

PRESENTING THE PAST: PUBLIC HISTORIES OF SLAVERY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Public History (26:510:565)
Mondays, 5:30-8:10pm
Conklin Hall, Room 447
Fall 2014

Professor Lyra D. Monteiro

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Office Hours: Mondays, 1-2pm & Wednesdays, 11:30am-12:30pm, or by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Best Picture win of “12 Years A Slave” at the 2014 Oscars came just over a year before the Smithsonian plans to open the National Museum of African American History and Culture, located between the Washington Monument and the White House. This increased attention to the history and legacy of slavery in the United States is part of a larger international trend, which this course explores. By looking at the various ways in which the history of African enslavement in the New World has been remembered and interpreted in contexts ranging from historic sites and museum exhibitions to children’s literature and film, students will build towards developing their own proposals for new public interpretations of the history of slavery. Some of the issues we will explore in this class include: how the method, time, and place in which the past is narrated affect the story that can be told; the tensions between histories created for different kinds of audiences, including locals, tourists, and various descendant communities; and the ways in which the narration of slavery’s history changes over time.

In order to address this topic, we will focus on the “primary documents” of public memory, including specific monuments, exhibitions, films, and TV shows. We will supplement this study with readings from the growing body of scholarship on the public history and public memory of slavery, coming out of disciplines including History, Archaeology, Sociology, and American Studies. We will adapt the syllabus accordingly as news items related to the public history of slavery emerge over the course of the semester.

Instead of a traditional research paper, the final project for this class will be to create a complete grant proposal for a new public interpretation of the history and/or legacy of slavery, in a venue of your choosing.

An important note about affect:

While historians—and academics in general—tend to be trained to approach their subjects dispassionately, it is impossible to do so with a subject like slavery and its legacies and meanings in contemporary society. We are all citizens (broadly defined) of a racially structured society that is the direct descendant of a society that was deeply rooted in the system of slavery. As such we do ourselves and our scholarship a disservice if we suppress and deny our personal feelings about the history of slavery, and how they impact our work. From time to time during the semester, we will explicitly address the role of emotion in the work we study and our reactions to it, and I welcome contributions on this theme throughout our discussions.

To that end, it is important that we all work together to maintain a safe atmosphere in this room, where each person's feelings are respected. Two important principles to keep in mind:

1. Feelings are very different from objective facts: if one person says "I feel like gummy bears are creepy," that does not mean that they are saying they *know it to be true* that gummy bears are fundamentally creepy, or that gummy bears should be banned, or all gummy bears should be destroyed, etc., but simply that they "feel" that way about them. No one is entitled to dispute the veracity of another person's statement about their feelings. At the same time, please take care to distinguish between statements of opinion related to "facts" from statements of emotion.
2. No one in this room is a victim or a perpetrator of the enslavement of African people in the New World. This is not to say that we are not affected by the *aftermath* of this history—indeed, most of us have ancestors who were slaves, slave-owners, or both—but no one in this room is to blame for what happened in the past, nor are any of us capable of speaking for the enslaved. That does not necessarily mean that people today have no ability—or even *responsibility*—to combat the negative legacies of slavery—indeed, one of the underlying questions of this course is what culture workers today can and should do to heal the wounds of our collective past.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Students are expected to attend all class meetings and participate actively in class discussions. In addition to regular class sessions, screenings and field trips may be arranged outside of class times (if you cannot attend these out-of-class sessions due to schedule conflicts, you must still complete the visits and watch the films before the following class).

30% Response Papers (Due Weekly)

Because this course depends on thoughtful engagement with the material, students will prepare for each class by writing brief, 2-3 page responses to the readings, websites, etc., assigned for class. Papers must be **emailed** to Professor Monteiro by midnight of the evening **before** the class meeting during which the material will be discussed.

10% Plantation Website Presentations (In Class, October 13)

Websites are an increasingly important way in which historic sites present themselves to the public, and the public engages with historical material. Each student will select one of the plantation museums discussed in Eichstedt and Small's *Representations of Slavery*, and analyze how that plantation presents itself today through its website. You will give a brief presentation on the website, comparing the current approach to slavery with that encountered by Eichstedt and Small a decade ago, and discussing how it relates to the different categories laid out in *Representations of Slavery*. Even if you have visited the plantation personally, please focus your presentation on the website, specifically.

