Midnights at the Museum: Dark Histories on Display
HIST196
Spring 2024
TR 4:50-6:05
Location: Dewey 2110D

Instructor: Alice Wynd (she/her)
Contact Info: awynd@ur.rochester.edu
Office Hours: Rush Rhees 323 TR 6:15-7:30 and by appointment

Course Description:

In a small museum behind an unassuming storefront in Baltimore, Maryland, there is an exhibit where visitors descend into the belly of a slave ship to witness the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. The Great Blacks in Wax Museums compels visitors to look into the tear-filled eyes of enslaved Africans (represented by life-sized wax figures) as their captors force fed them, mutilated their bodies, and packed them like cargo onto vessels bound for the Americas. Institutions across America interpret and disseminate narratives about dark events in history; slavery, the Holocaust, institutional racism, and genocide of Native Americans are all "on display" for visitors to see. Museums are—and have always been—political entities that use their collections and resources to promote specific arguments.

Furthermore, museums themselves have attracted criticism about their funding, curation, and collecting practices. In 2018, an activist group called P.A.I.N. (Prescription Addiction Intervention Now) Sackler staged a "die-in" protest in front of the Sackler Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; seventy participants laid on the floor to represent the victims of the opioid epidemic, shaming the institution for its continued relationship with the Sackler Family, the owners of OxyContin producer Purdue Pharma. P.A.I.N. Sackler rejects the family's sanitized public image as "patrons of the arts" and demands that the museum take accountability in its funding, and many similar confrontations are taking place across the country. This course examines how modern American museums interpret dark pasts and what ethical issues darken museums. Considering this topic, we will explore three central questions: how do museums and historic sites narrate the cruelty of past events? How do these institutions perpetuate cruelty themselves? How can museums do better?

Grading Scale

94-100% = A 87-89% = B+ 77-79% = C+ 67-69% = D+
90-93% = A- 83-86% = B   73-76% = C   63-66% = D
             80-82% = B- 70-72% = C- 60-62% = D-

Grading

Exhibit Review Essay	25%
Final Project Proposal/Outline	10%
Final Project	35%
Final Project Presentation	5%
Engagement	25%

Assignments

Exhibit Review Essay: One of the most common forms of writing for a public historian is the review. Students will select a virtual exhibit or video tour and write a 5- or 6-page review, echoing the forms of reviews we have read in class.

Final Project Proposal/Outline: To prepare for the final project, students will submit a 2-page proposal for their digital exhibit accompanied by a detailed outline that highlights the intended argument and sources.

Final Project (Digital Exhibit): Students will create a virtual exhibit on a narrow topic related to the course's theme using StoryMaps.

Assignment due dates are listed in the course schedule. The first two assignments should be formatted as word documents and submitted to the corresponding Blackboard portals. All citations should adhere to the Chicago Manual of Style.

You are strongly encouraged to utilize tutoring services at the Writing, Speaking, and Argument Center for all assignments. **You will be awarded extra credit for each assignment you work on during a tutoring session**; please have your tutor email me (awynd@ur.rochester.edu) a session summary to receive extra credit.

Policies and Procedures

Late work: Assignments submitted after the deadline will be penalized one grade step (e.g., B+ to B) per day late, unless the student had previously arranged an extension with the instructor. Students needing an extension are urged to contact the instructor at least two days prior to the deadline. Post-due-date extensions will be considered in cases of illness/injury or family emergency.

Required Readings: This is a zero book cost course; all of your readings will be linked in the syllabus or uploaded to Blackboard. Readings are due on the day they are listed in the course schedule. **Note: readings are due on the day they are listed.**

Workload: In accordance with the College credit hour policy, which awards 4 credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of 3 periods of 50 minutes each week, students are expected to devote at least one hour each week identifying the main lines or argument in course readings, working alone or in groups.

Attendance and Engagement: I will not be taking attendance, but "Engagement" with the course constitutes twenty percent of your final grade. I conceptualize "Engagement" as a more holistic version of "participation"; in addition to participating in class discussion, you will receive credit for being active in group work, giving your full attention to the class, and asking questions outside of class (over email or in office hours). To receive full credit for this aspect of the course, I expect you to consistently exercise multiple types of participation. Discerning readers will realize that it is impossible to receive a favorable grade for "Engagement" without attending class!

Names and Pronouns: Please let me know if your name and pronouns do not match what is listed in UR Student through whatever means you are comfortable with, and I will happily make the necessary changes in my records.

