

History 426
Objects in History/Objects as History:
Material Culture and Museum Studies for Historians

Instructor Information:

Instructor: Dr. Denise Meringolo Associate Professor of History
and Director of Public History
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Office Hours: Walk ins welcome on Tuesdays from 5:30 to 6:30 and
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Course Description:

This course will introduce you to the theories and methods that historians have adopted and developed for the analysis and interpretation of material culture –what museum professionals call artifacts and what we call “our stuff.” This is a seminar style course. Together we will explore, discuss, and test the ideas in a wide range of scholarship on museums and material culture, including the history of American museums and their collections as well as the value, meaning, and relevance of material culture for historians inside and outside of universities. We will work collaboratively to build our own approach to material culture study, and you will test that approach by producing a material culture case study. This is a skill-building class intended for upper level students who have already acquired experience in conducting primary and secondary source research.

This course can apply toward completion of the public history minor. It also counts as elective for completion of the history major.

Course Objectives:

1. You will study the evolution of history museums in the United States
2. You will become familiar with major theories relevant to historians’ uses of material culture
3. You will explore, test, and arrive at a deeper understanding of a variety of methods for interpreting objects as historical evidence
4. You will learn to incorporate material culture analysis into your research
5. You will understand the function and value of material culture in public history interpretation

GEP Information

This course has NOT been approved to meet any of the requirements of the undergraduate General Education Program.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is a serious matter at UMBC. We expect the absolute highest standards from students and faculty in their pursuit of new knowledge through academic coursework. By enrolling in this course, you assume the responsibilities of an active participant in the UMBC scholarly community. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include but is not limited to suspension or dismissal. The complete Student Academic Conduct Policy is available through the Provost’s website:

http://www.umbc.edu/provost/integrity/acc_policy/

In addition, please be advised that the penalty for academic dishonesty –including plagiarism and other forms of cheating-- in any UMBC History Department course is an "F" for the course. ALL cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Academic Conduct Committee. For further definitions on what academic misconduct is and how to avoid it at all costs please see <http://library.acadiau.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/>

Required Books:

Burns, Andrea *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Black Museum Movement* University of Massachusetts Press, 2013

Conn, Steven *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926*

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

Lubar, Steven *Inside the Lost Museum: Curating Past and Present* Harvard University Press, 2017

Swigger, Jesse, *History is Bunk: Assembling the Past at Henry Ford's Greenfield Village* University of Massachusetts, 2014

Assignments:

Critical Reflection: Material Culture at the Maryland Historical Society (10% of Final Grade)

Due after Week Four

After our visit to the Maryland Historical Society, write a critical reflection in which you comment on the use of material culture inside the museum. Pay attention to display techniques that draw your attention to particular things. Comment on the relationship between text and artifact. Raise questions about the way the museum is organized. While you are there, select one artifact about which you would like to know more, record as much information as possible about it in your notes, and identify it in your reflection. Ask our hosts (the curator, registrar, and/or special collections archivist) questions about how you might learn more about this particular artifact.

Final Paper Proposal: A History of an Artifact (5% of Final Grade)

Due after Week Six

Conduct preliminary research. Write a final paper proposal in which you describe the origin, use, and (if possible) ownership of the artifact you have chosen. Identify a historical context that is particularly important for understanding this artifact, and describe how you think that context sheds light on the significance of this artifact. (If you need help, review Rebecca Shrum's essay on Mr. Coffee as a model.) Prepare a bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

Critical Reflection: What Good Are Museums (10% of Final Grade)

Due after Week Nine

Thinking about the course reading through week nine, write a critical reflection in which you make an original argument about the purpose of museums and their collections. What have you learned about how well AND how poorly museums have lived up to this purpose? Make a case for the future of museums and collections. How might they matter again, particularly for expanding understanding of the American past?

Final Paper Outline: Artifact Context(s) (5% of Final Grade)

Due after Week Twelve

So far this semester, you have accomplished three things. You have learned a bit about the history and purpose of American museums and their collections. You have explored the scholarship of material culture, reading examples of historical interpretation focused on a variety of artifacts. You have conducted original research about an artifact you found compelling or strange or curious. Your final paper should bring all of these elements together. Your artifact is in a collection and it has been used to communicate particular ideas. It is also a primary source that you can use to make an original argument about the past. Craft an outline for your final paper that will make it easy for you to write. If you need help getting started or if you want to review best practices, look here:

Outlining Strategies and Sample Outline: <http://bit.ly/1S2Zpa4>

Four main components for effective outlines: <http://bit.ly/1hZxLqQ>

How to Write an Outline: <http://bit.ly/2x8RJzH>

Oral Presentation (10% of Final Grade)

Due Week Fifteen

Prepare a short presentation with visuals in which you share your main argument and key findings about your artifact. Describe your interpretive process. Make a case for the value of material culture research.

