Sites of Violence and Public Memory
Professor Marty Blatt
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Class meeting: Tuesday, 4:00 – 6:30.
Office hours: Tuesday, 2:30 – 4:00.

Course Description

This course will explore how public historians address sites of violence and public memory. Sites to be considered will include those related to war and different aspects of violence in the United States. We will examine violence against Native Americans, blacks, and working people and also look at terrorist attacks, both domestic and international. A key theme throughout the course will be the conflict/balance public historians employ between commemoration and interpretation. Another framing concept will entail the destructive or toxic impact of war and violence versus the redemptive meaning of war. Students will read history and theory of public history related to sites of violence/war and case studies. We will visit engage in discussions and have guest speakers. At the end of the class students will have a fuller understanding of the critical issues involved in the public history of sites of violence and public memory.

COURSE SCHEDULE.

Week One. (1/12): Freedom Trail and Revolutionary War 250.
Week Two. (1/19): Minute Man National Historical Park.
Week Three. (1/26): The Civil War.
Week Four. (2/2): Violence against Native Americans.
Week Seven. (2/23): National Park Service and War of 1812 and World War I anniversaries.
Week Nine. (3/8): Enjoy Spring Break!
Week Eleven. (3/22): Oklahoma City bombing.
Week Fourteen. (4/12): No class.

REQUIRED TEXTS

• Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing – Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)

Assignments:
• Each student will be responsible for facilitating class discussion in multiple class sessions. You should prepare a written outline of key questions/issues to be addressed. You will hand in your outline, which can be in bullet format, in hard copy on the day of class for which you are responsible. You should identify issues, questions, problems, dilemmas, conflicts, and ways to spark conversation. Be prepared to facilitate class discussion.
• Each student should write during the semester (on weeks of your choosing) two AHR (American Historical Review) or JAH (Journal of American History) style reviews of books from the eight required texts listed above. These should be approximately 750 words. Please read some AHR and JAH reviews to get a sense of the style. You should convey the book’s main arguments, methods, sources, and assess the book’s effectiveness and contribution to the literature. Please note that your reviews are not about if you “liked” the book but rather you will provide a descriptive and evaluative discussion of a book’s scholarly contribution. These should be provided to the instructor in hard copy.
• Each student will write a 3-5 page reflection on what you have learned about sites of violence and public memory. This should include engagement with the readings. What did you know about sites of violence entering the class and how has your thinking changed? What class discussion worked best for you and why and which class discussion was the most problematic and why? What reading(s) worked best for you and which reading(s) were most problematic? You don’t need to repeat here what you will say in your book reviews. Just give me a quick reference to your reviews in this context. Which speaker did you find most compelling and why and which speaker was the weakest and why?

Course Policies and Expectations:
To succeed in this class you will need to keep up with the reading, participate actively in class discussions, and complete all assignments. If at any time you are having difficulties with the material or the assignments, or just need to talk, please feel free to come see me during office hours or make an appointment for another time.

Attendance and participation in discussions are critical and required and class discourse will be an important learning experience for all students. There are occasionally good
reasons to miss class, like religious holidays, medical mishaps, family, or emergencies, but if you must miss something please contact me to make arrangements.

Participation consists of being on time for class, having completed all assignments prior to the beginning of class, and being an active member in discussion sessions. You do us all a disservice by coming to class unprepared. The success of any seminar is directly proportionate to the effort by its members to create a lively, provocative discussion that investigates the week’s topic with energy. If anyone comes unprepared, the experience of everyone suffers as a result. Also, it is a signal to the rest of the room that you are content to coast on their time and effort, which is something no public historian wants to do.

Most class periods will be split between some lectures/presentations and class discussions based on readings/assignments. The instructor will suggest one or two main topics for discussion to give focus to your weekly reading assignment. Your response to that issue or issues and your ability to raise other questions based on the assignment will be the bases of evaluation of your class participation. Each of you should be prepared to make a brief presentation on the topic of the class as a way of starting each session.