Technology Policy: It is allowed and encouraged to use technology in the classroom. Resisting the siren song of digital distractions is an important skill to practice in college, and I understand that you may occasionally look at non-class-related materials during class. I do, however, reserve the right to intervene if your technology use disrupts class.

Academy Honesty/AI: Students and faculty at the University must agree to adhere to high standards of academic honesty in all of the work that we do. First-year students read and sign an academic honesty policy statement to indicate that they understand the general principles upon which our work is based. The College Board on Academic Honesty website gives further information on our policies and procedures: www.rochester.edu/college/honesty.

In this course the following additional requirements are in effect:
You are encouraged to discuss course readings and assignments with your fellow students. However, all written work must be done independently and not in collaboration with another. In order to make appropriate help available for your essays, I encourage you to consult with me and with the College Writing, Speaking, and Argument Program. All written work must be submitted with Chicago-style citations; I am more than happy to provide guidance about quoting and citations *before* the assignment is due.

Using AI to write any assignment is a serious violation of the university's Academic Honesty Policy. I will be screening every submission for AI writing.

Students with disabilities: The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources. The access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can reach the Office of Disability Resources at: disability@rochester.edu; (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introductions

Week 2: What is a Museum, actually?
T (1/23): Alexander, Museums in Motion, Ch. 1
  ● Submit student questionnaire via Blackboard portal
Th (1/25): Hooper-Greenhill, "The disciplinary museum" from *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*

Week 3: Museums and Historical Fact
T (1/30): Trouillot, Silencing the Past, Ch. 1
Th (2/1): "Are Museums the Right Home for Confederate Monuments?" (Smithsonian Magazine)

Violence in Museums (Module 1)

Week 4: American Slavery (Pt 1)
T (2/6): Araujo, *Museums and Atlantic Slavery*, intro
Th (2/8): Whitney Plantation Museum tour

Week 5: American Slavery (Pt 2)
T (2/13): Hartman, Lose Your Mother, intro and chapter 8
Th (2/15): The Carpetbagger, "Great Blacks in Wax Museum ft. Dan Bell"

Week 6: The Holocaust in American Museums
T (2/20): Griffith, *Auschwitz: Not Long Ago, Not Far Away. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*
Th (2/22): U.S. Holocaust Museum Virtual Tour

Week 7: Conceptualizing Cruelty
T (2/27): Wakatsuki, "Review: Only the Oaks Remain: Stories of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station, Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA"
Th (2/29): "They Were Really Us": The UCSF Community's Early Response to AIDS

Exhibit Review due Friday, March 1, at 11:59 PM

Violence of Museums (Module 2)

Week 8: Stolen Artifacts
T (3/5): Lonetree, "Introduction" from *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*
Th (3/7): "The Problem with Museums" (PBS Origins)

Week 9 (March 9-17): **SPRING BREAK**

Week 10: Interlude—StoryMaps and Your Final Project
T (3/19): "A Right to the City" Digital Exhibit (Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum)
"Building Boston, Shaping Shorelines" (Harvard Map collection)
Th (3/21): No reading- in-class tutorial
Final project proposals due on Friday, March 22, at 11:59 PM

Week 11: Stolen Artifacts (Pt 2)—Nazi Looting
T (3/26): Feldman, "Was That Painting Stolen by Nazis? New York Museums Are Now Required to Tell You" (Smithsonian Magazine)
Th (3/28): **No class—Final project proposal conferences with instructor**

Week 12: Blood Money
T (4/2): Akers, "Museum in Philadelphia under fire for hosting far-right group's event"
Walters, "Opioid crisis protesters target New York's Guggenheim over Sackler family link"
Th (4/4): Pittas, "Artistic Activism and Museum Accountability: Staging Antagonism in the Cultural Sphere"

Progress in Museum Practice (Module 3)

Week 13: Interpreting tragedy in the 21st century
T (4/9): Select one of the following digital exhibits to analyze
   ● The Life of Sally Hemings (Monticello)
   ● Stonewall Forever
   ● Museum of Disability History virtual museum
   ● Cherokee Nation virtual field trip
Th (4/11): 1619 Project NYT Youtube stream

Week 14: "Best Practices"
T (4/16): Lara Kelland, "Activist Digital Public History" from *Handbook of digital public history* (2022)

Th (4/18): In-class work session

Week 15 (4/23 and 4/25): Project Presentations

Week 16 (4/30): Project Presentations

Final project submission deadline: May 6th at 11:59 PM

HOW TO FIND MY OFFICE:

3rd Floor