This course introduces the practice of public history and its intellectual foundations. Through our readings, class discussions, and assignments, we will examine the activities of public historians and the complex issues they face when preserving, interpreting and presenting history. Reading a series of case studies and theoretical essays, we will discuss how theory plays out in practice and in a variety of arenas in which historians engage with historical sites, objects, and publics. The course will be organized loosely into three parts. In Part 1, we will address the idea of the public. Who are the “publics” in public history? What kinds of relationships do (or should) public historians have with them? Can authority be shared? How do public historians handle “the other” – issues of cultural appropriation or cross-cultural interactions? Part 2 considers “history” – how does society decide what’s worth remembering and saving? What role do public historians play in shaping, sharing, and interpreting public memories? How do we resolve the tension between memory and history? And what is the relationship between public history and the historical discipline? Part 3 considers political activism and the politics of public history practices. How have both conservative and radical agendas shaped the work of public history in the past, including sources of funding, methods of engagement, and institutional collecting priorities? And how do politics, personal and professional, shape the work of public historians today?

In addition to the questions above, some other things to keep in mind when you read:

- Who is the author(s) and what is their connection to the projects or institutions being discussed?
- Who is the audience for the reading? And how does that audience compare/connect to the audiences involved in the public history projects being described?
- What format/form does this public history project take? In what ways does the form/format align with the subject and content? How, if at all, might this topic be suited to a different – or more effective – format?
- What roles and responsibilities are assumed by history professionals? And what skills are required for these roles?

WHAT WE’LL BE DOING:

Please know that I know that we’re gathering as a class during a time full of uncertainty, risk, inconveniences, and discomfort, all of which makes our shared intellectual work more difficult. I hope, in addition, that we can use this time together to build a community and to think together about the potential of public history to offer meaningful forms of engagement during times of crisis and disruption.

The syllabus that I have prepared offers a possible roadmap for our work together. However, it is open to change depending on your needs and new developments as a result of the pandemic and other external factors. I invite you to recommend positive changes to this plan – and I strongly encourage you
to let me (and your classmates) know how the class readings, assignments, discussions, and format can best suit your needs and interests.

For now, I am planning for us to meet weekly on Thursday afternoons, from 2:00-4:00, for our virtual seminar. Those who are able should join these meetings via Zoom; if you are not able to participate in this way, please contact me in order to discuss alternatives.

In addition, I’ll be available on Wednesday afternoons from 4-6:00 for virtual office hours. Please drop in then to talk with me about the class, your graduate studies, or other matters.

REQUIREMENTS

Active participation: You should attend each class, having read the assigned materials and ready to join a discussion, ask questions, and contribute to this group learning experience. Each of you will be responsible for leading one or more class discussions (including reading and reporting on one or more of the additional supplementary readings, chosen in consultation with the instructor).

Review essay: write a critical review of two of the assigned books, suitable to submit to one of these publishers: Gotham Center blog, the National Council on Public History’s blog, the Radical History Review, or another publication. Reviews should be 750-1,000. You should pair up books that you think will make for an interesting side-by-side analysis or comparison. The review might focus on a particular topic or theme (e.g., parallels/differences in the history of the Black museum movement and Tribal museums); an approach (e.g., models of community collaboration); or another issue of interest to you (e.g., ways the books can help public historians respond to our current moment). You can turn in your review essay any time before November 20.

Final assignment: option to complete a 25-30 page research paper or to complete a project, in collaboration with a public history organization. Assignments described in more detail:

a. Research paper: complete a scholarly research paper (approx. 25-30 pages) that describes and analyzes how a particular topic or issue in history has been interpreted and presented in a variety of public history formats. The paper will be due on December XX, with a one-page précis due on November 5. For the last class session, December 3, each student also will prepare and present a brief (10-15 minutes) presentation of their paper’s research and conclusions.

b. Public History Project: as an alternative to Option A, you can elect to complete a project, in collaboration with a public history organization, that represents the application of some of the ideas and practices covered in class. Projects should be completed by December XX along with a short (6-8 pages) report describing methods, outcomes, and possible next steps. For the last class session, December 3, each student also will prepare and present a brief (10-15 minutes) presentation of their project’s methods and outcomes. Students interested in this option should discuss possible projects with me early in the semester and may design their own project or select from some of these possibilities:
   • Create an online exhibit suitable for inclusion on OutHistory.org
   • Develop a proposal to review and revise Mission US 2, Flight to Freedom, by speaking to key stakeholders from ASHP, WNET, etc.
PART I: PUBLIC HISTORY’S PUBLICS

