C+**; 70-76=**C**; 60-69=**D**; 0-59=**F**

Note: there are no minus grades at Rutgers.

American Studies Department Learning Goals Met by this Course:

Students will learn to:

- Critically analyze interdisciplinary primary and secondary sources relating to the study of monuments and museums.

- Interpret monuments and museums in their broader social, economic, cultural, and political contexts.
- Gain insights into how museums and monuments shape public memory and collective understandings of the past.
- Write well; speak articulately; and think critically, analytically, and creatively.

Class Policies:

Class Announcements:

Please make sure that you are receiving and checking Canvas announcements. All important information related to class will be sent out through Canvas. You are responsible for knowing the information and instructions posted to Canvas.

Special Accommodation Requests:

All special accommodation requests should be brought to my attention during the first two weeks of class. Full policies and procedures are available for review at:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu>.

Academic Integrity Policy:

<https://nbprovost.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-students>

The principles of academic integrity require that a student:

- properly acknowledge and cite all use of the ideas, results, or words of others.
- properly acknowledge all contributors to a given piece of work.
- make sure that all work submitted as their own in a course or other academic activity is produced without the aid of impermissible materials or impermissible collaboration.
- obtain all data or results by ethical means and report them accurately without suppressing any results inconsistent with their interpretation or conclusions.
- treat all other students in an ethical manner, respecting their integrity and right to pursue their educational goals without interference. This requires that a student neither facilitate academic dishonesty by others nor obstruct their academic progress.

- uphold the canons of the ethical or professional code of the profession for which they are preparing.

Any violation of academic integrity is a serious offense and is therefore subject to an appropriate sanction or penalty. If you are unsure about whether something might violate Rutgers' academic integrity policy - please ask me for clarification!

Honor Pledge:

I pledge on my honor that I will adhere to all aspects of the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy and to Rutgers policies concerning bullying, intimidation, and harassment (<https://policies.rutgers.edu/10211-currentpdf>).

By accepting this syllabus and enrolling in this course, you assume responsibility for knowing the above policies and the possible penalties - including suspension and expulsion - should you violate them.

Class Schedule and Readings

January 18 – Introductions [CLASS ON ZOOM]

January 25 – Theorizing Public and Collective Memory [CLASS ON ZOOM]

- Maurice Halbwachs, “Space and the Collective Memory,” in *The Collective Memory* (1950)
- David Rieff, “The Cult of Memory: When History Does More Harm Than Good,” *The Guardian*, March 2, 2016
- Matthew Houdek and Kendall Philipps, “Public Memory,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Communication* (2017)
- David W. Blight, “The Fog of History Wars,” *New Yorker*, June 9, 2021

February 1 – Monuments: Concepts and Definitions

- Robert Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” (1967), in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Univ of California Press, 1996), 68–74.
- Miles Orvell, “America in Ruins: Photography as Cultural Narrative,” *American Art* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 9-14
- Lisa Blee and Jeani O’Brien, Prologue and Introduction, *Monumental Mobility: The Memory Work of Massasoit* (UNC Press, 2019).
- Seth C. Bruggeman, “Memorials and Monuments,” *The Inclusive Historian’s Handbook*, <https://inclusivehistorian.com/memorials-and-monuments/> (read online)

February 8 – Museums: Curation, Interpretation, and Representation

- Tony Bennett, “Civic Seeing: Museums and the Organization of Vision,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Blackwell, 2010).
- Susan Crane, “Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum,” *History and Theory* 36, no. 4 (1997): 44-63.
- Zadie Smith, “Getting In and Out: Who Owns Black Pain?” *Harper’s Magazine*, July 2017.

- Lisa Corrin, "Mining the Museum: An Installation Confronting History," *Curator* 34, no. 4 (1993): 302-13.

February 15 - NO CLASS - Reading Day

February 22 - Remembering and Forgetting the Alamo, Part 1

- Burrough, Tomlinson, and Stanford, *Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth*, introduction through chapter 8

March 1 - Remembering and Forgetting the Alamo, Part 2

- Burrough, Tomlinson, and Stanford, *Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth*, chapters 9 through 16

March 8 - Remembering and Forgetting the Alamo, Part 3

- Burrough, Tomlinson, and Stanford, *Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth*, chapter 17 to end of book

March 15 - NO CLASS, Spring Break

March 22 - Dismantling Racism

- Karen L. Cox, "From Bereavement to Vindication," in *No Common Ground: Confederate Monuments and the Ongoing Fight for Racial Justice* (UNC Press, 2021).
- Ana Lucia Araujo, "Setting Slavery in the Museum," in *Slavery in the Age of Memory: Engaging the Past* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).
- The Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers in New York, Report, January 2018.
- Julia Jacobs, "Whose Writing Is on the Wall at the Museum? It Could Be Yours." *New York Times*, November 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/10/arts/design/art-museum-labeling-new-york-historical-society.html> (read online)

March 29 - Constructing New Commemorative Landscapes

- Sarah Jordan, "Who Deserves a Statue – And Who Never Did? Philly's Monument Lab May Have Answers," *Philadelphia Magazine*, October 16, 2021, <https://www.phillymag.com/news/2021/10/16/monument-lab/> (read online)
- "America's Monuments, Reimagined for a More Just Future," *New York Times Style Magazine*, August 24, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/24/t-magazine/confederate-monuments-reimagined-racism.html> (read online)

Planned Guest Speaker: Representatives from the Lost Souls Public Memorial Project, East Brunswick, NJ

April 5 - Museum Ethnographies

- David Berman, "Clip-On Tie," *The Baffler* (December 1994).

Planned Class Trip to the Zimmerli Museum

April 12 - Monuments and Exhibitions to Intimacy, Emotion, and Self

- Ann Cvetkovich, "Ephemera," in *Lexicon for an Affective Archive*, eds. Giulia Palladini and Marco Pustianaz (Perlego, 2017), 179-83.
- Leslie Jamison, "The Breakup Museum: Archiving the Way We Were," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Spring 2018.
- Stephen Vider, "Public Disclosures of Private Realities: HIV/AIDS and the Domestic Archive," in *The Public Historian* 41, no. 2 (2019): 163-89.

April 19 - Museums and Memorialization

- David Klion, "The 9/11 Museum and Its Discontents," *New York Magazine*, August 26, 2021, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/08/the-failures-of-the-9-11-museum.html> (read online)

In-Class Film Screening: Director Steven Rosenbaum, *The Outsider* (2021)

April 26 - The Labor and Economics of Museum Work

- Amy M. Tyson and Azie Mira Dungey, "'Ask a Slave' and Interpreting Race on Public History's Front Line: Interview with Azie Mira Dungey," *The Public Historian* 36, no. 1 (2014): 36-60.
- R. E. Fulton, Erin Reid, Jackie Wait, and Daniel Walber, interviewed by Andy Urban, "'We Are Workers in a Workplace Who Have Rights': Unionization, COVID-19, and the Place of Labor at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum," *The Public Historian* 43, no. 2 (2021): 81-102.