

HIST 396 001: Introduction to Public History (Fall 2022)



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Office Hours: By appointment (Zoom/Google Meet/In-Person)

Course Description

This class explores the role of historical memory in shaping our understanding of the past by examining the history of museums in the United States, the role of movies in shaping public conceptions of American history, and the influence of celebrations and commemorations in creating a usable past. We will start by examining the role of museums and public performances, such as pageants and parades, in American society and try to come to a better understanding of how places of public celebration and ceremony influence the telling of America's past. Did you know that many of the United States' best know museums and monument were constructed during a forty-year span between the 1880s and the 1920s? The class will take trips to local/national museums, meet with museum professionals, and explore public history sites in Northern Virginia. In the end, we will examine the role of museums in shaping our understanding of an increasingly diverse American population.

LEARNING OUTCOMES (By the end of the semester, students should be able to):

- 1) Identify the key stages of museum development in United States history
- 2) Identify how modern museum organizers relay their mission to the public through exhibit and exhibition
- 3) Critique and Evaluate present-day museums and their objectives and missions
- 4) Analyze competing interpretations involving public memory and public history
- 5) Identify the connections between various forms of celebration and ceremony in American history, including pageants, parades, museums, public history sites, and amusement parks

Required Texts

There are four primary texts in this course. To supplement these texts we will read additional selections (articles, chapters, and documents). The additional readings, as well as the primary texts, comprise an integral component to the course and should be read thoroughly.

- Rosenzweig and Thelen. *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (Columbia University Press).
- Wallace, Mike. *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays* (Temple University Press) - Sleeper-Smith, Susan, ed. *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives* (University of Nebraska Press, 2009).
- Weschler, Lawrence, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and Other Marvels of Jurassic Technology* (Vintage, 1996).
- Additional Readings available for download on Blackboard.

Graded Work

Participation	50 points	Museum Site Visit Reports	100 points
Attendance	50 points	Site Evaluation	100 points
Thought Journals	50 points	Final Term Paper	100 points
Book Review	50 points	TOTAL	500 points

Attendance and Participation

Because this is a lecture/discussion course, attendance and active participation are crucial to its success. Students should miss no more than 2 classes without a university-recognized excuse. If students miss more than 4 total classes without excuses, they will receive an “F” for the course. Active participation is equally important, as we will learn as much from one another as we will from the course materials.

Thought Journals

Students are required to write five, 1-2 page journal entries (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1” margins) throughout the semester. The reading journals are due on the days indicated in the syllabus. Late entries will be accepted, but will lose 20% of the grade for every day that is it overdue. - The reading journal is designed to help you internalize and reflect on the course readings. It is also intended to help you prepare for the in-class discussion, our exams, and our critical response essays. - The journals should address three main points:

- Important points from the reading. What specific events, facts, or ideas stood out to you. Be sure to bring an extra copy of your entries to class to facilitate our discussion.
- Questions you have about the author, his/her research or perspective, OR important quotes from the text – did the author state anything in a particularly interesting or poignant way
- Your (informed) opinion about the quality of the writing and the utility of the piece for our course.
- *****Second Thoughts***** -- At one or two points throughout the semester I might ask you to revisit your thought journals and reflect on them in the context of our class discussion. The “second thought” will follow the same format as the original thought journal.

Book Review

Each student will write a book review (2 full pages), of one of our readings for the semester, Lawrence Weschler’s *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet*.

The review should:

- 1) Identify the author of the work
- 2) Clearly and accurately summarize the author's argument/point-of-view, or the plot of the novel
- 3) Discuss the manner in which the author supports her argument, or how the plot and characters develop
- 4) Cite specific examples of the evidence used to support her argument, or important moments in the plot of the novel
- 5) Critique the book. What are its strengths and weaknesses

The review should be typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1" margins, error-free.

Museum Site Visit Reports

You will visit at least two museums or historical sites during the semester. For these reports, I ask that you compile a history of the institution or place, a statement explaining the mission of the museum (or what you believe the historical site is supposed to convey), and a critique of how the exhibits or exhibitions that you witnessed expressed this mission. 2 essays, 500-750 words each.

