

Public History: Theory, Method, and Practice
HIST 506: 301 (3 credits) – Spring 2017
Rutgers University – New Brunswick

Draft

Mondays, 1:10pm-4:10pm
Rutgers Academic Building – Room 2150
College Avenue Campus

Dr. O’Brassill-Kulfan
kobrassillkulfan@history.rutgers.edu

Office Hours: Mondays 9am-12pm, Tuesdays, 10am-4pm, *and by appointment*
Van Dyck Hall – Room 213C

Course Description

How do the histories that we learn in the classroom differ from those we learn on the street, in the museum, and in government documents? How does one explain the history of the women’s suffrage movement in a 100-word statement on a plaque in a town square that would be understandable by an eight year old? What can Spielberg’s *Lincoln* and Broadway’s *Hamilton* tell scholars about how the public consumes history? Who controls the narratives of those histories, and what does that mean for who is and is not included in our retellings of the past? How should we account for power and silences in history?

Studying public history involves considering these questions and exploring a variety of possible answers through the lens of the theory and practice of the field. By investigating a variety of public history institutions, from archives to museums to websites to parks and beyond, we consider how various practitioners craft and disseminate historical narratives and why. This course will explore a variety of definitions of the term “histories” as they exist within and without academia. Learning the intellectual and practical tools for creating and sharing history enhances community and civic engagement and shapes shared cultural memory.

Theory & Method: In this course, students will read academic, professional, and popular discussions of history and public history that will allow us to explore what it means to disseminate historical knowledge in different forums and mediums, and how to identify different constituencies and take into consideration the audiences receiving that knowledge. In this course, students will be challenged to think critically about what sorts of histories they’ve internalized as participants in public discourse, how those narratives were constructed, and how that construction and impact can deepen our understanding of historical facts and fictions. In doing so, students will engage with public dialogues surrounding complex and challenging histories in order to identify how historical knowledge on these subjects has been created, disseminated, and received.

Practice: This course provides an opportunity to utilize the narrative-creation and analytical skills students will have acquired in other humanities courses in application in a public setting, as many graduates in history and related disciplines go on to do. Students in this course will take on the role of aspiring public historian in order to explore the variety of communication styles, analytical approaches, and research directions that make it possible to disseminate historical information in a wide variety of contexts. Through class projects and hands-on experience, including methodological training and site visits, this course serves as a window into public history as a profession as well as a discipline, and will provide an overview of different methods utilized in a variety of public history careers – from archives to digital production to museums and libraries. For students completing the certificate in public history, this course serves as the core methodological and theoretical training to support entrance into the discipline.

Students in this course will actively consider, and by the end of this course, be able to discuss answers to, the following questions:

Theory

- What is public history? Where does public history happen? Why does it exist? Whose narratives create it? Who is its audience?

Method

- How is public history presented? In what forms is it consumed? What are the challenges to presenting difficult and/or contended histories?

Practice

- How are these theories and methodologies implemented through the practice of public history? What can be learned about power, truth, history, and audience, by completing the tasks of constructing public history projects yourselves?

Required Texts

- *The Public History Reader*, eds Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (Routledge: New York/London, 2013) (app. \$30-45)
- *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (Beacon Press: Boston, 1995) – or more recent edition (app. \$5-15)
- *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, eds Lois E. Horton and James O. Horton (app. \$8-20)

Additional required readings, as listed each week on the syllabus, have been uploaded to Sakai, under resources, for you to access.

Some film/TV viewing outside of class may be required. More details to come.

Outcomes - History Department Learning Goals Met by this Course

Students who study History at Rutgers University can expect to develop an understanding of the following concepts:

- 1.) How individuals are shaped by their own past and by the past of their society and institutions;
- 2.) The role of human agency in bringing about change in society and institutions;
- 3.) The operation of large-scale forces responsible for causing change over time, such as politics, economics, and religion;
- 4.) The role of diversity and difference in shaping human experience;
- 5.) The nature of cause-and-effect relationships in human affairs as they have played out over time and as they continue to operate in the present.

