

# **Cultural Heritage on Display: Fairs, Festivals, and Museum Exhibitions in the American Public Sphere**

The University of Texas at Austin, Spring 2012  
Anthropology 325L (31345); AMS 321 (30810)  
MWF 9-10am  
SAC 4.118

## **Instructor: Dr. Suzanne Seriff**

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## Course Description:

This course is designed to take you behind the scenes in the public construction, negotiation, and display of “traditional American culture” by focusing on a number of cultural heritage sites in the public sphere. In particular, the course will examine the political economy of fairs, festivals, theme parks, heritage sites, and museum exhibitions as contested sites of heritage production in American history—focusing especially on those moments when an almost crusade-like obsession with defining and displaying the “true American” becomes an active agent in the process of nation building and ideological construction. We will focus closely on the histories and agencies of specific “exhibitionary complexes,” paying close attention to the problematic relationship of their objects to the instruments of their display. Each student will have the opportunity to participate directly in creating and/or critiquing the process of cultural heritage production, documentation, and display—including conducting original field research, planning and designing a specific mode of display, or providing a critical analysis of an historic example of cultural heritage production.

## Readings and Requirements

The class format will be structured around discussions, in-class activities, out of class fieldwork, and lectures. In-class discussions, weekly discussion blogs based on the readings, two written assignments and an original research project are required for this class.

## **Required Textbooks:**

- \* Thatcher Freund: Objects of Desire: The Life of Antiques and Those Who Pursue Them. (Reproduced Co-op Packet) (or check with Amazon for used copies)
- \* Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz, eds, Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations. Duke University Press, 2006
- \* Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, eds, Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture. Oxford University Press, 2009.

### **Course Requirements and Grading:**

Success in this course involves using both the concepts and the tools of the cultural researcher. Thus, you will be asked to do certain things as well as display certain knowledge. There will be a variety of different types of assignments and opportunities to tailor the assignments to your own interests. All written assignments should be double-spaced and typed.

#### **A Note about Due Dates and Academic Integrity**

Academic life places all of us under demanding time constraints. Please mark your calendar with due dates for the assignments and begin working on these projects early in the semester. **I will not accept assignments that are turned in late or give incompletes** unless your work was delayed due to a religious observance, a death in the family, or a serious illness just prior to the due date. If this is the case, I will ask you for written verification from your doctor or from a family member.

And finally, the university's policy on academic integrity will be followed in this class.

### **Grading:**

#### 1. ESSAYS: (30%)

Two short (5 page) papers based on readings, in-class materials, and student-initiated research. I will hand out specific project assignments at least two weeks in advance of each due date. The first assignment requires interviewing a collector and analyzing the collection; the second assignment is an analysis of an “exhibitionary complex” of your choice: a history museum, a mall, a themed environment, a festival, a cultural heritage site. Please follow the instructions for the projects carefully. No credit will be given for projects that are handed in late without prior approval from the instructor. Each of these projects will be worth 15% of your grade.

#### 2. WEEKLY DISCUSSION BLOG (30%)

Students will be required to respond to a weekly prompt on our Blackboard discussion board and keep up with it each week. There will be a total of 15 blogs—one for each week and **each entry should be a full typewritten page:**

- 1) the entry will be based on a written prompt from the instructor which will be posted at the beginning of each week (for the next week). Some of the prompts are listed in your syllabus as well, but be sure to check on the discussion board site which will have the most up-to-date assignment.
- 2) in most cases, students will respond to the posted blog by 9pm, Sunday evening before our Monday morning class.
- 3) Students should use simple, direct language that expresses your ideas as clearly as possible.

Each blog entry will be worth two points, for a maximum of 30 points. Students will receive one point for turning the blog in on time and addressing all aspects of the question, demonstrating a command of the reading, where applicable. Students will get the maximum 2 points only if you have shown exceptional insight and effort.

No points if your entry is late, skipped, or grossly incomplete.