20% Site and Audience Report (Due November 3)

This paper asks students to think carefully about the ways in which the site and the audience for a particular project influence the most appropriate interpretation of the history of slavery. Students will each select a "site" where the history of slavery already is, or *could be* interpreted. Perhaps you will choose the Newark Museum, a rest-stop along the Turnpike, Nat Turner Park in Newark's Central Ward, etc. – but your site need not be local. Use websites, interviews, published material, and on-site observation to produce a 5-7 page paper about the characteristics of the site and audience, as they would relate to a potential public presentation of the history of slavery. Your paper should address the following kinds of questions: Who will encounter the work and how? What are the characteristics of the location/medium for your project, and of the audience? Why is it possible to talk about the history of slavery here (e.g., what is the *content* of the history that would be relevant)? Why is it necessary/important to do so? What would make a discussion of slavery at this site, for this audience, most effective? You may wish to use this paper as an opportunity to begin study of the site you will be focusing on for your final project. All of your sources must be properly cited.

40% Final Project (Paper Due: December 8; Revisions Due: December 22)

Students will create a grant proposal for a public history project that interprets the history and legacy of slavery in an existing place or institution (including digital media). For instance, you might propose a slavery exhibit for Newark's Penn Station, a performative intervention at Zuccotti Park that addresses Wall Street's historical ties to slavery, or an app that maps resources related to slavery in the user's location. Let your catchphrase for this project be "grounded dreaming" – try not to be constrained by what

is traditionally understood to be possible, but be attentive to the practicalities of implementing your project, as well. Identify an appropriate grant for which you could apply for funds for this project, and prepare the required materials for that grant. Some of the elements you may need to include are: a summary of the relevant history; a description of how the material will be presented (including diagrams and images, where appropriate); a critical discussion of why this particular presentation of the material is appropriate for the audience you intend to reach; a list of individuals and institutions to be involved in creating the project; methods for evaluating the project; and a detailed budget. These grant applications will be circulated to the rest of the class on December 8. During our last class session, on December 15, seminar participants will act as the committee to which you are applying for funding—and on the basis of your written application and proposal, will either approve your grant, or offer suggestions for resubmission. Grant proposals may then be revised and resubmitted by December 22.

NOTE: All students must meet with Professor Monteiro to discuss their plans for their final project BEFORE Thanksgiving.

POLICIES

Except in cases of emergency, cell phones must be turned completely off during class. Laptops may be used for taking notes, and I highly encourage those who can multitask effectively to google relevant points during class, to enhance our discussions.

Feel free to bring dinner along to class. Extra treats that can be shared are always welcome.

With the exception of the weekly response papers, all written work must be submitted in **hardcopy**, either in class, or to the folder outside of Professor Monteiro's office in the History Department. Page number guidelines refer to the following format: 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins on all sides. Late work will be penalized an automatic ½ letter grade reduction for each day (i.e., the maximum grade that can be earned on a paper that is turned in the day after it is due is an A, the following day an A-, etc.), unless a doctor's note or similar official excuse can be provided. The Rutgers University policy on academic integrity will be strictly enforced (<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>).

Students with more than two unexcused absences (e.g., medical or family emergencies, religious holidays, or severe inclement weather) will have their final grade reduced by one grade for each additional absence (thus, the highest grade a student with three unexcused absences can earn is a B+). Whenever possible, please inform Professor Monteiro via email prior to any absences (excused or otherwise).

LECTURES AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Required texts (available for purchase at the campus bookstore and on Amazon, and on reserve at the library):

1. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press: Boston, 1995.
2. Jennifer E. Eichstedt and Stephen Small. *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002 (any edition).
3. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2007.

Recommended reading for students seeking a scholarly overview of the history of slavery:

- Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Recommended reading for students seeking an introduction to public humanities work:

- Steven D. Levine, ed. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

All other readings can be accessed via the links below, or are available on Blackboard.

Monday, September 8

Introductions

(no readings)

Monday, September 15

Slavery in Contemporary American Culture

- Jasmine Nichole Cobb, "Directed by Himself: Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*" *American Literary History* 26, no. 2 (2014): 339-346.
- "View NMAAHC" App for iPhone & Android (install and explore)
- Amy M. Tyson and Azie Mira Dungey, "'Ask a Slave' and Interpreting Race on Public History's Front Line: Interview with Azie Mira Dungey" *The Public Historian* 36, no. 1 (2014): 36-60.
- Nicholas Powers, "Why I Yelled at the Kara Walker Exhibit" www.independent.org/2014/06/30/why-i-yelled-kara-walker-exhibit
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations" <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

Monday, September 22

Race and Memory

- Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (all)

Monday, September 29

Heritage Tourism

- Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* (all)

Monday, October 6

Plantation Tourism in the United States

- Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery* (all)

Monday, October 13

A National Slavery Museum in Virginia

- Stephen P. Hanna, "A Slavery Museum? Race, Memory, and Landscape in Fredericksburg, Virginia." *Southeastern Geographer* 48, no. 3 (2008): 316-337.

