American Studies 502T
Spring 2010
Mondays, 7-9:45 p.m.
EC-11

Pamela Steinle
Office: UH-418
Office Hrs: Mon. 5-6
Phone: 278-3438

Public Memory

This seminar provides the opportunity for advanced analysis of cultural practices of remembering (and forgetting) in relationship to both scholarly and popular constructions of the history of "American experience**."** Together, we will read and consider the diverse theoretical and methodological approaches (as well as the arguments) of several scholars who have taken public memory, in broad outline and in application to specific subjects of historical experience, as their subject. The books for the seminar were also chosen for the way their authors probe at social constructions of nation and citizen, of community and membership--and how narratives, artifacts, and sites of public memory can be seen to create as well as reinforce social boundaries yet if public memory is probed and complicated, social boundaries are revealed to be permeable spaces of transition.

In seminar discussions and written responses to seminar readings, we will identify, consider, and seek to understand the meaning(s) and significance of cultural narratives about American experience (shared, familiar and occasionally mythic storylines) as well as acts and artifacts in memorialization of American events. Seminar discussions will combine grappling the with specific subjects and arguments of individual course texts but the common framing question to be engaged for your reading and in seminar discussion is:

> *As Americans attempt to give structure and meaning to their experience across diverse cultural membership as well as across time and place, what is remembered and what is forgotten, absent, or erased as narratives and/or artifacts of memory appear for the first time, are sustained from earlier periods, are revised, or disappear altogether?*
> *And…who decides or controls public memory?*

In addition to discussion preparation notes and weekly reading response assignments (a précis for each book as well as a few very brief personal response papers), this seminar requires the production of a primary research paper or project, on an aspect of public memory in American culture of your own choice but grounded in explicit discussion of both the historical context(s) and secondary literature surrounding your focal subject. Your paper or project (with accompanying paper) is to be presented to your peers during the final weeks of the semester.

Required Readings

Aciman, Andre. *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, & Loss* (1999)
Foote, Kenneth. *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (2003)
Gomez-Barris, Macarena. *Where Memory Dwells: Culture and State Violence in Chile* (2009)
Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997)
Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007)
Sturken, Marita. *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (2007)
Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003)

Course Requirements and Expectations

As a graduate seminar, course meetings will be devoted to your discussion of the required course readings, course issues and concepts. T*imely as well as thoughtful reading will be crucial to your successful participation in this seminar*. Your preparation notes and reading response assignments will either provide a starting point for or be incorporated into the flow of this discussion. I will not "lecture" after the first class meeting however I will comment to provoke, mediate, and otherwise foster your engagement in discussions. Consequently, your course grade will reflect 2/5 value given to reading preparation as evident in your prep notes and response writings as well as your discussion participation, and 3/5 value given to your research paper/project. Your research presentation to the seminar in the final two weeks of the semester is mandatory but non-evaluated participation and, as such, is not assigned earned point value--however--if for any reason you do not give a research presentation, a 10 point penalty will be deducted from your total earned course points.

Course grades will therefore be determined as follows:

80 pts. Reading response assignments, due at the end of class (10 x 8 pts each).
20 pts. Preliminary research project statement & preliminary bibliography.
100 pts. Research project on a subject of your choice, based on both primary and secondary research, responding to at least two of the required course texts and culminating in a 20-25 page (5000+ word) traditional research paper with an annotated bibliography of at least 4 books beyond the course texts which locate your subject in historical context and scholarly discourse

OR…*IF and only if you already have the skills necessary to producing an expressive form…*

an alternative research production (a documentary film, a painting, a short story, an outline plus one chapter of a novel…talk with me about your ideas) accompanied by an 8-10 page (2000+ word) paper discussing your choice of subject and presentation medium in responding to at least two of the required course texts, your method of primary evidence collection, the location of your subject in historical context and scholarship, a statement of summary findings, and including an annotated bibliography of at least 4 books beyond the course readings.

more info about the research projects/papers at end of syllabus

200 pts. Total

Per university policy, one absence is excused in a class that meets once a week. *You will be penalized 10 points for each subsequent absence (deducted from your total points earned in the course).* If absent from class, you may still turn in any reading response assignment due for that night but at half-credit.

