

Christopher Kaplonski

Memory, history and narrative

This course offers an overview of key approaches to understanding the construction of history and memory in relation to cultural and political forces. In particular, it will examine the relationship between social (public) memory, private memory, and official and unofficial histories.

The first part of the course will cover an introduction to the problem of social memory and history. We will supplement the theoretical literature with specific case studies. In this part of the course, we will seek to answer such questions as: what are the interrelationships between history and memory? How are memories (and history) constructed, interpreted, transmitted and transformed? How do private and social forms of memory influence each other? What larger significance does the study of memory and history have for our understandings of culture and the construction of meaning?

In the second part of the course, we will focus on issues of commemoration and the memory of major public events. How do public and private understandings of history relate to state-sanctioned interpretations of the past? How are memorials understood by individuals and groups? In what ways are sanctioned interpretations of history at odds with personal memories? In looking at commemoration, we will be questioning the role of the state in the formation of memory, and the role of memory in the legitimation or contestation of state power. This part of the course will be supplemented by analysis of local memorials.

The third part of the course will focus more particularly on the role of narrative in the construction of memory and history. What tropes do people use when they remember and describe past events? What events do people and states choose to talk about, and why? How do the voices and silences of narrative shape the memories being recalled? How do contemporary cultural schemas influence reconstructions of past events? In this section of the course, we will also consider briefly the application of narrative analysis to literature and memoirs.

Course requirements

This course is intended as a second and/or third year course. A basic understanding of the principles of cultural anthropology are presumed.

Grading will be based upon a number of short (3-4) page papers that critically analyze topics covered in class, as well essay-based mid-term and final exams.

This course will include a semester project. This will be the gathering and analysis of a life history that includes memories of a major historical event in order to provide students with a better grasp of the issues involved.

Suggested readings

General:

Fredrick Barth, *Cosmologies in the making*

Paul Connerton, *How societies remember*

James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social memory*

Jonathan Friedman, "Myth, history, and political identity"

Carlo Ginzburg, "Shared memories, private recollections"

Maurice Halbwachs, *The collective memory*

Jacques LeGoff, *History and memory*

Commemoration and the state:

Jonathan Boyarin, *Remapping memory*

John Gillis (ed), *Commemorations: the politics of national identity*

Jurgen Habermas, "Defusing the past"

Ronit Lentin, *Israel and the daughters of the Shoah.*

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

Ruby Watson, (ed) *Memory, history and opposition under state socialism*

Narrative:

Umberto Eco, *Six walks in the fictional woods*

Natalie Zamon Davis, *Fiction in the archives*

Vieda Skultans, *The testimony of lives*

Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our pasts*

Hayden White, *The content of the form*

James Young, *Writing and rewriting the Holocaust*