

Public History and Mass Incarceration

26:050:521 / 26:510:565

Mondays, 5:30pm-8:10pm

Conklin Hall 233

Instructor Information:

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Description:

Public history is the co-creation of historical knowledge between historians and the public. This course will ground students in the theory, methods, and practices of public history and the public humanities to consider how to engage the public with the history of mass incarceration. Using case studies, we will examine how public historians have delved into the challenges and opportunities that arise when dealing with, in James and Lois Horton's words, "the tough stuff of American memory," including slavery, trauma, violence, and structural inequality. We will also examine the broader scholarship on mass incarceration, but because much public history work is local, our focus will be on the Elizabeth Detention Center. We will focus specifically on a mostly forgotten riot that took place at the detention center in 1995 (then called Esmor). In 1995, immigrant detainees, predominantly African immigrants seeking asylum in the U.S., rioted against inhumane treatment from guards and conditions at the facility. This event spurred a successful landmark court case against Esmor, a private prison corporation, for their human rights abuses and insufficient training of guards. This case, *Jama vs. US Immigration and Naturalization Services*, settled in 2007, was brought by faculty at Rutgers University-Newark's constitutional law clinic. While the legal case was successful, it did not end immigrant detention in Elizabeth, NJ.

Today, the Elizabeth Detention Center is one of the largest facilities in the country used in detaining undocumented immigrants and is run by Corrections Corporation of America. Immigrants, including asylum seekers, are held in custody by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). According to ICE, the Elizabeth facility is "a temporary detention center for individuals who are waiting for their immigration status to be determined or who are awaiting repatriation." Activists, including our community partner, the American Friends Service Committee, continue to advocate for those who are detained.

We will research the events leading up to the 1995 riot, the court case, and the subsequent life of the Elizabeth Detention Center, placing these events within the context of immigration and asylum law,

globalization, the War on Terror, and privatization of immigrant detention. We will also be collaborating with the Newest Americans Project at Rutgers-Newark.

This course is part of an international project, the [Humanities Action Lab](#) (HAL), which uses public history and the public humanities to raise critical conversations about contemporary issues. Twenty colleges and universities across the nation are partnering to build a collaborative travelling exhibition on mass incarceration through their local stories.

Expectations:

This course will blend the theory and practice of public history. You will be treated as both graduate students who are expected to complete required readings and contribute thoughtfully to class discussions and as members of a project team who will work collaboratively to produce public history texts and materials. Collaborative work is a key skill for all public historians (and pretty much anybody who isn't a hermit) to have; we will practice it throughout this course.

Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will have:

- Become conversant with the scholarly literature on mass incarceration, immigrant detention, and public history;
- Researched specific issues around immigrant detention using primary and secondary sources;
- Produced "texts" interpreting these issues that synthesize primary and secondary sources and are designed for public viewing;
- Worked with a community partner (or partners);
- Contributed to a national public history project.

Assignments:

Students will be divided into two collaborative groups for our semester-long assignment.

- One group will write text and find images for our local piece of the national exhibit on mass incarceration that will debut in April 2016 and then tour the country.
- The other group will work in smaller teams to develop thematically coherent content around our main topic. There are numerous possibilities for what form this content will take, including multimodal digital mini-essays, digital document dossiers, audio and video short documentaries, and infographics/data visualizations.

Unlike other graduate seminars, your work will not just be seen by me, but will be readily accessible by the public. To ensure that we produce the best possible work in our time together, there will be a staged editorial review process. Every student is expected to engage in thoughtful and constructive peer review.

We will also present our work to our community partner at the end of the semester.

In addition, each individual student will:

- Write three National Exchange Posts for HAL. These posts will be an opportunity for you to grapple personally with the material in the course. Some of these posts will be chosen to appear

on the national HAL website. More information will be distributed about these throughout the semester.

- Read and write an executive summary of a section of a deposition taken from a detainee at Esmor by the lawyers at Rutgers-Newark's Constitutional Law Clinic. The goal will be to make these unwieldy documents more useful for our exhibit and other research.

Attendance and Participation:

You will be expected to attend class having completed readings and assignments and be prepared to actively participate. If you cannot attend class, please let me know at least 24 hours before class (except in the case of emergencies).

Grading:

10% Peer review—Did you thoroughly read and constructively comment on your classmate's materials?

10% Blog posts/commenting—In addition to writing the National Exchange posts, you will be expected to comment on other people's posts.

10% Executive summary of deposition—You will be expected to read and summarize a section of a deposition, placing it within the themes and readings for the course.

20% Attendance and participation—See above.

30% Deliverable—This is the summation of your semester-long project. We will discuss in more detail throughout the course.

20% Presentation of semester projects—At the end of the semester, you will be expected to present your work to our project partners. More information will be provided about this over the course of the semester.