Final course grades will be assigned using the "plus/minus" grade option on the following scale:

196-200 A+	176-180 B+	156-160 C+	136-140 D+	126/lower = F
188-195 A	168-175 B	148-155 C	128-135 D	
181-187 A-	161-167 B-	141-147 C-	121-127 D-	

Final grades of "Incomplete" will be given with reluctance and will forfeit the possibility of an "A" in the course upon the completion of work. Plagiarism of any sort will result in an "F" in the course.

COURSE OUTLINE

1/25 Introduction to the course, introduction to your 502 peers

2/1 Memory and Cultural Identity, Part I
Read: Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting & the Sociological Imagination*: Chpts 1 & 2
Discussion prep questions: What does Gordon mean by "haunting?" What is her answer to her own theoretical and methodological questions: "How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly?" and "What methods and forms of writing can foreground the conditions under which a ghostly presence or matter emerges?" Why does Gordon believe that hauntings are urgent matters for consideration in the present?
Read: Susan Bordo, 502 excerpt from *Twilight Zones: The Hidden Life of Cultural Images*
***Response assignment due**: Write up to two pages responding to Susan Bordo's prompt:
"If they asked you where you were from, what would you say?"

UNIT ONE: MEMORY AND HISTORY

Consider:

Our interest in *lieux de memoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de memoire*, real environments of memory.

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The "acceleration of history," then, confronts us with the brutal realization of the difference between real memory—social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies—and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past….

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Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic—responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again. Memory is blind to all but the group it binds…. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative.

Above selections from Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," trans. Marc Roudebush, in *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989), pp. 7-12

Discussion prep questions for all readings, Unit One and Unit Two:

502 guiding questions: *As Americans attempt to give structure and meaning to their experience across diverse cultural membership as well as across time and place, what is remembered and what is forgotten, absent, or erased as narratives and/or artifacts of memory appear for the first time, are sustained from earlier periods, are revised, or disappear altogether?*

And…who decides or controls public memory?

**I may also give more specific discussion prep questions in class for the next week's reading.*

Precis elements to be written up (two pages) for each book:

What is the author's thesis? What methods (of data collection and of data analysis) does s/he employ to ground and evidence her work? How does this book add to your understanding of public memory? How does this book respond to other seminar books? And at least three quotes that had significant impact/meaning for you with a single sentence explaining how/why.

2/8 Re-Membering Trauma in Public Imagination
Read: Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, & Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*
Response assignment: Precis #1

2/15 President's Day HOLIDAY: Class will not meet: read ahead in Foote

2/22 Spaces, Places, and Stages of Re-Membering
Read: Kenneth Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*
Response assignment: Precis #2

3/1 Absences and Re-Memory in Expressive Forms
Read: Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*
Response assignment: Precis #3

3/8 Memory and Cultural Identity, Part II
Read: Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*
Response assignment: Precis #4

3/15 Radical Disruption and Cultural Memory: the Afterlife of American Slavery
Read: Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*
Response assignment: Precis #5

3/22 Re-Membered Realities: Slavery, Suicide, and Flying Africans
*Research presentation by Prof. Terri Snyder and discussion
Reading review: all course readings up to this point will be assumed familiar in discussion.
**502 research project/paper assignment in the second half of class

3/29 SPRING BREAK: enjoy some necessary "R & R" and start thinking about your research topic

UNIT TWO: WHERE I WAS FROM

Consider:

At the beginning of his essay, "Reflections on Exile," Edward Said tells anecdotes about friends, mainly writers, who testify to their pain in being separated from their homeland and their mother tongue. He is quick to acknowledge not only that exile is suffered by a comparatively small number of writers and artists, but that it has "torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography." He speaks of the "hopelessly large numbers, the compounded misery of 'undocumented' people suddenly lost, without a tellable history." Here, he says, we must "leave the modest refuge provided by subjectivity and resort instead to the abstractions of mass politics." But this early interruption to his text, this irruption of a public voice, soon gives way to the privacy of another anecdote about a friend. The clash of public and private voices in Said's essay represents the difficulty of placing the exile. Said's anecdotes show the experience of exile as lived in irreducibly subjective isolation; at the same time, he observes, the exile exists only in relation to nationalism, the "assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage." But here Said asks, "What is there worth saving and holding on to between the extremes of exile on the one hand, and the often bloody-minded affirmations of nationalism on the other?…Are they simply two conflicting varieties of paranoia?"