Academic Integrity/Plagiarism
Employing ideas or phrases that are not your own without explicitly and sufficiently crediting their creator will not be tolerated. As a result, I urge you to err on the side of caution: take detailed notes, cite your sources carefully and consistently, and do not leave assignments to the last minute. If you plagiarize, the department’s chair will be notified and appropriate steps will be taken. To ensure that this does not occur, please review the University’s policy regarding academic integrity [http://issuu.com/northeasternuniversity/docs/2014-15_academic_integrity_policy?e=2831976/8316945](http://issuu.com/northeasternuniversity/docs/2014-15_academic_integrity_policy?e=2831976/8316945)

COURSE SYLLABUS


- View DVD of Wodizecko projection.
- Seth Bruggeman, Boston National Historical Park visiting scholar essay

Discussion Questions:
• Do the public historians along the Freedom Trail strike a balance between giving visitors the heroic narrative many of them seek versus challenging visitors to explore new concepts?
• Did Wodizcko profane the Bunker Hill Monument or interpret it in such a way as to make it relevant to contemporary concerns?


• Lexington and Concord chapter in Edward Linenthal, Sacred Ground – Americans and Their Battlefields.
• Seth Bruggeman - Minute Man National Historical Park scholar site visit essay.

Discussion Questions:
• Does history suffer when the Minutemen are characterized as a model of civic virtue?
• How did the Cold War influence historical interpretation at Minute Man?
• The National Park Service has had to confront the issue of the historic right to bear arms after every major shooting massacre. How has the agency addresses this topic?


• John Coski, The Confederate Battle Flag – America’s Most Embattled Emblem

Discussion Questions:
• How did the Confederate flag become popular in contemporary America?
• What is the relationship between the Confederate flag or memorials and acts of racist violence?


• Little Bighorn chapter in Linenthal, Sacred Ground.
• Ari Kelman, A Misplaced Massacre – Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek

Suggested:
• Benjamin Madley, “Reexamining the American Genocide Debate: Meaning, Historiography, and New Methods,” American Historical Review, February 2015, Volume 120, Number 1, pp. 98-139.

Discussion Questions:
• What was the significance of the name change from Custer to Little Big Horn?
• Again looking at naming, what does it mean for the National Park Service to include “massacre” in the official name of the Sand Creek site?


Discussion Questions:
• Do you agree with James Young that the perpetual, unresolved debate in Germany about how best to memorialize the Holocaust might be most important. What do you think?
• Compare and contrast the national Holocaust memorial in Berlin with the *stolpersteine*.
• Curators of “The Price of Freedom” exhibit clearly want to argue that U.S. firepower is always in service to freedom. Do you agree?


• Arizona Memorial chapter in Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*

Discussion Questions:
• What is the tension between managing the Arizona Memorial as a shrine versus providing historical interpretation? What are the “lessons” of the Pearl Harbor attack that have been imparted at the site?
• The National Park Service maintains Manzanar and other sites where Japanese Americans were imprisoned. What problems has the agency had to confront at these places?


• Discussion questions to follow.


Discussion Questions:
- Did the veterans who promoted and developed the memorial as a site of healing succeed?
- Why does Meredith Lair believe that the new Education Center at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial will be problematic?


Documentary films for historic sites that interpret war.

Week Eleven. March 22. Oklahoma City bombing.


Suggested:

Discussion Questions:
- What do you think of Linenthal’s division among progressive, redemptive, and toxic narratives?
- What were some of the difficulties planners encountered in developing the memorial space?

Week Twelve. March 29. 9/11 Memorial in New York.

- Elizabeth Greenspan, Battle for Ground Zero
- Rick Beard, Review of The National September 11 Memorial and Museum, The Public Historian, Volume 37, Number 1, February 2015, pp. 150-158.

Discussion Questions:
• Greenspan identifies several conflicting parties and a struggle that played out over several years. How important was the museum at the memorial and how did it turn out?
• Alice Greenwald became director of the 9/11 Memorial Museum after nineteen years at the Holocaust Museum. How do you think she was able to bring her previous experience to bear on the 9/11 facility?


• James Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*
• Withoutsanctuary.org
• Doss, chapter in Memorial Mania.

Discussion Questions:
• Hirsch traces the history of the 1921 Tulsa race riot and the subsequent forgetting and remembering. How would you characterize the struggle for memory and reparations?
• The “Without Sanctuary” exhibit contains horrific images of racial violence but does little to scrutinize the white perpetrators of the violence and subsequent celebratory gatherings. Contrast this approach to the outdoor memorial in Duluth, MN.

Week Fourteen. April 12. NO CLASS. Work on reviews and reflection papers.

Week Fifteen. April 19. Class War


Suggested:

Discussion Questions:
- How has violence associated with labor conflicts been memorialized?
- Why has Boston not yet erected a public monument or marker to Sacco and Vanzetti?