Final Paper (60% of Final Grade)

Due on the Day and Time of the Final Exam

By This Date	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To
Week One	<p>Read: The Syllabus</p> <p>Rebecca K. Shrum, "Selling Mr. Coffee: Design, Gender, and the Branding of a Kitchen Appliance," <i>Winterthur Portfolio</i> Volume 46, Number 4 (Winter 2012) pages 271-298 (Available in Blackboard)</p> <p>Edward T. Linenthal "Anatomy of a Controversy" from <i>History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past</i> Holt Paperbacks, 1996 (Available in Blackboard)</p>	<p>What are the primary goals of the class? Do the assignments support these goals? What do you need clarified? Are there any changes you would like to request?</p> <p>Why do you think I chose these case studies to begin class? What questions do they raise? What do they suggest about how historians, museum professionals and others give meaning to material culture?</p>	<p>Discuss the course learning goals, assignments, and expectations. Advocate for any changes you think would be useful. Develop classroom procedures.</p> <p>Pull out key themes and questions from the introductory case studies. Identify ideas you want to explore this semester.</p>
Week Two	<p>Read: Steven Lubar <i>Inside the Lost Museum</i>, Section One</p>	<p>Why collect? Who collects? How do we measure "collectability?"</p>	<p>Discuss the underlying goals, objectives, and values of collecting</p>
Week Three	<p>Read: Steven Conn <i>Museums and American Intellectual Life</i>, Chapters One, Three, and Five</p>	<p>Are collections "objective?" What are some key problems with museum collections? Where do these problems come from?</p>	<p>We will identify key ethical and intellectual issues with museum collections.</p>

By This Date	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To
Week Four	Museum Field Trip: The Maryland Historical Society	Prepare by visiting the Maryland Historical Society website. Look specifically at the pages describing the museum and its collections. During your visit to the museum, pay attention to the selection, display, and contextualization of artifacts.	Take notes. Think critically. Prepare to write a reflection on your visit.
Week Five	<p>Read Jesse Swigger, <i>History is Bunk</i> Section One</p> <p>Visit the website https://www.thehenryford.org/ Explore the site, paying particular attention to information about the institution's history and mission, and collections and research.</p>	<p>WHEN was Ford assembling his collections and why is the timing significant? What contexts does Swigger provide –what else was going on in the realm of museums or preservation or collecting that seem relevant. What motivations or beliefs drove Ford's collecting habits? What is the relationship between his motivations and the meanings assigned to the collection?</p>	<p>Problem solve: Imagine you are hired to work at Deerfield Village. What problems would you face? How might you address them?</p>

By This Date	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To
Week Six	<p>Read: Andrea Burns <i>From Storefront to Monument</i>, Introduction and Chapters One and Two</p> <p>Visit the website: http://www.aampmuseum.org/</p>	<p>How does the history of African American Museums differ from that of Greenfield Village? What ideas and interactions shaped their development and evolution over time? What problems have they faced over time?</p>	<p>Discuss the value, importance, and/or ethics of African American museums. What are the pros and cons of establishing separate institutions and collections?</p>
Week Seven	<p>Read: Amy Lonetree <i>Decolonizing Museums</i>, Chapters 1, 4, and 5</p>	<p>This book returns us to issues we discussed at the start of the semester when reading Steven Conn. Does Lonetree offer us any important lessons about the nature and significance of representation? Does Lonetree's book provide you with new insight into the political and cultural role of museums? Compare Lonetree's perspective on museums to that of Burns.</p>	<p>Discuss the ethics of "anthropology" as it relates to museum collections. Think about how Lonetree's work might change your perception of the meaning of museums and material culture.</p>
Week Eight	<p>Objects and Memory</p>	<p>We will watch this documentary film together in class</p>	<p>Take notes and discuss the ways in which everyday things can take on new meanings.</p>
Week Nine	<p>Read Steven Lubar, <i>Inside the Lost Museum</i>, Part III AND Chapter Seventeen</p>	<p>Lubar offers a philosophical and theoretical vision of museum display. Based on your visit to the Maryland Historical Society and your reading about museums, what ideas seem particularly important and why?</p>	<p>Although Lubar is writing specifically about museums, his ideas also provide us with a roadmap for analysis. We will begin to develop a strategy for material culture interpretation that you can use.</p>
By This	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To

