

HPSS S732 Witness Tree Project
Fall 2010: Presidents, Place, and Public History
[in conjunction with FURN 2451]

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1-4

Class: W 01:10pm - 04:10pm at 20 Wash. Place, Room 237A

The Witness Tree Project is a curricular initiative involving Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and the National Park Service (NPS). Witness trees, as designated by the National Park Service, are long-standing trees that have "witnessed" key events, trends, and people in American history. The Project arranges for fallen witness trees to be shipped from a national historic site to RISD, where, in a joint history seminar and furniture studio, students interpret the history the tree witnessed and make relevant objects from the tree's wood. In addition to classroom study, the Project variously involves field trips, guest lectures, exhibitions of students' objects, and other events that highlight the significance of material culture, landscape, and design in learning about American history.

This is the second iteration of the course. Last year, the Project focused on a fallen, historic, pecan tree, shipped to RISD from Hampton National Historic Site, a former plantation in Maryland. This year's Project focuses on memorial-era trees from both the George Washington Birthplace National Monument and the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site (the homestead of Theodore Roosevelt). After analyzing the landscape and material culture of Roosevelt's family home and "summer white house" at Sagamore Hill, students in the seminar will learn about the legacies of Washington and Roosevelt, examine the development of the presidency, and explore the history and politics of presidential memorialization in national parks, monuments, and libraries. Study in the seminar will be integral to work in the furniture studio and vice versa; assignments in both courses are intended to complement one another.

Course Philosophy

The Role of the Department of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences at RISD

This course is offered by the Department of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences (HPSS) at RISD. HPSS is a multidisciplinary department whose faculty members teach and conduct research in a range of fields across the humanities and social sciences, including American studies, anthropology, history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. The coming together of such disparate fields in one department represents the cutting-edge of scholarship and provides a unique and rich learning experience in which you may readily learn and compare traditional disciplinary approaches to understanding the world (anthropology, history, philosophy), as well as explore newer, interdisciplinary fields of knowledge (e.g. gender and sexuality, media studies, race and ethnicity). Studying in HPSS will enable you to develop your imagination and independence of thought, your ability to approach issues and problems from different viewpoints, and your communication skills --qualities integral to the creative work of any artist.

The Role of Liberal Arts at RISD

HPSS is one of three departments (alongside English and History of Art and Visual Culture) in RISD's Division of Liberal Arts. At RISD, the liberal arts are integral to the process of becoming an accomplished artist or designer. Creativity depends on curiosity, empathy, and communication—a desire to explore and share an understanding about the world in which we live.

In fact, the word "liberal" in liberal arts comes from the Latin *liber*, meaning "free," and it is meant to convey that learning about culture, history, and philosophy can liberate the mind and thus provide the foundation for truly imaginative and innovative work. Liberal Arts classes are intended to shape fundamental aspects of your vocation by instilling in you a lifelong curiosity about the world, enhancing your capacity to analyze situations and act on ideas with independence and confidence, and enabling you to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.

Course Requirements and Expectations

Books

The following books will be available at Symposium Books, 240 Westminster Street, or you may purchase them online.

James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (Anchor Books, 1996 [1977]. [paper: 978-0385483995]).

James MacGregor Burns and Susan Dunn, *George Washington*. New York: Times Books, 2004 [Note: in hardcover only: 978-0805069365].

Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D. C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. [Note: in hardcover only: 978-0520256545]

NOTE: The readings are listed in the schedule below according to when we will discuss them as a class. Please read them by such dates and come to class with questions, analyses, and applications. Having said that, please treat the readings as rich sources to which you can return repeatedly throughout a section of the course and through the course as a whole. In the ideal, we would *never* be finished with any of the readings in a course.

Evaluation

The following four factors will determine your final grade:

1. Attendance and Participation 10%

You are required to attend all classes, no excuses. The course meets only once a week, which makes missing a class a This means you may miss a class if you have to (due to illness, etc.) but that it will count against you.

2-4. Three Section Projects 30% each

Descriptions below, in the Class Meeting Schedule.

Grading Policies

- Grades will be based on a traditional A-F scale, where "C" equals "meeting the basic requirements of the course." Everyone starts with an assumed C and goes up or down from there as they complete the course-work. Since this is a collaborative class Dale Broholm and I will do the grading together.
- All assignments, exams, etc. not completed by the last day of class will receive an F and be factored into the final grade, unless you have made other arrangements with me.
- Plagiarism is a serious offence and will result in an automatic F for the assignment and may warrant further judicial action. Be sure that you understand what constitutes plagiarism before you begin an assignment.