Students who study History at Rutgers University can expect to develop the following practical skills:

- 1.) The ability to read and understand a variety of literary forms, including primary sources such as diplomatic correspondence, journalistic reports, and private papers, as well as secondary sources written in academic prose;
- 2.) The ability to analyze information effectively and to construct cause-and-effect relationships from disparate data sources;
- 3.) The ability to write persuasively and communicate effectively;
- 4.) The ability to work independently and to conduct independent research.

Accomplishing these goals requires hard work and perseverance. Students who make a serious commitment to the discipline should find, however, that in addition to acquiring valuable concepts and skills they will also develop an appreciation for History that will continue after their formal education has been completed.

Please note: This syllabus is subject to change, and may evolve with the direction of the course. If/when changes are made, students will be made aware of adjustments in a timely fashion.

Assignment and Grading Overview

Additional information about each assignment will be provided throughout the course.

- Historic walking tour of New Brunswick: 100 points - 25% of total grade
- Applied public history group project: 120 points - 30% of total grade
- Site visit/visiting speaker responses: 80 points - 20% of total grade. Students are responsible for their own transportation to sites for scheduled visits, though the

class may travel as a group. More details to come. Contact the instructor if you have any concerns.

- Final exam: 80 points - 20% of total grade

Project Descriptions:

Applied public history project: students will select a series of documents or objects from one of the historical sites or institutions (archives, museums, libraries, etc.) that we visit during this course to interpret and present via a method discussed in the course and selected by the students. More details to come.

Site visit/visiting speaker responses: Throughout this course, we will visit several public history sites and institutions and/or hear from practicing public historians. Students will be expected to write a journal-style response to these visits by linking what was encountered at the site with the theory, method, and practice covered in the coursework. Discussion questions will be provided in advance. Previous site visits have included the Cornelius Low House, Rutgers University Archives and Special Collections, New Brunswick Free Public Library, The Edison Papers, Rutgers Oral History Archive, etc. Previous guest speakers have included archivists for the State of New Jersey, public historians from the Brooklyn Historical Society, and museum curators from the Old Barracks Museum.

Historic walking tour of New Brunswick: each student will be expected to create their own brochure-style or app-style descriptive list of historic sites that they would include on an historic walking tour of the city. Students will examine their choices carefully, reflecting, in writing, on how they chose which locations, sites, events, or objects they chose to include and how this reflects principles of curation and narrative-creation about the city's past and present.

Grading Scale

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

Attendance & Other Class Policies

Students must check their email and other University digital course tools (including Sakai) regularly in order to stay up to date with class meeting information, syllabus adjustments, assignments, etc.

Attendance and participation are essential in this course. Public history is an active discipline that relies on frequent and open communication, and the structure of the course reflects this. Students are expected to attend every class meeting (with the exception of excused absences) and to participate at each class meeting. Participation

involves active attention and contribution: excessive cellphone use or distracting laptop use will not be permitted.

If you have to miss class due to illness, an emergency, or for another excused reason, please use the University absence reporting website: <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. The system will notify the instructor of the absence automatically.

Late or make-up work will only be accepted in situations where the student has had a documented, excused absence. All other late assignments will receive a 10% grade deduction for each day the assignment is late.

If a student needs to miss class or adjust their completion of coursework for religious observation, the instructor should be notified in advance and accommodations will be made.

Special Accommodation Requests

Requests for disability or other special accommodation should be made to the instructor within the first two weeks of class. Official procedures for doing so are outlined by the Office of Disability Services here: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-services>.

Academic Integrity Policy

Consult, don't plagiarize -- document your research! For tips about how to take notes so that you don't plagiarize by accident: http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid_plagiarism.

All students are expected to adhere to the principles of academic integrity laid out by the university here: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers/>. Plagiarism will be addressed to the fullest extent in accordance with University policy.