Site Evaluation

You will choose a public history site (not a museum) from either the Fairfax/Northern Virginia area or the DC area and compose a site history. This is separate from the museum visits and site reports outlined above. You should trace the history of the site back to its original use and address how the site has evolved and changed over time. You should also propose future options for site use. 750-1,250 word count.

Final Term Paper

You will reexamine one of the museums (NMAI) you visited in light of our discussions of museums as contested sites of power. How are different groups of individuals "presented" in the museum? Why? I'd also like to ask you to be more suggestive in this paper. What can you say about the future of NMAI as it struggles to depict Native History and Culture to both Native and white audiences.

Tentative Schedule Subject to Change

UNIT 1: REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

How do Americans remember their past?

Where do they find evidence for historical narratives?

Who do they trust? Why?

Why does it matter?

WEEK 1 - Introduction: How do Americans remember their past?

Aug. 23: Class Introductions, Goals, and Expectations

Aug 25: Inventing Traditions and Creating Usable Pasts

Readings: <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/arts/design/statues-monuments-deblasiocommission.html?referer> , <http://partizaning.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/HobsMassProTrad.pdf> , John Bodnar, "The Memory Debate," 3-20 (Blackboard)

WEEK 2 - The Memory Debate

Aug. 30: The Power of the Past

Sept. 1: Creating and Studying (Usable) Pasts - **Thought Journal #1 DUE**

Readings: *Mickey Mouse History*, "Introduction," viii-xiv; *The Presence of the Past*, "Introduction," 1-14 and "Patterns of Popular Historymaking," 16-36.

WEEK 3 - How Do Americans Use Their Past?

Sept. 6: **No Class - Site Visits**

Sept. 8: The Present and the Future - **Thought Journal #2 DUE**

Readings: *The Presence of the Past*, "Using the Past to Live in the Present," Skim 36-45 then read to 62 for Tuesday; *The Presence of the Past*, "Using the Past to Shape the Future," 63-88 for Thursday.

UNIT TWO: THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM

How does the history of the museum influence our understanding of what museums do?

How do museums function in American society?

How might we evaluate present-day museums?

What are the difficulties in managing or running modern museums?

How does the past still influence how museums function today?

WEEK 4 - Curiosity Cabinets and Collecting

Sept. 13: **No Class - Site Visits**

Sept. 15: What's in the Cabinet and Peale's Museum of Wonder - **Thought Journal #3 DUE**

Readings: "Museum Vision," *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (Blackboard) for Tuesday; *Mickey Mouse History*, "Visiting the Past," 3-32.

WEEK 5 - Educating and Entertaining the Masses

Sept. 20: The Smithsonian - **Site Evaluation Report DUE**

Sept. 22: **No Class - Museum Visits**

Readings: "Reifying Race: Science and Art in Races of Mankind at the Field Museum of Natural History" (Blackboard)

WEEK 6 - Museum Visits

Sept. 27: **No Class - Museum Visits**

Sept. 29: **No Class - Museum Visits**

Readings: *Mickey Mouse History*, “Razor Ribbons, History Museums, and Civic Salvation,” 33-54.

WEEK 7 - Disney’s America

Oct. 4: The 20th Century Museum

Oct. 6: Disney and the World’s Fairs - **Museum Site Report #1 DUE**

Readings: *Mickey Mouse History*, “Mickey Mouse History,” 133-158; *Mickey Mouse History*, “The Virtual Past,” 101-114.

WEEK 8 - Museum Visits

Oct. 11: **No Class -Fall Break**

Oct. 13: **No Class - Museum Visits**

Readings: Get caught up or read ahead!

WEEK 9 - Evaluating the American Museum

Oct. 18: The Story of a Museum that Isn’t (or Is)

Oct. 20: Evaluating Museums - **Thought Journal #4 DUE**

Readings: *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet*, “Part 1,” 1-69 for Tuesday; *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet*, “Part 2,” 70-111, *The Presence of the Past*, “Experience is the Best Teacher,” 89-114 for Thursday.

