

# Museums, Monuments, and American Culture

Spring 2020  
(American Studies, 01:050:355)

Wednesdays, 10:55AM to 1:55PM  
Ruth Adams Building 105

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Office Hours: 1-3PM, Tuesdays, or by appointment  
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William Wallcut, *Pulling Down the Statue of George III at Bowling Green, July 9, 1776, 1857.*  
Image courtesy of Lafayette College Art Collection.

## Course Description:

This course examines the role that museums and monuments play in American culture. It surveys historic sites, landscapes, and other public places of memorialization and display. Using different case studies and examples, we will focus on the politics that surround how the past is remembered, who assumes responsibility for preserving the past, and how the past – as well as contemporary art and culture – gets exhibited to audiences. At a moment when Americans debate whether monuments to Confederate generals and Christopher Columbus should remain standing, how public institutions can be made more inclusive to different groups, histories, and cultural forms, what roles museums should have in the twenty first century, so too will the course wrestle with these pressing concerns. In addition, we will also explore the complicated dynamics between education and entertainment; celebration and criticism; and vernacular and official forms of commemoration and exhibition.

## Required Readings:

- Chip Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits: Inside the Fight to Reclaim Native America's Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), ISBN#: 9780226684444.
- Micki McElya, *The Politics of Mourning: Death and Honor in Arlington National Cemetery* (Harvard University Press, 2016), ISBN#: 9780674737242.

Additional required readings – listed in this class schedule portion of this syllabus – will be posted as .pdf files on the course's SAKAI site, in the section titled "Resources."

Readings correspond to the day they will be discussed and need to be completed before class meets. You are required to bring readings to class, to have available to reference in discussion, and there may be occasional spot checks to see if you have done this.

## Assignment and Grading Summary:

- **Collwell Essay** – due Friday, February 28, 20%
- **Personal Curation Assignment** – Reflexive essay due and in-class presentations, March 11, 15%
- **In-Class Exam** – April 8, 30%
- **McElya Essay** – due Friday, May 8, 25%
- **Participation and attendance** – 10%

Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences will result in deductions to your attendance grade.

Participation in class discussions is key to your Attendance/Participation grade.  
Discussion is where you demonstrate that you have been doing the readings and are engaging them critically.

If you feel uncomfortable or shy speaking in class or have other questions about how to improve your participation in discussion, I'm happy to meet with you to discuss strategies for participating.

**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 synthesize interdisciplinary sources and methods of analysis and to conduct investigations into American culture and history. Students will learn to use scholarship in history, politics, literature, and art to analyze and interpret the varied experiences, perspectives, and events that define American life. Students will be able to write well; speak articulately; and think critically, analytically, and creatively.

**Class Policies:**

**SAKAI and Class Announcements:**

Please make sure that you are receiving and checking SAKAI announcements via email, as I regularly use this tool to post important information relating to class. You are responsible for knowing the information and instructions posted to SAKAI.

**Special Accommodation Requests:**

All special accommodation requests should be brought to my attention during the first two weeks of class. Full disability policies and procedures are available for review at: <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/>.

**Missing Class:**

If you have to miss class due to sickness, an emergency, or another excused reason, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.

**Phones and Computers:**

Computer and phone use should be limited to activities related to class. If I see you regularly using your phone or computer for purposes unrelated to class, it will hurt your grade.

**Academic Integrity Policy:**

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml>

Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

If you are unsure about how to research and write a paper – the most common cause of violations of the academic integrity policy – please ask me for help!

**Honor Pledge:**

I pledge on my honor that I will adhere to all aspects of the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy

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 the Honor Pledge.

## Class Schedule and Assigned Readings

### **January 22 – Introductions; Course Scope and Content; Defining Monuments and Museums; In-class Reading**

- James Loewen, “The 10 most misleading American historical sites,” *The Guardian*, October 24, 2019,  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/24/the-10-most-misleading-american-historical-sites>

### **January 29 – Monuments and/or Memorials? Constructing and Deconstructing Public Memory**

- Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26, (1989): 7-24.
- Peter Maass, “The Toppling: How the Media Inflated the Fall of Saddam's Statue in Firdos Square,” *ProPublica/New Yorker*, January 3, 2011.
- Dolores Hayden, “The Power of Place: Claiming Urban Landscapes as People's History,” *Journal of Urban History* 20, no. 4 (1994): 466-485.
- Jesse Bayker, Christopher Blakley, and Kendra Boyd, “His Name Was Will: Remembering Enslaved Individuals in Rutgers History,” in *Scarlet and Black Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History* (2016).

