

History 626
Objects in History/Objects as History:
Material Culture and Museum Studies for Historians
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Instructor Information:

Instructor: Dr. Denise Meringolo Associate Professor of History
and Director of Public History

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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. We will briefly explore the history of American museums and their collections. We will primarily focus on questions regarding 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 of your own. This is a skill-building class intended for upper level students who have already acquired experience in conducting primary and secondary source research.

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
6. You will take a leadership position in class, mentoring and working with a small group of undergraduates on specific in-class projects

Important Information Regarding University Policies and Resources

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/>

Student Disability Services (SDS)

UMBC is committed to eliminating discriminatory obstacles that may disadvantage students based on disability. Services for students with disabilities are provided for all students qualified under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the ADAAA of 2009, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act who request and are eligible for accommodations. The Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) is the UMBC department designated to coordinate accommodations that would allow students to have equal access and inclusion in all courses, programs, and activities at the University.

If you have a documented disability and need to request academic accommodations, please refer to the SDS website at sds.umbc.edu for registration information and to begin the process, or alternatively you may visit the SDS office in the Math/Psychology Building, Room 212.

For questions or concerns, you may contact SDS through email at disAbility@umbc.edu or phone (410) 455-2459. If you require accommodations for this class, make an appointment to meet with me to discuss your SDS-approved accommodations.

Food and Housing Insecurity

The UMBC Counseling Center offers confidential support for students dealing with a variety of issues. You can explore their services by visiting the website <http://counseling.umbc.edu/>. Do not hesitate to contact a counselor if you have questions or need support. In particular, any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live is urged to contact Doha Chibani, LCSW-C, Clinical Social Worker and Referrals Coordinator at the Counseling Center, Student Development and Success Center. Her telephone number is 410-455-2472. Her email is chibani1@umbc.edu. She will help you identify resources that can assist you. Please note that [Retriever Essentials](#) is available to provide you with access to healthy food and other essential supplies free of charge. If you have any questions about Retriever Essentials, you can contact Lauren Kataja. Her email is lakataja@umbc.edu.

Disclosures of Sexual Misconduct and Child Abuse or Neglect

As an instructor, I am considered a Responsible Employee, per [UMBC's Policy on Prohibited Sexual Misconduct, Interpersonal Violence, and Other Related Misconduct](#). While my goal is for you to be able to share information related to your life experiences with me privately or through discussion and written work, I want to be transparent that as a Responsible Employee I am required to report disclosures of sexual assault, domestic violence, relationship violence, stalking, and/or gender-based harassment to the University's Title IX Coordinator.

As an instructor, I also have a mandatory obligation to report disclosures of or suspected instances of [child abuse or neglect](#).

The purpose of these reporting requirements is for the University to help provide you with options, and to help you find support and resources; **you will not be forced to file a report with the police**. Further, you are able to receive support and resources, even if you do not wish to have any action taken. However, please note that in certain situations, based on the nature of the disclosure, the University may need to take action.

If you need to speak with someone in confidence about an incident, UMBC has the following Confidential Resources available to support you:

The Counseling Center: 410-455-2472

University Health Services: 410-455-2542

(After-hours counseling and care available by calling campus police at 410-455-5555)

Other on-campus supports and resources:

The Women's Center, 410-455-2714

Title IX Coordinator, 410-455-1606

Additional on and off campus supports and resources can be found at: <http://humanrelations.umbc.edu/sexual-misconduct/gender-equitytitle-ix/>.

Required Books:

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

Linenthal, Edward T. *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* Columbia University Press, 2001

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

Miller, Daniel *Stuff* Polity, 2009

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

For Further Reading on Museums:

SOCIAL JUSTICE & MUSEUMS RESOURCE LIST Initiated and edited by La Tanya S. Autry, @artstuffmatters, <http://bit.ly/1r11fuV> July 2015 -

<https://artstuffmatters.wordpress.com/2017/10/15/changing-the-things-i-cannot-accept-museums-are-not-neutral/>

Assignments:

Three Critical Reflections: Material Culture Labs (30% of Final Grade)

After each of your museum lab sessions, you will write 3-5 page analysis in which you reflect on what you have learned about the use of material culture inside each museum. Your reflections MUST demonstrate that you completed the assigned reading and that you used it as a window through which to view your museum experience. More lab-specific instructions are in the syllabus.