UNIT THREE: PRESERVING THE PAST

How does nostalgia influence modern conceptions of progress and commercialism?

How does “History” function as a commercial and political tool today?

How will “History” function in the ongoing development of museums and other sites in DC or NOVA?

WEEK 10 - Preserving the Past

Oct. 25: Preserving History

Oct. 27: **No Class - Museum Visits** NMAI

Readings: *Mickey Mouse History*, “Preserving the Past,” 177-222.

WEEK 11 - History, Power, and Controversy

Nov. 1: History in Black and White and Red and . . . - **Book Review DUE**

Nov. 3: **No Class - Museum Visits** NMAI

Readings: *Mickey Mouse History*, “The Battle of the Enola Gay,” 223-248 for Tuesday; *The Presence of the Past*, “History in Black and Red,” 147-176 for Thursday

UNIT FOUR: CONTESTING KNOWLEDGE AT THE NMAI

How might we use the NMAI as a case study for examining the role of power in “creating a usable past”?

How do both white and Native peoples “create a usable past” in their constructions of “Indian History”?

What does our study of the NMAI suggest about the future of museums?

WEEK 12 - Contested Knowledge

Nov. 8: Indians in the Museum - **Museum Site Report #2 DUE**

Nov. 10: Ethnography and the History of American Indian History

Readings: “William Clark’s Indian Museum in St. Louis, 1816-1838” (Blackboard), “Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives,” *Contesting Knowledge*, 1-5.

WEEK 13 - The Legacy of Ethnography

Nov. 15: George Heye’s Indian Collection

Nov. 17: The NMAI: A Case Study - **Thought Journal #5 DUE**

Readings: “The Legacy of Ethnography,” *Contesting Knowledge*, 9-14, “Ethnographic Showcases as Sites of Knowledge Production and Indigenous Resistance,” *Contesting Knowledge*, 45-64 for Tuesday; “Reinventing George Heye,” *Contesting Knowledge*, 65-105 for Thursday.

WEEK 14 - The National Museum of the American Indian

Nov. 22: **No Class Meeting - Thanksgiving**

Nov. 24: **No Class Meeting - Thanksgiving**

Readings: “Museums and Indigenous Perspectives on Curatorial Practice,” *Contesting Knowledge*, 129-131. “A Dialogic Response to the Problematized Past,” *Contesting Knowledge*, 133-155 for Tuesday; NMAI Selected Readings (Blackboard), “The Construction of Native Voice at the National Museum of the American Indian,” *Contesting Knowledge*, 218-247 for Thursday.

WEEK 15 - Tribal Museums and Continued Colonialism

Nov. 29: Tribal Museums: Toward a New Future of the Past?

Dec. 1: Decolonizing the Past

Readings: “Creation of the Tribal Museum,” *Contesting Knowledge*, 251-256, “Tsi’niyukwaliho?ta, the Oneida Nation Museum,” *Contesting Knowledge*, 257-282 for Tuesday; “Museums as Sites of Decolonization,” *Contesting Knowledge*, 322-337 for Thursday.

Finals Week: Term Paper Due - Dec 8, 2022 Exam session time: 1:30-4:15

Grading Scale:

500-470 = A	384-365 = C
469-450 = A-	364-350 = C
449-435 = B+	349-335 = D+
434-415 = B	334-315 = D
414-400 = B-	314-300 = D
399-385 = C+	299-000 = F

Disability Accommodations

If you have a learning or physical difference that may affect your academic work, you will need to furnish appropriate documentation to the Office of Disability Services. If you qualify for accommodation, the ODS staff will give you a form detailing appropriate accommodations for your instructor. In addition to providing your professors with the appropriate form, please take the initiative to discuss accommodation with them at the beginning of the semester and as needed during the term. Because of the range of learning differences, faculty members need to learn from you the most effective ways to assist you. If you have contacted the Office of Disability Services and are waiting to hear from a counselor, please tell me.

A Note about Academic Integrity:

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely.

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA or APA format. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.