In-class screening, “Confederacy,” *Last Week Tonight*, October 2017

### **February 5 – Museums, Exhibitions and the Creation of an American National Identity**

- Robert Schofield, “The Science Education of an Enlightened Entrepreneur: Charles Willson Peale and His Philadelphia Museum, 1784-1827,” *American Studies* 30, no. 2, (1989): 21-40.
- Eleanor Harvey, “Founding Landscape: Charles Willson Peale’s Exhumation of the Mastodon,” *American Art* 31, no. 2 (2017): 40-42.
- James W. Cook, “The Feejee Mermaid and the Market Revolution,” in *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (2001)
- Curtis Hinsley, “The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (1991)

- Morrison Heckscher, "The American Wing Rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Winterthur Portfolio* 46, no. 2/3 (2011): 161-178.

### **February 12 – Expropriation and Repatriation: Indigenous Art and Culture**

- Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits*, Intro, Parts 1 & 2

### **February 19 – Expropriation and Repatriation: Indigenous Art and Culture**

- Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits*, Parts 3 & 4, Conclusion

### **February 26 – Enactment as Memorialization**

In-class screening of Robert Greene, director, *Bisbee '17*

### **March 4 – Curating the Self: Exhibiting Private Lives**

- Sebnem Timur Ogut, "Novel or Museum? Reading Orhan Pamuk's Museum of Innocence: Museum of Innocence, Istanbul, Turkey," *Design Issues* 32, no. 4 (2016): 91-6.
- Ann Cvetkovich, "In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture," *Camera Obscura* 17, no. 1 (2002): 107-147.
- Nicola Wright, "Death and the Internet: The Implications of Digital Afterlife," *First Monday* 19, no. 6 (2014).
- Stephen Vider, "Public Disclosures of Private Realities: HIV/ AIDS and the Domestic Archive," in *The Public Historian* 41, no. 2 (2019): 163-89.

### **March 11 – In-Class Presentations, "Exhibiting Private Lives"**

### **March 25 – Art Museums: Exhibition, Controversy, and Interpretation**

- W. J. T. Mitchell, "Offending Images," in *Unsettling "Sensation": Arts-Policy Lessons from the Brooklyn Museum of Art Controversy* (2001)
- Steven C. Dubin, "How 'Sensation' Became a Scandal," *Art in America* 88 no. 1, (2000): 53-59.

- Zadie Smith, “Getting In and Out: Who Owns Black Pain?” *Harper’s Magazine*, July 2017.
- Fred Wilson, artist, “Mining the Museum,” and Howard Halle, “Review: ‘Mining the Museum,’” *Grand Street* 44 (1993), 151-172.

### **April 1 – Commodifying Culture**

- Gregory Sholette, “Untangling Art’s relationship with Capitalism,” excerpt from *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* (2017), <https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/art-and-capitalism/> (READ ONLINE)
- Andy Urban, “History Museums and Capitalism: The Need for Critical Conversations,” *Gotham: A Blog for Scholars of New York City History*, April 16, 2019, <https://www.gothamcenter.org/blog/history-museums-and-capitalism-the-need-for-critical-conversations> (READ ONLINE)

In-class film screening, dir. Banksy, *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010)

### **April 8 – In-Class Exam**

### **April 15 – Monuments and Memorials, Revisited: Controversies and Public Action**

- Maya Lin, “Making the Memorial,” *The New York Review of Books*, November 2, 2000.
- The Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers in New York, Report, January 2018.
- Jarrett Earnest, “Does NYC’s ‘Gay Liberation’ Monument Whitewash Stonewall? The New Museum Proposes Replacements,” *Vulture*, November 28, 2018, <https://www.vulture.com/2018/11/is-nycs-gay-liberation-monument-too-white.html> (READ ONLINE)
- “Tear Down the Confederate Monuments – But What Next? 12 Art Historians and Scholars on the Way Forward,” *Artnet News*, August 23, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/t65eejn> (READ ONLINE)

### **April 18 & 19 – Class Trip to Washington DC**

**April 22 - Single Landscape, Competing Meanings**

- McElya, *The Politics of Mourning*, Intro through chapter 4

**April 29 - Single Landscape, Competing Meanings**

- McElya, *The Politics of Mourning*, Chapter 5 to end