August 27: Thinking Historically in the Midst of Crisis

September 3: Thinking Historically in the Midst of Crisis


Jacob F. Lee and Matthew E. Stanley, “Direct Action and the Rejection of Monumental History,” June 5, 2020, Counterpunch, at: https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/06/05/direct-action-and-the-rejection-of-monumental-history/?fbclid=IwAR038JRGMy7hejjIXZ10DFjC-wnQsABclZnwb7nP-HAVI72cbv4XiYZEBNXQ


Ashley Maynor, “Five Ways We Can Do Better to Respond to the Crises In Our Communities,” History@Work, February 5, 2018, https://ncph.org/history-at-work/five-ways-we-can-do-better-crises-in-our-communities/

Queens Memory Project

Voces Pandemic Oral History Project https://voces.lib.utexas.edu/voces-pandemic

September 17 Audiences and Stakeholders

Ari Kelman, A Misplaced Massacre (Harvard University Press)

September 10: Broadening History’s Scope

Lara Kelland, Clio’s Foot Soldiers (University of Massachusetts Press, 2016)

September 24: Decolonizing Museums, Archives, and Stories

Amy Lonetree, Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums (University of North Carolina Press, 2012)

O’Neal, Jennifer R. (2015) ""The Right to Know": Decolonizing Native American Archives," Journal of Western Archives: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1,

In connection with this week’s topic, you may want to attend some sessions of this week’s conference sponsored by the American Philosophical Society on the topic of Relationships, Reciprocity, and
Responsibilities: Indigenous Studies in Archives and Beyond at:
https://www.amphilsoc.org/nasi2020#paragraph-1692

PART II: HISTORY AND PUBLIC HISTORY

October 1: Digital Public History: Principles and Practices

Sharon Leon, “Complicating a “Great Man” Narrative of Digital History in the United States,” Chapter 19, in Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism and Digital Humanities, edited by Elizabeth Losh and Jacqueline Wernimont (University of Minnesota Press, 2018) at
https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled-4e08b137-aec5-49a4-83c0-38258425f145/section/53838061-eb08-4f46-ace0-e6b15e4fbf

Laura Zucconi, Ethan Watrall, Hannah Ueno, and Lisa Rosner, “Pox and the City: Challenges in Writing a Digital History Game” in Writing History in the Digital Age, edited by Kristen Nawrotzki and Jack Dougherty (2013): http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/12230987.0001.001/1:8/--writing-history-in-the-digital-age?g=dculture;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;xc=1#8.1


October 8: Creating/Curating Public Memory

James Young, The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between (University of Massachusetts Press, 2018)

October 15: Community Museums and Alternative National Histories

Andrea A. Burns, From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement (University of Massachusetts Press, 2013)

Fath Ruffins
Lonnie Bunch

October 22 Laboring in the Front of the House/on the Front Lines


Museums and labor?

**PART III: THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC HISTORY**

**October 29: Queering the Past**

TPH special issue on LGBTQ history

Susan Ferentinos

**November 5: Radical Curatorial Practices**


**November 12: Critical Campus Histories**

Rhonnda Thomas, *Call My Name, Clemson: Documenting the Black Experience in an American University Community* (University of Iowa Press, 2020)


http://www.criticalethnicstudiesjournal.org/blog/2019/1/21/do-not-decolonize-if-you-are-not-decolonizing-alternate-language-to-navigate-desires-for-progressive-academia-6y5sg

**November 19: Growing and Eating History**


Janis Thiessen, *Manitoba Food History Truck*, at [https://uofmpress.ca/blog/entry/the-manitoba-food-history-truck](https://uofmpress.ca/blog/entry/the-manitoba-food-history-truck) and [https://www.manitobafoodhistory.ca/](https://www.manitobafoodhistory.ca/)

Southern Foodways Alliance, at [https://www.southernfoodways.org/](https://www.southernfoodways.org/)

**November 26: Thanksgiving No class**
December 3: Presentations

Graduate Center academic calendar, with info re: withdrawals, changing your course schedule, etc. at: https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/Registrar/Academic-Calendar-Fall-2020.pdf