

Syllabus
The Politics of Memorials: Making and Shaping History
POL-295B
Washington and Lee Spring Term 2021
Lucy Britt

Tuesday/Thursday/Friday 1:30pm-4:30pm

Zoom link for class and for office hours (by appointment): <https://unc.zoom.us/j/93423760601>

From Cape Town to Charlottesville, memorials are often sources of intense controversy in the U.S. South and beyond. In this course, students explore some of the most hotly debated topics in commemoration. These include: What role should the past play in the politics of the present and future? How should we design our physical surroundings – from murals and monuments to flags and street names – to represent history? How do different actors, from the state to religious groups, use these symbols and ceremonies to depict their visions of the values and priorities of the collective? What is the point of commemorating the past, including past mass violence? What is the difference between the discovery of history and the preservation – or creation – of memory? And how ought communities to balance the demands of victims, the public, and future generations?

Among both scholars and the public, there are those who object to portrayals of historical violence that politicize victims or appear to craft a narrative about history. Others object that no depictions of history are politically neutral. This course acts as an introduction both to differing theoretical or methodological approaches and to the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of “memory studies.” It focuses on memory, commemoration, and memorials. The course explores these themes from a number of disciplinary, methodological, and theoretical perspectives, including scholars and thinkers from political science and theory; philosophy; sociology; literature; film studies; and psychology.

Students engage in these questions through class readings, discussion, original research projects, and site visits. For the final project, students will conduct original research on a site of memorialization in the local region. They will analyze the portrayal of the past through the theoretical frameworks offered by the thinkers we study during the semester.

Policies and Guidelines

- For this class, students are expected to adhere to all Washington & Lee policies and guidelines, including the honor code and all policies around harassment and an equal learning environment.
- If you need disability accommodations, please communicate your needs with me as soon as you can.
- If you have an emergency come up, please communicate that any upcoming excused absences with me as early as you can.
- I will be responsive via email during the work week but less so in the evenings and weekends, so please plan any questions about assignments accordingly.
- Late penalties for all assignments (unless there is an excuse) are 5 points per day

Assignments

Final Project – 65%

- This is an iterative assignment that gives students structure and multiple opportunities for feedback. Students choose their own project topic relevant to the course's themes and work closely with the instructor to produce a polished final product.
- Students visit a local memorial, marker, park, or monument and put together a final paper on it connecting the site to themes from our course
- Site visit report – 15%
 - Graded A-F
 - Rubric on Canvas
 - 500-700 words not including heading
- Topic meeting – 5%
 - Meet with the instructor to approve topic idea
 - Graded for completion
- Outline – 5%
 - Graded for completion
 - Expectations on Canvas
- Rough Draft – 5%
 - Graded for completion
 - Expectations on Canvas
- Peer Editing Workshop – 5%
 - Peer Editing Workshop Worksheet (in-class assignment) – 2.5%
 - Graded A-F
 - Peer Editing Workshop Reflection – 2.5%
 - Graded A-F
 - Rubric on Canvas
- Final Paper – 20%
 - Graded A-F
 - Rubric on Canvas
 - 7-8 pages double spaced plus pictures
- Final Paper Presentation – 10%
 - Graded A-F
 - Rubric on Canvas
 - 4-5 minute presentations plus 2-3 minutes of Q&A during the exam period

Discussion Questions or Reflections – 15%

- Ten discussion questions or reflections, one to three sentences each
- Questions or reflections should be about one or more readings for a given class meeting
- Students have the choice whether to write a question or a reflection
- *Questions* are questions that will get your classmates discussing the reading. For example: “The author draws most of their examples for their argument from Europe, but the political dynamics in other parts of the world are often quite different. Do you think the author’s argument applies to places in the world other than Europe?”
 - Questions should not have one correct answer (should not be reading comprehension or fact-based questions). They should ask your classmates to address the juicy controversies, big questions, applications to related issues or current events, or broader implications of the reading

- *Reflections* are statements of your opinions or thoughts about the reading. They are also meant to get your classmates talking. This could be a critique of the reading, an application of the reading to current events or historical events, or putting the reading into conversation with another reading from the class.
- Graded for completion
- Due at noon before the class where we'll be discussing the reading(s) you respond to

In-Class Participation – 10%

- Graded A-F
- Includes in-class participation as well as office hours
- Includes participation in our in-class workshops

Attendance – 10%

- No points deducted for first unexcused absence
 - Subsequent absences lose 5 points on attendance grade

Course Schedule

1. Tuesday, April 27: **Introductions**

- Icebreakers, introductions, review of syllabus, discuss readings about class discussion, classroom discourse contract
- Library research workshop
- Readings:
 - Robin DiAngelo. 2018. "Where Do We Go from Here?" in *White Fragility*. (2018) pp. 139-154. eBook available through W&L: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wlu/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=6048775> (16 pages)
 - Tiffany Jewell. 2020. "When to Call Someone Out or Call them In Over Racist Behavior." *KQED* <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/55779/when-to-call-someone-out-or-call-them-in-over-racist-behavior> (6 pages)

2. Thursday, April 29: **Melancholia, Mourning, and Memory**

- Discussion of readings and memorial case study (Parque de la Memoria and Buenos Aires' sidewalk tiles)
- Readings:
 - Sigmund Freud. 1918. "Mourning and Melancholia" (16 pages)
 - Judith Butler. 2004. Excerpt from "Violence, Mourning, Politics" in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*: read pp. 19-35 (16 pages)

