“Geography and Collective Memory”

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Purposes of the Course

Within the social sciences, humanities, and urban design professions, scholars studying topics of identity, heritage, commemoration, remembrance, historical interpretation, and local/situated knowledge have frequently addressed the notion of “collective memory of place.” Interestingly, while many non-geographers working in this area have demonstrated a strong geographical sensitivity, until recently the number of geographers who have touched upon collective memory was rather small (J.K. Wright, David Lowenthal, Roger Downs, Peter Gould, Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, and John Jakle being some of the early and notable exceptions.) This might have something to do with Geography’s former privileging of landscape and spatial pattern over people and how they think. When the discipline began to take its most recent “cultural turn” in the mid-1980s, however, memory-oriented geographers began popping up all over the place.

This seminar has several purposes:

- To explore how geographers approach the notion of “collective memory”
- To explore how geographical constructs such as space, place, landscape, human-environment relations, scale and network/flow have been incorporated into studies of collective memory conducted by non-geographers
- To identify and critique theories of collective memory
- To explore the following empirical questions about geography and memory:
  - How (and what) do people choose to remember about the places in which they live?
  - Who decides what is remembered?
  - How are these memories transmitted to, and interpreted by, others—insiders, outsiders, contemporaries, and descendants?
  - What roles do space and landscape play in these processes?
- To examine the methodologies by which forgotten (or minor) memories of place might be retrieved to create alternative geographies of collective memory

We will start by reading a “sampler” of geographical work on memory—to discover external and internal disciplinal influences as well as major themes. This sampler should also serve as a catalyst for picking a term-paper topic. Next we will look at some of the most-cited works from the social sciences, history and philosophy on memory. This should help provide us with a multi-disciplinary set of theories for understanding possible relationships between space, place and memory—which we will address in the third section of the course. Finally, we will return to the work of geographers who are interested in the ways in which race and ethnicity intersect with geography and memory. Here we will bump up against the tourist industry’s use of heritage, preservation, and historical re-construction as it commodifies places as tourist destinations.

Readings

The literature related to this topic is immense and there is so much more that I wish we could read. But I had to draw the line somewhere! A course reader will be available at the Copy Center in Marshall Square. It will contain the journal articles listed in the schedule below. Material that appears in book format is
available from three sources: 1) on reserve in Bird Library; 2) as new books in the SU Bookstore in Schine; and 3) as used books through various on-line vendors. You could always come up with some sharing schemes, too. We will be reading from the following books:


**Assessment**

Assessment in this seminar will be based on three pieces of information:

1. **A term paper.** This will be a 20 to 25 page typewritten term paper that takes a geographical (or spatial) approach to something related to collective memory. You might choose to focus on a local monument or public space and study its role in commemoration or in public remembrance. You might try to unearth alternative historical geographies for a place—by critiquing the standard metanarrative (official) local history and contrasting it to the experience of a sub-group who may remember things differently or use space in ways that differ from the majority. The possibilities are nearly endless. We will be talking a lot more about the choice of paper topics as the semester goes along. Think of the entire termpaper exercise, however, as tantamount to writing the first-draft of a journal article. Worth 40% of the course grade. **DUE by 4:30 p.m. on Friday, December 6th.**

2. **An in-seminar presentation based on the term paper.** More on this during the semester. Worth 20% of the course grade. The presentations will occur in our December 2nd meeting.

3. **Participation in, and preparation for, our weekly meetings.** Worth 40% of the course grade.
Schedule of Readings/Discussions

Introduction

Meeting 1: August 26 Historical Geography and Memory

[September 2 Labor Day Holiday—No Class]

Meeting 2: September 9 A Geography/Memory Sampler
Readings (all in the course reader):


[September 16 Yom Kippur—No Class]

Some Approaches to Memory

Meeting 3: September 23 Sociological (and Anthropological) Approaches
Readings:

- Paul Connerton (1989) How Societies Remember

Meeting 4: September 30 Historical Approaches
Reading:

- Dominick La Capra (2001) Writing History, Writing Trauma
- Vera Schwarz (1998) Bridge Across Broken Time: Chinese and Jewish Cultural Memory

Meeting 5: October 7 Philosophical Approaches
Reading:
Memory in Place/Space

Meeting 6: October 14 Urban Memory, I
Reading:
(assertion)

Meeting 7: October 21 Urban Memory, IIa
Reading:
(assertion)

Meeting 8: October 28 Urban Memory, IIb
Reading:
(assertion)

Meeting 9: November 4 National Memory, I
Reading:
(assertion)

Meeting 10 November 11 National Memory, II
Reading:
(assertion)

More Geographers on Memory

Meeting 11 November 18 Identity and Memory
Readings (all in the course reader):
(assertion)
Meeting 12: November 25 Heritage Obsession

Reading:
   - David Lowenthal (1998) *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (This book was previously published in 1996 with the main title of *Possessed by the Past*)

Conclusion

Meeting 13: December 2 Student Presentations

If you have any questions or problems during the semester, please do not hesitate to talk to me!

Anne E. Mosher