Revised Syllabus for History/American Studies 455
The Afterlives of Objects:
Telling American Histories through Material Culture and Museums
History Research Seminar, Williams College, Spring 2020
Instructor: Prof. Christine DeLucia

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Our spring semester and lives have been significantly disrupted by the coronavirus. Your physical and emotional wellbeing, and that of your families and communities, ought to be priorities at this time. Please know that faculty and staff very much want to support you and your continued learning this spring, and to be flexible with academic expectations and outcomes.

The changes we are experiencing are serious, and necessitate substantial modifications to the remainder of our course. Below is an updated syllabus and set of course requirements. Following the College’s guidelines on accessibility, we will be moving to an asynchronous format and primarily using Glow discussion boards to interact, rather than attempting to virtually convene at a set time each week. I recognize that you may wish to consult with me one-on-one as you develop your research projects, and I am glad to make that happen via Zoom, telephone, email, or other means. I will shortly circulate a sign-up for scheduling digital check-ins.

Requirements
Williams College has moved to a universal pass/fail grading system for Spring 2020 courses. Details about this change are available via the Registrar’s Office: https://registrar.williams.edu/reminders/spring-20-universal-pass-fail-for-undergraduates/
Below are the revised course requirements, which include extensions of deadlines and simplifications/shortening of writing assignments. One of the most challenging aspects of the course to attempt to replicate is hands-on work with original objects and site visits. While there is no perfect substitute, I have added a brief “Activity” to each week, using digitally-available materials.

1. Class participation (20% of final grade)
In moving online, we will now have conversations take place through the course Glow "Discussions.” Each week you will be expected to post a set of comments/thoughts/reflections/questions in response to the week’s assigned readings and multimedia. Please aim to post your contribution by the end of the day on Thursdays. Because this is substituting for a ~three-hour seminar, try to make your contribution substantive (e.g., ~2+ paragraphs), and feel very welcome to respond to classmates’ postings.

2. Discussion leader for one class session (10% of final grade)
Discussion leaders for the remainder of the semester should submit their contributions online through the Glow Discussion for the assigned week. You should be able to upload files (Powerpoints, videos, Word documents, handouts, etc.). Feel welcome to use whatever approach seems most feasible for getting your ideas across. This could be as simple as a text post with your main insights and some questions to spark discussion among the group. If you are the discussion leader, please aim to post your work by the Wednesday of your assigned week, so that others may engage and build off of it.
3. **Three short writing assignments** (together, 25% of final grade)
Detailed prompts have been distributed beforehand for each.
   a. Personal object reflection. Select an object from your own life and experiences, and reflect on its form and meanings in a short (~3-4 pp.), relatively informal essay, intended to ease you into practices of critical thinking about materiality. (5% of final grade)
   b. Collections object close-looking and analysis exercise. Select an object or original resource from one of our early-semester collections/site visits, including Object Lab at WCMA, and practice describing, contextualizing, and critically analyzing it. (10% of final grade). **Now due May 1.**
   c. Compose a brief (~ 5 pp.) assessment of a digital object-based exhibition. A list of options will be pre-circulated, with possible websites ranging from national museums to very local and community-operated venues. This is an opportunity to reflect on how new curatorial and interpretive practices are using objects to convey distinctive historical narratives to wider publics. (10% of final grade). **Now due May 1.**

4. **Research project** (45% of final grade)
The primary focus of this course is the production of an intensive research project about a single object or small set of objects, and their historical contexts. It is an opportunity to be creative as well as critically minded. You are welcome to select the object(s) from collections at WCMA, Archives/Special Collections, or alternatively, given our dispersed locations, from a digital repository, or a site/collection nearby to where you now are. Your goal is to better understand your chosen object(s), and put them into critical conversation with historiography about American material culture. The project will be developed throughout the semester, with a prospectus (overview of project with preliminary bibliography) due in the latter part of the semester. We will devote portions of class time to discussing project development.
   - **Prospectus:** 5% of final grade. Due April 13.
   - **Class presentation of findings:** 5% of final grade. This is a chance for you to share, via Glow, your work-in-progress with classmates and attain constructive feedback as you prepare to complete the project. I will provide more details closer to the final weeks of class.
   - **Written essay about the object(s), based on research in primary and secondary sources (~8-10 pages: please note revised length expectation), and distillation of key findings into a public-facing format.** 35% of final grade