3. Friday, April 30: **The Significance of Bodies and the Significance of Objects**

- Discussion of readings and memorial case study (Rwandan genocide memorials)
- Readings:
 - Thomas Laqueur. 2015. Introduction to Part I and "Chapter 1: Do the Dead Matter?", in *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (24 pages)
 - Alice Walker. 1973. "Everyday Use" (6 pages)

Site visit report due Monday, May 3 at noon

4. Tuesday, May 4: **Collective Memory, Collective Forgetting**
 - Students share findings from site reports
 - Discuss readings and memorial case study (Confederate monuments in the U.S.)
 - Readings:
 - Maurice Halbwachs. 1925. "Preface," in *On Collective Memory* (4 pages)
 - Brooke Gladstone's interview with David Rieff for *On the Media* podcast: "In Praise of Forgetting": <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/segments/praise-forgetting-2> (click "Listen" button and/or read transcript) (11 minutes)
 - Frederick Douglass. 1852. "What to a Slave is the Fourth of July." Watch James Earl Jones perform the speech: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0baE_CtU08 (6 minutes).
 - W. Fitzhugh Brundage. 2018. "Exclusion, Inclusion, and the Politics of Confederate Commemoration in the American South" (6 pages)

5. Thursday, May 6
 - Writing workshop
 - **Topic meetings in class**
 - **Additional topic meetings scheduled 9am-12:30pm May 6**

6. Friday, May 7: **Monuments and Memorials – Classical and Alternative Forms**
 - Discussion of readings and memorial case studies (National Mall in Washington, D.C and 9/11 memorials)
 - Readings:
 - *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision*, documentary created by Freida Lee Mock. 1994. (1h45m). Rent online for \$4.99: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/mayalin>
 - Simon Stow. 2012. "From Upper Canal to Lower Manhattan: Memorialization and the Politics of Loss" (10 pages)

Outline due Monday, May 10 at noon

7. Tuesday, May 11 **The Politics of Historical Preservation**
 - Discussion of readings and memorial case study (memorializing Black enslaved people's history in the U.S.)
 - Guest speaker: Heli Meltsner, architectural historian and preservationist
 - Readings:
 - Dolores Hayden. 1994. "The Power of Place: Claiming Urban Landscapes as People's History" (19 pages)
 - Patrice Frey. 2019. "Why Historic Preservation Needs a New Approach." <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-08/why-historic-preservation-needs-a-new-approach> (11 pages)

8. Thursday, May 13: **After Auschwitz**
 - Discussion of readings and memorial case study (Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Holocaust Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, and *Stolpersteine* in Europe)
 - Readings:

- Theodor Adorno. 1959. “The Meaning of Working Through the Past” (15 pages)
- James Young. 1992. “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today” (30 pages including pictures)

9. Friday, May 14: **What’s in a Name?**

- Discussion of readings and memorial case study (Washington & Lee, Lee Chapel, and the history of race on campus)
- Guest speaker: Lynn Rainville, Director of Institutional History & the Museums, Washington and Lee
- Readings:
 - Lauret Savoy. 2015. “What’s in a Name,” in *Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape* (19 pages)
 - Caroline Klibanoff. 2017. “Public Memory and Street Names in the South: Who Gets Remembered?” <https://medium.com/@cklibanoff/public-memory-and-street-names-in-the-south-who-gets-remembered-de8f7cb9e1e8>
 - Charles Reagan Wilson. 2009. Excerpt from *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*. Bottom of 151 (start with “Washington and Lee University reflected”)-160 (9 pages)

10. Tuesday, May 18: **Memories of Colonialism**

- Discussion of readings and memorial case studies (Australian memorials to Indigenous victims of colonial violence; Columbus imagery and Indigenous resistance in the U.S., and the #RhodesMustFall movement in South Africa)
- Readings:
 - Achille Mbembe. 2001. “Introduction: Time on the Move” from *On the Postcolony* (17 pages)
 - Douglas Foster. 2015. “After Rhodes Fell.” <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/after-rhodes-fell-south-africa-statue/391457/> (6 pages)

11. Thursday, May 20: Spontaneous and Vernacular Memorials

- **Rough draft due at beginning of class**
- Discussion of readings and memorial case study (George Floyd Square and COVID-19 memorialization)
- Peer editing workshop
- Readings:
 - Erika Doss. 2006. “Spontaneous memorials and contemporary modes of mourning in America” (21 pages)

12. Friday, May 21: **Transitional Justice**

- Discussion of reading, film, and memorial case study (the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, AL)
- **Peer editing reflection due at beginning of class**
- Readings:
 - Sonali Chakravarti. 2014. “Introduction,” in *Sing the Rage: Listening to Anger after Mass Violence* (15 pages)

- *My Neighbor, My Killer*, documentary created by Anne Aghion. 2009. (80 minutes)
<https://vimeo.com/groups/331203/videos/244348910>
 - Warning: graphic depictions of violence, including sexual violence

Exam: Saturday, May 22, 9am-12pm

- Student presentations of final projects. **Final project and final project presentations due at beginning of exam period**