#### 3. RESEARCH PROJECT (25%):

One research project on the topic of cultural heritage representation will be due at the end of the semester. Projects could be done in the form of a video documentary, a mock museum exhibit, an online social networking experiment, a handmade book, or some

other creative form of expression. Possible topics for these projects will be discussed during class. Projects can be based on academic library research, or first-hand ethnographic field research conducted by one or more students during the semester. This project can incorporate one or more of the smaller writing assignments conducted throughout the semester, or can tackle a completely new topic. Because of the in-depth nature of the project, however, assignments must be selected in consultation with (and prior approval from) the professor, before Spring Break. Students may work together in pairs if desired. An annotated bibliography will be required as part of the assignment—to be turned in two weeks in advance of the assignment's due date, and a two page, written, final reflection piece will complete this assignment.

#### 4. IN CLASS ATTENDANCE and PARTICIPATION (15%):

Attendance in class, careful and critical reading of the assigned material each week, and participation in class discussions is essential. Discussions, field trips, videos, and readings complement rather than duplicate each other. In order to do well in, and get the most out of, this course, you should come to class regularly and keep up with the reading assignments. Attendance will be taken each week and will be worth 10% of your final grade. You cannot make an "A" in this course without regular attendance and participation in class. There will be five "pop quizzes" during the course of the class which will cover specific vocabulary or concepts from the readings. If attendance is good, I may let you know in advance when the quizzes will be but if attendance or reading starts to slack off, I will give the quizzes on a "surprise" basis. The quizzes are worth 5% of your final grade.

#### **Use of Blackboard and Electronic Reserves**

The course has a Blackboard website which will be demonstrated during the first week of the class. It includes an electronic gradebook and access to required readings. As noted in the below schedule of assignments, a number of these readings will be available through Blackboard.

Announcements concerning the course will also be made on Blackboard. Students in the class are responsible for checking this website regularly, which you can access by clicking on "Blackboard" under "Popular Sites" on the upper left side of the UT home page. Students are also responsible for regularly checking the e-mail account that is registered with the University. All e-mails to the professor should either be done through Blackboard, or include "ANT 325L or AMS 321" in the subject line; otherwise they may inadvertently be missed. This course is cross listed in Anthro and American Studies. I will create a MASTER section for this class which will include all of you in the class. Thus you will always use this MASTER section to access our blackboard including readings, discussion blog prompts, etc. The MASTER will be called: sp 12 Cultural Heritage on Display MASTER. Only your grades will be listed under the specific unique number in which you are registered.

### **Schedule of Topics and Readings**

#### **Week One (1/18-1/20) --Orientation: Cultural Representation of the Self: Personal History on Display**

Course introduction: identifying expectations and goals for this course; exploring the concept of cultural heritage, visual culture, representation and display.

Introduction to the idea of “critical reading” of a “text” —including objects, performances, events, displays, as well as printed media .

Exercise: 1. Introductions: I Show and You Tell: Representing the Self to Others:  
My cultural heritage on display.

Exercise 2. Introduction: You Show and You Tell: Representing Others

Read for the Week:

Lowenthal. The Heritage Crusade. Ch. 2: Personal Legacies (Blackboard)

**Discussion Blog Topic Prompt:**

Due Date: Sunday night 9pm, January 22nd, to be posted on our Blackboard discussion board:

- a. Make a list of all of the ways that you can think of that you participated in past-related activities in the past year (i.e., looked at photos with family and friends, took photos, told stories, watched movies about an historical event, attended a reunion, visited a history museum, read a history book, took a course, wrote in a journal, worked on a collection, created a collage or a scrapbook or a quilt for a friend, cleaned out an old closet etc.)
- b. Write a sentence or two about the nature/context of each type of participation (did you “narrate” history, “read” history, analyze history, critique a particular presentation of history, etc)
- c. Mark which of these activities involved practices of “looking.”