Reflection One due via email by 11:59 pm on Sunday February 24

Reflection Two due via email by 11:59 pm on Sunday March 17

Reflection Three due via email by 11:59 pm on Sunday April 14

Short Paper: Material Culture Approach (15% of Final Grade)

Drawing on our readings, class discussion, and first lab session, write a 3-5 page paper in which you develop a specific approach to material culture analysis. This paper will establish the analytical framework you intend to use for your final paper. It should be well-grounded in our course materials, and you should use footnotes to document the origin point for each element of your proposed methodology.

Due via email by 11:59 pm on Sunday March 10

Final Paper Proposal: A History of an Artifact (10% of Final Grade)

By the middle of March, you should have chosen an artifact that will be the focus of your case study. The artifact can come from the BMI or the Maryland Historical Society, or it may be an artifact from your private collection or another museum. Conduct preliminary research. Write a 3-5 page proposal in which you describe your chosen artifact and make some preliminary arguments about its meaning. You should use your material culture approach as your guide. Prepare a bibliography of primary and secondary sources. The bibliography is NOT included in the required page count. Remember: the artifact is a primary source.

Due via email by 11:59 pm on Sunday April 7

Paper Draft and Peer Review (5% of Final Grade)

Due in Class on May 8

Final Paper (40% of Final Grade)

Your final paper should be between 15 and 18 pages.

Due via email on Monday May 20 by 5:30 pm

By This Date	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To
January 30	<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>
February 6	<p>Read: Steven Lubar <i>Inside the Lost Museum</i>, Section One</p> <p>Steven Lubar, Lukas Rieppel, Ann Daly, and Kathrinne Duffy, “Lost Museums” <i>Museum History Journal</i> Volume 10, Number 1</p> <p>Amy Kohout “More Than Birds: Loss and Reconnection at the National Museum of Natural History” <i>Museum History Journal</i>, Volume 10, Number 1</p> <p>Visit the Lost Museum Project Website: https://jenksmuseum.org/posts/</p> <p>GRADUATE STUDENT MEETING AFTER REGULAR CLASS MEETING</p> <p>(Note: Undergraduates are not reading the two extra articles)</p>	<p>Why collect? Who collects? How do we measure “collectability”? How does the history of the Jenks Museum help illuminate these questions?</p>	<p>Discuss the underlying goals, objectives, and values of collecting. Begin to articulate a set of methods and philosophies to guide your work with material objects.</p>

By This Date	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To
February 13	<p>Read: Read Jesse Swigger, <i>History is Bunk</i></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>GRADUATE STUDENT MEETING AFTER REGULAR CLASS SESSION</p> <p>(Note: Undergraduates are reading select chapters, not the entire book)</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>
February 20	<p>Museum Field Trip: BMI</p> <p>Background Reading: American Alliance of Museums Reference Guide, “Developing a Collections Management Policy”</p> <p>AAM, Collections Stewardship Standards</p>	<p>Prepare by visiting the Baltimore Museum of Industry website. Pay particular attention to the “About Us” and “Exhibitions and Collections” pages. During your visit to the museum, pay attention to the selection, display, and contextualization of artifacts. Ask questions about their collections policies.</p>	<p>Take notes. Think critically. Prepare to write a reflection on your visit.</p> <p>Select one artifact about which you might like to know more, record as much information as possible about it, 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.</p>
SUNDAY February 24	REFLECTION ONE DUE VIA EMAIL By 11:59 pm		