Date			
Week Eleven	<p>Read in Blackboard Jules Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture" Robyn Aselson, "Seduced by an Old Flame" Leslie Shannon Miller "The Many Figures of Eve" All these selections are from Prown, Jules David and Kenneth Haltman, <i>American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture</i></p>	<p>Consider these as models of historians writing on material culture. Do they differ significantly from the way material culture is interpreted and displayed in museums? If so, how?</p>	<p>Discuss and analyze these examples of writing by material culture scholars.</p>
Week Twelve	<p>Visit http://www.tangiblethings.org/about/ Read the About Page Watch the video titled "Introduction" Choose three additional videos to watch</p>	<p>Thinking about these videos in the context of the class. Which of our readings seem most relevant or related to the videos you chose? How do the videos differ from and/or add to our readings?</p>	<p>You will lead class discussion. Describe the videos you have chosen. Talk about their usefulness in helping you develop your own approach to material culture analysis.</p>
Week Thirteen	<p>Read in Blackboard: Sarah J. Purcell "Commemoration, Public Art, and the Changing Meaning of the Bunker Hill Monument" Caroline Janney "War Over a Shrine of Peace: The Appomattox Peace Monument and Retreat from Reconciliation" Read online Nick Sacco "America's ever-changing commemorative landscape: a case study at National Statuary Hall" http://bit.ly/2wffRlX Jill Titus "Cold War Civil Rights at Gettysburg" http://bit.ly/2wPULsx</p>	<p>Think about monuments and memorials as artifacts. How do they convey meaning? How are artifacts in public space different from artifacts in museum collections?</p>	<p>Debate the value of monuments and memorials.</p>
By This	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To

Date			
<p>Week Fourteen</p>	<p>Read in Blackboard: Rachel Howard, Heather Fox, and Caroline Daniels, “The Digital Deluge”</p> <p>Rainey Tisdale, “Do History Museums Still Need Objects?”</p> <p>Catherine Lewis, Jennifer Dickey, Samir El Azhar and Julia Brock “Exploring <i>Identities</i>: Public History in a Cross Cultural Context</p>	<p>Think about the role, value, and purpose of collections and museums in the 21st century. What is changing? What are some concerns? What are some opportunities?</p>	<p>Discuss the present and future of the field.</p>
<p>Week Fifteen</p>	<p>In Class Peer Writing Review and Final Paper Revision Workshops</p>		<p>Work on your final paper drafts</p>

Grading Rubric for Critical Reflections

	A	B	C	F
Critical Thinking	Used guiding questions in assignment and examples from course readings to think critically and arrive at original and interesting arguments. Clearly identifies strengths and weaknesses.	Tried to use guiding questions in assignment and examples from course readings, but I have to do some work to understand your connections. Makes an effort to identify strengths and weaknesses	May have used guiding questions OR examples from course readings; Made an effort to identify key problems. The effort to make connections is evident, but one or more aspects of the thought process are missing	Does not adequately respond to the parameters of the assignment
Effective Writing	Articulated a strong and arguable thesis and advanced argument with supporting points and evidence from course readings and from meaningful observations	Tried to articulate a thesis and advance the argument, but I have to do some work to understand your logic	Thesis is descriptive rather than argumentative or paragraphs do not directly support argument or use of evidence is sparse. The effort to craft an argument is evident, but one or more aspects are missing.	No obvious effort to craft an effective argument in response to the assignment
Close Reading	Identifies specific, fully described, and well-chosen (they support your point) examples from readings and observations	Attempts to identify specific examples from your observations and from the course readings, but I have to do some work to understand your examples	Effort to identify specific examples is evident, but they lack specificity or are not well described or they do not support your point	No clear and compelling examples from course readings
Problem Solving	Makes concrete and creative critiques and recommendations about public interpretations and collections of material culture	Attempts to make critiques and recommendations but suggestions may be vague or they may simply repeat an older strategy	Effort to make critiques and suggestions is evident, but the suggestions are difficult to understand or they seem disconnected from the argument and observations in the paper	No effort to make concrete suggestions for public interpretation of violence, protest, and race
Spelling/ Grammar	Your spelling and grammar are perfect	Your spelling and grammar contain one or two consistent errors	Your spelling and grammar need a significant edit and revision	You spelling and grammar problems render your assignment incomprehensible.