By participating in the coursework required for this course, you are bound to adhere to the following **honor pledge**: *"On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this examination (assignment)."*

Course Schedule & Reading Assignments

Readings should be done prior to the date listed on the syllabus. Please come to class ready to discuss the listed materials (with the text and your notes in hand).

Week 1 – January 23 **Defining public history**

Public History Reader, Introductions to Book and to Part I and Chapter 2 (xiii-xxvi, 1-9, 30-51)

Silencing the Past, Chapter 1: 1-30

Week 2 – January 30

Production of Historical Narratives

Silencing the Past, Chapters 2 & 3 (31-107)

View several timelines at:

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/timelines/interactive_timeline.htm

Week 3 – February 6

Truth and Histories for the Public

Public History Reader, Chapter 3, 6, & 7 (56-65, 104-141)

Week 4 – February 13

Official and Unofficial Histories

Silencing the Past, Chapters 4, 5, & Epilogue (108-156)

McManamon, "Repatriation in the USA: A Decade of Federal Agency Activities under NAGPRA," *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy, and Practice* (pdf on Sakai)

Week 5 – February 20

Historical Knowledge as Politics

Public History Reader, Introduction to Part III and Chapter 15 (243-254, 275-282)

Crooke, "Confronting a Troubled History: which past in Northern Ireland's museums?", *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7, no. 2 (2001), pp. 119-136 (pdf on Sakai)

Week 6 – February 27

Tangible Material Culture

Public History Reader, Introduction to Part II and Chapters 8 & 11 (147-172, 214-223)

Excerpts from Thatcher Ulrich, *Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (pdf on Sakai)

Week 7 – March 6

Owning, preserving, deserving, sharing

Excerpts from Vagnone & Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums* (pdf on Sakai)

Week 8 – March 13

No class – Spring Recess

Week 9 – March 20

Art vs. Truth

Slavery and Public History, Chapters 2, 3, & 4 (19-74)

Listen to *Hamilton*, or watch *Lincoln*, an episode of *Roots*, or *12 Years a Slave*, *Free State of Jones*, or other historical film approved by instructor

Week 10 – March 27

Presenting Conflict to the Public

Slavery and Public History, Chapters 5, 6, & 7 (75-150)

Tyson and Dungey, "Ask a Slave" and Interpreting Race on Public History's Front Line: Interview with Azie Mira Dungey," *The Public Historian* 36 (2014): 36-60 (pdf on Sakai)

Week 11 – April 3

Public Historians as Mediators

Slavery and Public History, Chapters 8, 9, & Epilogue (151-224)

Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, *Report on Slavery and Justice* (2006) and Brown University response to *Report on Slavery and Justice* (2007) (pdfs on Sakai)

Week 12 – April 10

Public History as Entertainment

de Groot, "History on Television," *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, pp. 165-218 (pdf on Sakai)

Gray and Bell, "History on television: Charisma, narrative and knowledge," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (February 2007), pp. 113-133 (pdf on Sakai)

Week 13 – April 17

Memory & Commemoration

Greenspan, "Spontaneous Memorials, Museums, and Public History: Memorialization of September 11, 2001 at the Pentagon," *The Public Historian*, Vol. 25 No. 2, Spring 2003 (pdf on Sakai)

Week 14 – April 24

Memory in the Present

Goldstein, "New York's 9/11: An Oral History Archive Takes Shape," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 12, 2011, Vol. 57, Issue 43 (pdf on Sakai)

Week 15 – May 1

Digital Memory and Living Archives

McKenzie, "Teaching Twitter: Re-enacting the Paris Commune and the Battle of Stalingrad," *The History Teacher* 47.3 (2014): 355-372 (pdf on Sakai)

Archiving the 2015 Baltimore Riots –

- View/read: <http://www.baltimoreuprising2015.org/>
- Read: <https://www.mdhs.org/pressrelease/objects-photos-baltimore-uprising-2015-featured-new-maryland-historical-society-exhibit>

Final Exams – May 4-10

The date, time, and location of the final exam can be found at the following website once this information is available: <https://finalexams.rutgers.edu/>.