**Assignment for next week:**

Select an image or object from popular culture or mass media that you feel is "representative" of the United States and bring it in for the next class on Monday, 1/23/12. This could be an advertisement, a product wrapper, a postcard, a cartoon, a toy, a piece of cloth, an object, or an image that sums up or illustrates what the USA "stands for" to you. The image/object may be positive, critical, ambiguous, or with multiple meanings, as long as it represents some aspect of the United States you feel is important. Please do not “create” an object or collage yourself. I want you to find/select an image or object that is already in existence. I am not looking for any particular kind of image; use your imagination.

**Week Two (1/23-1/27) The Changing Meaning of Things: The Presence of the Past in our Everyday Lives**

Exercise: Class Presentation and discussion of "representative" icons of American culture:

How objects change in meaning over time and in different contexts

Read for the Week:

Lowenthal, David. Collective Legacies. Ch. 3.

Blackboard Course Document: Tim O'Brien: “The Things They Carried.”

Sturken and Cartwright: Ch. 1: Images, Power and Politics pgs. 9-48 (you may want to read the introduction as well).

Exercise: Class Presentation and discussion of "representative" icons of American culture: How objects change in meaning over time and in different contexts

**Discussion Blog Prompt: The Changing Meaning of Things.**

Describe the object or image you selected and analyze the ways in which the meaning of the object has changed over time and in different contexts of history, performance or use in American culture. Draw on the semiotic analysis introduced in ch. 1 of Sturken and Cartwright to analyse your image/object.

Assignment for next week: Bring to class on Monday an example of an object (could be an image of an object taken from a magazine or advertisement) that is “good taste” and an example of an object that displays “bad taste”.

### Week Three (1/30-2/3) The Changing Value of Things: Fashion, Taste, Connoisseurship

Read for the week:

Freund: Objects of Desire 1-68

Sturken and Cartwright: Ch. 2, pgs. 49-62

Barbara K-G:” Disputing Taste” in Destination Culture, pgs. 259-281, Blackboard

#### **Discussion Blog Prompt: Good Taste: Bad Taste**

Using the definitions and description of “taste“ from this week’s readings, discuss the object you brought to class and why you identify it as exhibiting good taste or bad taste in the American public sphere.

### Week Four (2/6-2/10): On Collecting Things; On Collecting Cultures

Read for This Week:

Finish Reading Freund's Objects of Desire (69-end of book)

Sturkin and Cartwright, ch. 2, pgs. 62-89

Blackboard: Stewart, Susan, “ The Collection; Paradise of Consumption’ In On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir and the Collection.

**First Written Essay: An Ethnography of Collectors and Collecting: Due: 3/5/12**

#### **Discussion Blog Prompt: On Collecting Things**

Describe a collection you have now, or had as a child, and explain the organizing principle behind its collection and display. If you do not—nor ever did—have your own collection, describe a collection you might like to have if money, time, and resources were no object.

### Week 5: (2/13-2/17) : Recovering the Meaning of America’s Past or Producing that Meaning: How does History compare to Heritage Production?

Read for the Week:

David Lowenthal: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History : Chs. 5 and 6 (blackboard)

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara, “Theorizing Heritage” (blackboard)

### Week 6 : (2/20-2/24): Exhibitionary Complexes: What Does it Mean to Show?

Read for This Week:

Tony Bennett: "The Exhibitionary Complex" In Boswell and Evans; Representing the Nation (Blackboard)  
Sturkin and Cartwright, ch. 3: Modernity: Spectatorship, Power and Knowledge  
Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Exhibitionary Complexes" In Karp and Kratz: pgs. 35-45

Week 7: (2/27-3/2): Cultural Heritage on Display: The Rise of the Museum as an Exhibitionary Complex in America

Read for this Week:

Donna Harraway: "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden" Blackboard  
Steven Conn: Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926, ch. 1-3 Blackboard

Field Trip: Blanton Museum of Art

Week 8: (3/5-3/9): The Exhibitionary Complex of the World's Fair in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century America

Read for This Week:

Robert Rydell "The Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893: And was Jeruseum Buildeed Here?" In Boswell and Evans Ch. 13 Blackboard Article  
Curtis Hensley: "The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893" In Karp and Lavine, Ch. 18. Blackboard Article  
Beverly K. Grindstaff: "Creating Identity: Exhibiting the Philippines at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition" (PDF Blackboard)

Film: Bontoc Eulogy

**Written Exercise #2: Exhibitionary Complex. Due Date: 4/6/12**

**Week 9: SPRING BREAK: (3/12-3/16)**

Week 10: (3/19-3/23): The Politics of Public Display: Heritage Production in Contemporary Folk Festivals

Read for This Week:

Journal of American Folklore Vol 1221 Winter 2008. Special Issue: Constructing Folklife and Negotiating the Natian9l): The Smithsonian Folklife Festival (PDF Blackboard articles):  
Diamond and Trimillos: "Introduction: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Smithsonian Folklife Festival"  
Trimillos: "Histories, Resistances, and Reconciliations in a Decolonizable Space: The Philippine Delegation to the 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival"  
Satterwaite: Imagining Home, Nation, World: Appalachia on the Mall"

Week 11 (3/26-3/30): Reappearance of the Authentic: Museums and The Experiential Complex in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Read for This Week:

Tony Bennett: "Exhibition, Difference, and the Logic of Culture" In Karp and Kratz, pgs. 46-69.

Martin Hall, "Reappearance of the Authentic," in Karp and Kratz, pgs. 70-101

Week 12: (4/2-4/6): The Politics of Public Display: The "Disneyfication" of Museums: Who Can Tell the Story and Whose Story is Important to Tell?

Read for this Week:

Nigel Briggs, "Reaching a Broader Audience" *The Public Historian* Vol. 22, No. 3(Summer, 2000) pp. 95-105 ( <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3379581>)

Cary Carson, "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, Whose History is the Fairest of Them All? (Blackboard article)

William Van Wert, "DisneyWorld and Post History" (Blackboard article)

Michael Sorkin: See you in Disneyland (Blackboard article)

**Due Date: Second Written Essay: Exhibitionary Complex**

Week 13 (4/9-4/13) Case Study: Immigration Museums as Cultural Heritage Sites: Who Can Be An American, Disney Style.

Read for this week:

"Ellis Island". In *Destination Culture*, by Barbara K-G. (Blackboard)

Mike Wallace: "Boat People: Immigration History at the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island" in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*. (1996 ). (Blackboard article)

Erica Rand: "Coming to Ellis Island," In *The Ellis Island Snow Globe*

Week 14 (4/16-4/20): Post-Modern Frictions

Read for this week:

Barbara K-G "World Heritage and Cultural Economics" In Karp and Kratz, pgs. 161-202

Sturkin and Cartwright, ch. 10: The Global Flow of Visual Culture, pgs. 389-430

Sturkin and Cartwright, ch. 8: 307-333

Christina Kreps, "Indigenous Curation, museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage" In Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, eds. *Intangible Heritage*. Routledge 2009. (Blackboard)

**Due Date: Annotated Bibliography for Final Project**

Week 15 (4/23-4/27) Remapping the Museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Read for this Week:

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Ch. 6 and 7: The Rebirth of the Museum (Blackboard)

Suzanne Seriff: "Immigrant Voices from America's "Forgotten Gateway":

A New Museum Model for Civic Engagement Within and Beyond the Gallery Walls". *Museums and Social Issues* Vol 3. No 2: *Immigrants in America*, pgs. 161-166 2008. (Blackboard)

161-166 2008. (Blackboard)

Corinne Kratz and Ciraj Rassool, "Remapping the Musuem" in Karp and Kratz, pgs. 347-356

Fred Myers, "The Complexity of Cultural Production: The Contingencies of Performance in Globalizing Museum Practices," In Kratz and Karp, pgs. 504-536

Week 16 (4/30-5/4) : Cultural Heritage on Display: Student Presentations

Final Exam: Student Presentations, cont. Date TBD