Above selection from Victor Burgin, *In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of Calif., Press, 1996), pp. 117-118

4/5 Displaced Pasts: Language and Identity in the "Anti-Homeland"
Read: Andre Aciman (Ed.), *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss*
Discussion prep questions:
Response assignment: Precis #6 & 2 pages reaction response or memory narrative

4/12 Transnational Trauma: Representation as Recovery
Read: Macarena Gomez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells: Culture and State Violence in Chile*
Discussion prep questions:
Response assignment: Precis #7 & 2 pages of response to a visual art work on trauma

4/19 Research project topic statement and preliminary bibliography due in class
--including your "cultural question," body of primary evidence, tentative research methods, & your decision re: traditional paper or alternative project/paper
*class time will be devoted to talking about your topics & research processes

4/26 Steinle Furlough Day: carry out your research

5/3 & 5/10 Research Presentations *5/10 is the last class meeting

***Polished papers and projects in final form are welcome to be turned in to my office UH 418 or to my mailbox in UH-313 as soon as you finish but are due not later than 7 p.m. on Monday 5/17**

About the Research Project…

Topic. Your choice of topic/subject should be determined using two criteria:

(1) You must address a single (or a single set of) American event(s), action(s) or artifact(s) of public memory that has engaged your interest and curiosity sufficient to generate a cultural question.

(2) Accessibility of evidence. You must collect both primary evidence and secondary sources within a 4 week research period. *Be realistic*.

Approach. Three questions to answer for yourself in deciding your research subject:

(1) What is your question about this subject in relation to understanding public memory of American experience?
(2) How will you evidence this subject and what method of research will you use and why?
(3) What are the limits of your study and why?

Historical Context/Secondary Grounding.

What have others written on your subject? What is the relationship of your study to these works? Prepare an annotated* bibliography of at least 4 secondary sources (beyond course texts).**

*This means that each bibliographic citation should be followed by an abbreviated summary and a statement as to the connection or usefulness of the work to your study.

** One book=one source; you are welcome to use journal articles as well but it will take two journal articles to count as one of your minimum four sources. A minimum of 3 of your secondary sources should be book-length works (including theses and dissertations).

Paper Structure

Your research paper should incorporate the following five components (presented here in a readily workable order, however you are welcome to reorder them to an order/organizational style that you think best suits your work):

A. Introduce your topic by explaining 1) which two course texts you were inspired by or are responding to and in what way(s); 2) why you chose this topic and what you anticipated you might find; 3) your research boundaries (method of evidence collection and method of analysis) and the rationale behind them; 4) your working definition of public memory and any other key terms in use.

B. Next frame your subject in historical context and secondary literature to ground for your study.

C. Then present and analyze your data: please use your data, sufficiently describing and quoting from qualitative primary sources to make them truly evident to your reader--and to give yourself enough in evidence to give rise to your interpretation(s) and argument(s). Alongside your analyses, be sure to explain the "*why and how so*" of what you understand your data to mean/signify.

D. In conclusion, interpret the cultural significance of your study: what does your research tell us, specifically and in broader speculation, about public memory of American experience? Please also comment on the relative challenges and merits of the research method(s) you employed.

*Provide endnotes using either *Chicago (see the Chicago Manual of Style*) or Turabian (see Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*) notation style.

All of the above applies equally to the short papers accompanying alternative format projects, except the 3rd component ("C" above) which should be addressed in abbreviated summary in the short accompanying paper but will otherwise be rendered within your alternative expressive form production.