Plantation Website Presentations

Monday, October 20

Public Archaeologies of Slavery

- Carol McDavid, "Public Archaeology, Activism, and Racism: Rethinking the Heritage 'Product.'" In *Archaeologists as Activists: Can Archaeologists Change the World?*, edited by M. Jay Stottman, 36-47. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010.
- Cheryl J. La Roche and Michael L. Blakey, "Seizing Intellectual Power: The Dialogue at the New York African Burial Ground," *Historical Archaeology* 31, no. 3 (1997): 84-106.
- M. Drake Patten, "Cheers of Protest? The Public, the *Post*, and the Parable of Learning," *Historical Archaeology* 31, no. 3 (1997): 132-139.
- John Ydstie "Plantation Dig Reveals Md. Town's Painful Past," Weekend Edition Saturday, NPR, 20 October 2007. Audio at www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=15383164

Date TBD, based on student and site schedules:

Visit: African Burial Ground, New York City

Monday, October 27

Art, Slavery, and Public Spaces

- Alan Rice, "Tracing slavery and abolition's routes and viewing inside the invisible: The monumental landscape and the African Atlantic" *Atlantic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2011): 253-274.
- Look up "#karawalkerdomino" on twitter and instagram
- Visit <http://www.sugarselfie.us/>
- Program for "Subtleties of Resistance," Free University – NYC, July 5, 2014.
- Jacqueline Francis, "The Brooks Slave Ship Icon: A 'Universal Symbol'?" *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 2 (2009): 327-338.

Monday, November 3

White Privilege and the Slave Trade

In-class screening: *Traces of the Trade*

Site and Audience Report Due

Monday, November 10

Institutional Legacies: American Higher Education

- Brown University's Slavery and Justice Report:
http://brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/documents/SlaveryAndJustice.pdf
- Emory University, Transforming Community Project:
<http://transform.emory.edu>
- Harvard and Slavery: Seeking a Forgotten History:
www.harvardandslavery.com
- William and Mary, The Lemon Project:
www.wm.edu/lemonproject

Monday, November 17

Slave Trade Abolition Bicentennial: 2007-2008

- Manu Herbstein, "Reflections in a Shattered Glass: The British Council's Celebrations of the Bicentenary of the 1807 Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in Ghana." *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 2 (2009): 197-207.
- Andrew Losowsky and Lyra Monteiro, *A Thousand Ships: A Ritual of Remembrance Marking the Bicentennial of the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*. The Museum On Site: Providence, RI, 2012.
- Annie Paul, "'Do You Remember the Days of Slav'ry?': Connecting the Present with the Past in Contemporary Jamaica." *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 2 (2009): 169-178.
- Marcus Wood, "The Horrible Gift of Freedom and the 1807/2007 Bicentennial," in *The Horrible Gift of Freedom: Atlantic Slavery and the Representation of Emancipation*, 296-353. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010.

Monday, November 24

Reconstructing Genealogies

In-class screening: *African American Lives*, Episode 3 (Season 1)

- Troy Duster. "Deep Roots and Tangled Branches." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 3, 2006.
- *African American Lives* website: www.pbs.org/wnet/aalives/2006/index.html
- Randi Marselis. "Descendants of Slaves: The Articulation of Mixed Racial Ancestry in a Danish Television Documentary Series." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 11: 447-469.
- Elonda Clay. "Mediated Science, Genetics and Identity in the U.S. African Diaspora." In *Media, Spiritualities and Social Change*, edited by Stewart Hoover and Monica Emerich, 25-36. London: Continuum Press, 2011.
- Alondra Nelson. "Bio Science: Genetic Genealogy Testing and the Pursuit of African Ancestry." *Social Studies of Science* 38 (2008): 759-783.

Monday, December 1

Memorializing Slavery

- From Gert Oostindie, ed. *Facing Up to the Past: Perspectives on the Commemoration of Slavery from Africa, the Americas, and Europe*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randall Publishers, 2001:
 - Alex van Stirpriaan, "The Long Road to a Monument," 118-122.
 - "Designs for the National Monument to Slavery," IX-XIX.

Monday, December 8 (NO CLASS)

Circulate Grant Proposals

Monday, December 15

Discuss Grant Proposals

Monday, December 22 (NO CLASS)

Final Papers Due