Class Meeting Schedule

NOTE: All class meetings will be in a seminar discussion format. It is understood, however, that all seminar content will function as an integral part of students' work in the studio and vice versa. Crossover discussion, mutual insight, and collaborative activity will enhance the topic outline presented here.

I. Material Culture and the Meanings of Place

Sept 20 – Course Topic and Goals

Research and familiarize yourself with the sites providing wood for the course:

1. George Washington Birthplace: <http://www.nps.gov/gewa/index.htm>
2. Sagamore Hill National Historic Site: <http://www.nps.gov/sahi/index.htm>

Sept 27 – Methods of Analysis

James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1996 [1977].

Oct 4 – *FIELD TRIP TO SAGAMORE HILL*

Oct 11 – *Field Trip Recap*

***DUE: Personal Mapping Assignment**

Maps are selective, purposeful representations of a place. They quickly communicate multiple levels of detail and scale and can address diverse factors such culture, behavior, and physical environment. In this assignment, you must map the Sagamore Hill site, based on your interpretations from the class field trip. Maps may be visual, textual, 3-D or 2-D; all maps must include at least three “layers” of information. The idea is to convey what you learned about the site, using your careful attention to both its environment and your experience of it. This exercise should help you as you prepare for your first assignment in studio.

II. The Presidency

Oct 18 – Presidents as History

Website: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents>

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton.” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 2 (Summer 1997): 179-190.

*GUEST: TED WIDMER, DIRECTOR AND LIBRARIAN OF THE JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY, BROWN UNIVERSITY

Oct 25 – Defining the Presidency: Washington

James MacGregor Burns and Susan Dunn, *George Washington*. New York: Times Books, 2004.

Barry Schwartz, “George Washington and the Whig Conception of Heroic Leadership.” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Feb., 1983), pp. 18-33.

Nov 1 – Transforming the Presidency: Roosevelt

Theodore Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*. Available online at <<http://www.archive.org/details/theorooseau-to00roosrich>>. You may also purchase it in paper form through Amazon.com.

George Juergens, “Theodore Roosevelt and the Press.” *Daedalus*, Vol. 111, No. 4 (Fall 1982): 113-133.

Nov 8 – Presidents as Icons

Seth Bruggeman, “National Park Service, George Washington Birthplace National Monument, Administrative History, 1930-2000.” Online at: http://www.nps.gov/history/history/park_histories/index.htm#gewa

H. W. Brands, et al, “Sagamore Hill National Historic Site: Historic Resource Study (2007).” Online at: http://www.nps.gov/history/history/park_histories/index.htm#sahi

*GUEST: SETH BRUGGEMAN, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND AMERICAN STUDIES & PUBLIC HISTORY COORDINATOR, TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

***DUE: Presidential History Assignment**

Write a detailed report (10-12 pages) on the narrative, visual, and curatorial representations of a single American president over time, from his term in office to the present. You must choose someone who served before 1950 and someone other than Roosevelt or Washington, both of whom we are already studying in class.

III. Nation, Tradition, and Memory

Nov 15 – Exhibiting the Presidency

Benjamin Hufbauer, "Spotlights and Shadows: Presidents and Their Administrations in Presidential Museum Exhibits." *The Public Historian* (Summer 2006): 117-131.

FIELD TRIP TO JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY AND MUSEUM, BOSTON, and ADAMS NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK, QUINCY

Nov. 22 – Public Space and National Memory

Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D. C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

November 24 – Thanksgiving Break

Nov 29 – History versus Memory

Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989), pp. 7-24.

David Glassberg, "Public History and the Study of Memory." *The Public Historian*. Vol. 18, No. 2 (Spring 1996): 7-23.

Albert Boime, "Fixed in Stone: Gutzon Borglum's 'Mount Rushmore.'" *American Art*, Vol. 5, No. 1/2 (Winter - Spring, 1991): 142-167.

Dec 6 – Final Discussion & Critique

***DUE: Presidential Memorialization Assignment**

Create a written proposal (7-10 pages) for a new public memorial to Theodore Roosevelt. Be prepared to orally present the fundamental themes of your proposal to the rest of the class.