By This Date	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To
February 27	<p>Read in Blackboard</p> <p>Jules Prown, “The Truth of Material Culture”</p> <p>Robyn Aselson, “Seduced by an Old Flame”</p> <p>Leslie Shannon Miller The Many Figures of Eve”</p> <p>All these selections are from Prown, Jules David and Kenneth Haltman, <i>American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture</i></p> <p>Daniel Miller, <i>Stuff</i> (Graduate Students Only)</p> <p>GRADUATE STUDENT BOOK DISCUSSION AFTER REGULAR CLASS MEETING</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>Miller offers a philosophical and theoretical vision of artifact meaning and interpretation Which ideas seem particularly important and why?</p>	<p>Discuss and analyze these examples of writing by material culture scholars.</p> <p>We will talk about how Miller’s ideas provide us with a roadmap for analysis. We will begin to develop a strategy for material culture interpretation that you can use.</p>
March 6	<p>Visit http://www.tangiblethings.org/about/</p> <p>Read the About Page</p> <p>Watch the instructional videos</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. We will continue to develop a strategy for material culture analysis that you can use in your own work. You will help guide undergraduates in this process.</p>
SUNDAY MARCH 10	MATERIAL CULTURE APPROACH DUE by 11:59 pm		

By This Date	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To
March 13	<p>MUSEUM LAB MdHS</p> <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 which can serve as a roadmap for understanding how to analyze artifacts. Use these chapters as the foundation for your reflection.</p> <p>Based on your visit to the Maryland Historical Society what ideas seem particularly important and why?</p>	<p>Take notes. Think critically. Prepare to write a reflection on your visit.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Remember to select one artifact about which you might like to know more, record as much information as possible about it, 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.</p>
SUNDAY March 17	REFLECTION DUE VIA EMAIL By 11:59 PM		
MARCH 20	NO CLASS SPRING BREAK		
March 27	<p>Read: Andrea Burns <i>From Storefront to Monument</i></p> <p>Visit these websites: http://www.aampmuseum.org/ https://thewright.org/ https://nmaahc.si.edu/</p> <p>(Note: Undergraduates are reading select chapters, not the entire book)</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>

By This Date	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To
April 3	<p>Read: Amy Lonetree <i>Decolonizing Museums</i></p> <p>GRADUATE STUDENT MEETING AFTER REGULAR CLASS SESSION</p> <p>(Note: Undergraduates are reading select chapters, not the entire book)</p>	<p>Does Lonetree offer us any important lessons about the nature and significance of representation?</p> <p>Does Lonetree's book provide you with new insight into the political and cultural role of museums?</p> <p>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>
SUNDAY April 7	PAPER PROPOSAL DUE		
April 10	<p>MUSEUM LAB: Homewood House</p> <p>Read Steven Lubar, <i>Inside the Lost Museum</i> Chapters 15 and 16</p>	<p>How do museums use artifacts to help create a more inclusive past and promote more critical reflection?</p>	<p>Thinking about all the course reading up to this point and reflecting on your visit to Homewood House, 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?</p>
SUNDAY April 14	REFLECTION DUE VIA EMAIL By 11:59 pm		

By This Date	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To
April 17	<p>Objects and Memory</p> <p>Read Edward T. Linenthal, Preserving Memory (Graduate Students Only)</p> <p>GRADUATE STUDENT BOOK DISCUSSION AFTER REGULAR CLASS SESSION</p>	<p>We will watch this documentary film together in class</p> <p>We will discuss it along with the book after our regular class meeting. As you read, focus in particular on Linenthal's description of the museum's artifacts and debates about their use and display. How do these stories add to your understanding of the ways in which artifacts come to have meaning?</p>	<p>Take notes and discuss the ways in which everyday things can take on new meanings.</p> <p>Debate: should some artifacts go un-displayed? Un-collected?</p>
April 24	<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>
May 1	<p>Explore the website of The Inluseum, especially the "About" page and the Tools and Publications. On the "Resources" page read choose two links you find most interesting.</p>	<p>Think about Homewood House, the MdHS, and the BMI. Consider our readings this semester as a whole. How would you describe the "inclusiveness" of museums historically, in Baltimore, and as promoted by this visionary website?</p>	<p>Discuss the ideal of inclusion as it relates to collecting, interpreting, and displaying artifacts.</p>

By This Date	Do This	Think about This	Be Prepared To
May 8	In Class Peer Writing Review and Final Paper Revision Workshops In Class Peer Revision Workshops		Work on your final paper drafts
May 20	FINAL PAPER DUE VIA EMAIL By 5:30 pm		