Research Proposal Rubric

	A	B	C	D	F
Question	Identifies and narrows the research question	Identifies the research question and tries to narrow	Identifies research question but does not narrow		No question
Hypothesis/Context	Identifies and explains the relevant historical context	Tries to identify and explain historical context	Vague historical context		No Context
Motivation	Explains why you chose the question	Tries to explain why you chose the question	Incomplete explanation		No Explanation
Research	You have identified appropriate resources that will help you address the question and are suitable for college study	You have identified mostly appropriate resources that will help you address the question and are mostly suitable for college study	You have identified resources that are on topic, but not focused on your question and/or not suitable for college study		Insufficient resources
Grammar/Style	Perfect No edits necessary	Nearly Perfect A few edits for clarity	Word choice and/or sentence structure and/or paragraphing need work; Editing needed to improve this pattern		Significant editing necessary
Bibliography	Perfect Chicago Turabian	Nearly perfect Chicago Turabian	Recognizable but many errors Chicago		Not Chicago Turabian

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Final Paper Rubric

	A	B	C	D	F
Analysis	You have clearly used –AND PROVIDED CITATIONS FOR—an analytical framework based on secondary sources. You place yourself in conversation with other scholars.	You have attempted to use –AND PROVIDE CITATIONS FOR—an analytical framework based secondary sources.	You are referring to an analytical framework based on secondary sources but it is not explicit. You have made an attempt to provide citations.		You have not used an analytical framework.
Argument	You have a clearly articulated thesis that is arguable and strong. Each new supporting argument is well stated. Each piece of evidence is introduced by you: you explain its significance for supporting your argument and you analyze it fully, drawing the reader’s attention not only to what it says but what it means. You use your own ideas AND ideas from class reading to help with your analysis	You have made an attempt to craft a thesis and supply supporting arguments. However, your thesis is weak OR your supporting arguments are not carefully proven with evidence OR you do not fully explain your evidence. Your reader can recognize the connections you are making, but he or she has to make a bit of a leap to do so.	Your paper may have a thesis AND/OR supporting arguments, but the argument does not hang together. It may not rest on evidence and arguments from your sources. It may be too much opinion and not enough argument. Your reader has trouble recognizing and following your connections. He or she may ask “So what?” or “what does this bit of evidence mean?”		Your paper does not prove a thesis. It may be too much description and not enough analysis. It may be incorrect because you have misunderstood your sources. It may be all description without evidence. It may be all evidence without argument.
Evidence	You have offered meaningful descriptions and analysis of the material culture artifact and other primary sources you use in your paper. They are the evidence to support your argument	You describe the textual or visual or material sources but you have not integrated them well into your argument. They stand out because you have not properly introduced and analyzed them.	You have identified appropriate visual or material or textual sources BUT you have not been able to demonstrate that they are useful to your argument. You may have identified compelling passages or aspects in them, but they interrupt or contradict your ideas.	You describe visual or textual or material sources, but you have misused them. Either they do not support your topic OR you have offered an interpretation that is clearly based on a misunderstanding of their content.	There is no useful description in your paper.
Grammar and Style	Your grammar is perfect. You use quotation marks, block quotes, footnotes and other elements of style correctly. You do not use contractions or colloquial language	Your grammar is nearly perfect. You have one or two errors you make consistently, but otherwise you obviously know the rules of grammar and the elements of style.	Your grammar includes many errors. You do not use punctuation correctly. You do not know the elements of style regarding quotations and footnoting.	Your paper is not formal enough. Your grammar and sentence structure include many errors. You have not integrated footnotes. You do not know how to quote from sources.	There are so many errors in your grammar and sentence structure that your paper is difficult to follow.
Citations	Your paper is footnoted in a consistent style and includes a bibliography. Chicago Turabian in the preferred format for History. You can find a style sheet here: http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html	Your footnote style is mostly consistent, but some footnotes do not conform OR they contain information that is not helpful for finding the source. There is a bib	Your paper is footnoted, but the style is inconsistent. The bibliography does not include complete information.		Your paper is not footnoted OR the footnotes do not follow a discernible style. You have not included a bibliography