Required Texts:

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.

Mark Dow, *American Gulag: Inside U.S. Immigration Prisons*.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.

James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, eds. *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*.

Articles and readings as assigned below. These can be found on our blackboard site.

FOR YOUR RESEARCH, there is a Google Drive that has a trove of newspaper articles, legal documents, and journal articles related to the Esmor riot. You should utilize these in your research. You can access the drive by clicking [here](#) or through this URL:

<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0BzE6T8Scx7pzfnBESUs5N1ImcGVFUIRaSHVaVHRITU9rVDRKdlhtUTczajR6Nm9BUVRHX1k&usp=sharing>

Weekly Schedule:

TO BE SCHEDULED: VISIT TO THE ELIZABETH DETENTION CENTER; MEETING WITH PROJECT PARTNERS

Week 1/Sept. 8: The Humanities Action Lab: Global Dialogues on Incarceration

Readings: HAL Overview

HAL Working Framework

HAL Collaborative Curation Process

Fall 2015 Curatorial Guidelines

"A Prison Empire," *New York Times*, 23 July 1995.

"Legacy of Immigrants' Uprising," *New York Times*, 7 July 1996.

"Fleeing to Asylum and Going Nowhere," *New York Times*, 8 July 1996

"8 Arrested During Protest of Immigrant Deportations," NJ.com.

http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2013/12/eight_arrested_during_protest_of_immigration_deportations_in_elizabeth.html

Week 2/Sept. 14: What is Mass Incarceration?

Readings: *The New Jim Crow*

Mary Rizzo and Martha Swan, "Public History and Mass Incarceration," *The Public Historian*.

Overview of Jama vs. US Immigration and Naturalization Services

<http://www.clearinghouse.net/detail.php?id=10539&search=source|general%3BcaseName|jama%3Bborderby|filingYear%3B>

Week 3/Sept. 21: What is Immigrant Detention?

Readings: *American Gulag*.

Cecelia Jeffrey Deposition Outline

Week 4/Sept. 28: Who is a Citizen?

Readings: Margot Canaday, "A New Species of Undesirable Immigrant:" Perverse Aliens and the Limits of the Law, 1900-1924," and "Who Is a Homosexual?": The Consolidation of Sexual Identities in Mid-Twentieth-Century Immigration Law, 1952-1983," in *The Straight State*.

Lisa Lowe, "Imagining Los Angeles in the Production of Multiculturalism," and "Work, Immigration, Gender: Asian "American" Women," in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*.

NATIONAL EXCHANGE 1 DUE

Week 5/Oct. 5: Categorizing Immigrants, Narrativizing Immigration

Readings: Michael Welch, "Criminalizing Asylum Seekers and the Indefinitely Detained," and "Warehousing Illegal Immigrants," in *Detained: Immigration Laws and the Expanding INS Jail Complex*.

Amy Gottlieb interview, *Beyond Walls and Cages*.

INS Report on Esmor

CURATORIAL STEP 1: FINALIZING SCOPE OF STORY AND MEDIA FORMATS; DEVELOPING THEMES FOR DIGITAL ESSAYS

Week 6/Oct. 12: How do We Talk About Difficult History with the Public?

Readings: James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, eds. *Slavery and Public History*.

<http://knottedline.com/>

Deposition Executive Summary Due

Week 7/Oct. 19: The Public History of Immigration: Ellis Island as Case Study

Readings: Mike Wallace, "Boat People: Immigrant History at the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island," in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*.

Daniel J. Walkowitz, "On Ellis Island," in *Contested Histories in Public Space*.

The Workers of Ellis Island: <http://www.nps.gov/elis/learn/historyculture/people.htm>

TENTATIVE DATE TO VISIT ELIZABETH DETENTION CENTER

Week 8/Oct. 26: Public History as Social Justice

Attend public lecture by Liz Sevckenko, director of the Humanities Action Lab.

Readings TBD

CURATORIAL STEP 2 – CONTENT OUTLINE, POTENTIAL IMAGES DUE ON OCTOBER 30; PREPARE FOR PEER REVIEW IN CLASS

Week 9/Nov. 2: Peer Review 1

Readings TBD

Week 10/Nov. 9: How does Power Produce History? How Can Public Historians Respond?

Readings: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

NATIONAL EXCHANGE 2 DUE

Week 11/Nov. 16: Research/Writing

Week 12/Nov. 23: Research/Writing

CURATORIAL STEP 3 DUE ON NOVEMBER 27; PREPARE FOR PEER REVIEW

Week 13/Nov. 30: Peer Review 2

Week 14/Dec. 7: Present project to partners

Last Day of Class

NATIONAL EXCHANGE 3

Dec. 16: FINALS WEEK

ALL FINAL MATERIALS ARE DUE BY NOON.