**SCHEDULE for remainder of Spring 2020 semester**

**WEEK of April 8**

**Entangled Economies and Memories: Souvenirs and “Tourist Art”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion leaders: Emily Bleiberg, Emily Kamen</th>
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Film clip, “Maria Martinez: Indian Pottery of San Ildefonso” (documentary, 1972), 26 min.: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkUGm87DE0k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkUGm87DE0k)


Sergei Kan, Chapter 7, “The Inside Passage to Authenticity: Sitka Tourism and the Tlingit,” in


- Preface, pp. ix-xiv

**Activity:** access the Great Lakes Research Alliance Aboriginal Arts & Cultures (GRASAC) that Ruth Phillips and many collaborators have developed, and browse one of the mini-exhibitions. Include a few thoughts about it in your weekly Glow discussion post (which is also welcome to touch on any other facets of the overall readings that you wish).

https://carleton.ca/grasac/exhibits/

**Research project prospectus due Monday April 13 by 5 p.m.**

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**WEEK of April 15**

**Indigenous craft traditions, museum dialogues, and collaboration/consultation**

**Discussion leaders:** Leah Rosenfeld and Abby Scott

James Clifford, Chapter 7, “Museums as Contact Zones,” in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 188-217

Film clip on Anishinaabe quillwork & craft practices: “Conservation consultation for *Beyond the Horizon*, Anishinaabe Artists of the Great Lakes,” 2013, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), 9 min.:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRn07eHpvAE&list=UU98mlqOY5HGNI5wrWS52F9A


http://cool.conservation-us.org/jaic/articles/jaic44-03-005.html

Exhibit website for *Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women’s Dresses*, National Museum of the American Indian, 2007-2008:

http://www.nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/identity_by_design/IdentityByDesign.html


**Activity:** access the Learning Lab website produced by the Smithsonian about the kéet-s’aaxw/killer whale hat that was requested for repatriation by the Tlingit community. How do you assess the efficacy of this learning module, which is intended to teach high school-age students about repatriation issues? Include a few thoughts on this module in your weekly Glow discussion post (which is also welcome to touch on any other facets of the overall readings that you wish).

https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/3d-technology-and-repatriation-of-the-ket-saaxw/tKiUpirR9gw1pp6

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**WEEK of April 22**

**Material Cultures of Seeing, Printing, and Remembering**

**Discussion leaders:** Dylan Syben, Nick Goldrosen

George Eastman Museum, “The Daguerreotype—Photographic Processes Series,”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d932O6jYRg8


http://commonplace.online/article/pressing-matters/

Activity: in lieu of being able to visit Special Collections at Williams Libraries, browse the Robert N. Dennis collection of stereoscopic views from the New York Public Library. Choose one or two images, reflect on how they connect with the course readings for this week, and include a few thoughts on them in your weekly Glow discussion post (which is also welcome to touch on any other facets of the overall readings that you wish).
https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/robert-n-dennis-collection-of-stereoscopic-views#/?tab=navigation

WEEK 11 (April 29)

**Landscapes of Commemoration, Mourning, and Spirituality**

**Discussion leaders: Dario Herrera, Sinclair Spratley**


https://archive.org/details/markers03asso

http://commonplace.online/article/object-lesson-desire-tripp-arms-gravestone/

The African Burial Ground: National Park Service website,
https://www.nps.gov/afbg/learn/historyculture/index.htm

James Deetz, “Parting Ways,” from In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life, via The Plymouth Colony Archive Project:
http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/parting.html


Activity: in lieu of being able to visit the Westlawn Cemetery in Williamstown, browse the Farber Gravestone Database for markers in Williamstown. Choose one or two, reflect on how they connect with the course readings for this week, and include a few thoughts on them in your
weekly Glow discussion post (which is also welcome to touch on any other facets of the overall readings that you wish).
https://www.davidrumsey.com/farber/
Alternatively, if you are presently living near a cemetery or similar memorial space this is currently accessible to the public, visit it and choose one or two markers or other features to reflect upon and connect to the course materials. *Or* browse the “Find A Grave” website and choose one or two markers to engage.
https://www.findagrave.com

**Writing assignment 2 (object analysis) due May 1, 5 p.m.**
**Writing assignment 3 (review of digital object-based exhibition) due May 1, 5 p.m.**

**WEEK of May 6**
**Concluding reflections and research presentations/workshopping of final projects**
We will use Glow to have each class member share a brief preview of their research-in-progress.

**WEEK of May 13**
**Research presentations/workshopping of final projects**
We will use Glow to have each class member share a brief preview of their research-in-progress.

**FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT DUE**
**Saturday May 23, 2020, by 3 p.m.**