ANTHROPOLOGY OF MUSEUMS
MEMORY, PLACE, POWER AND REPRESENTATION

Anthropology 268: Spring 2022
Wednesdays 1:45 – 4:45 pm in Penn Museum Room 345

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Class Structure:
This course will be conducted mostly in-person, with regular visits to the collections of the Penn Museum. Some guest lectures and a few class sessions will be conducted remotely via Zoom sessions on-line. Students will meet during the scheduled class time once a week, on Wednesdays from 1:45 to 4:45 pm (Eastern Standard Time) in the Penn Museum, either in room 345 or in the Collections Study Room. If possible, we may also conduct some field trips to local museums. Class meetings will feature inter-active lectures on specific topics and/or museum visits. Each week, students will be required to complete written assignments that will include a selection of: readings; discussion comments; object studies; on-line research; museum visits; virtual field trips, etc. Class content will be outlined and organized on Canvas, where students can access assigned readings, respond to discussion questions, submit written assignments, etc.
**Course Description:**

Who owns culture? How can museums be understood as places where issues of cultural identity, memory, representation, and power intersect? This course offers an introduction to the field of museum anthropology by investigating relationships among collectors, curators, visitors, texts, and objects. Students will review some of the histories, theories and paradigms that have influenced collecting processes and exhibitions, and develop critical analyses of the myriad ways in which museums and museum audiences use objects and texts to navigate the past and to interpret, form, and transform identities. We will particularly focus on representations of Indigenous peoples, histories, and heritage, while examining the social relations among curators, scholars, museum visitors, and Indigenous communities.

In 16th century Europe, some museum collections developed as “curiosity cabinets” of exotic materials from around the world. During the 18th and 19th centuries, American museums were built to house historical archives, interesting artifacts, and natural history specimens. During the emergence of salvage anthropology in the late 19th century, Native American and First Nations objects were widely collected as ethnographic specimens, and human remains were also collected as scientific specimens. By the early 20th century, a number of local and national museums and monuments were constructed to commemorate and display public histories and local memories. In North America and Europe, living history museums also became popular as vehicles for preserving and re-enacting the clothing, crafts, and customs of the lived past.

Since the late 20th century, all of these museums have inspired complex, often contentious discourse around colonial representations of race and culture, fraught displays, and the ownership and handling of human remains and heritage. Now, in the 21st century, increasing calls for reconciliation and repatriation have forced museums to grapple with problematic histories, to revise antiquated exhibitions, and to collaborate with the descendants of the peoples represented in their collections.

When Indigenous items of cultural patrimony, tourist objects, sacred objects, and art are mingled together in museum collections, how can we apply restorative methodologies to recover object histories and reveal new object stories? How do we determine what counts as “sacred” or “art” or “heritage” and who counts as a “descendant community” or “Indigenous”? What are the legal consequences and ethical stakes of applying these categories to objects in museums? We will investigate selective modes of preserving, cataloging, interpreting, and representing objects, cultures, and histories in different eras. Virtual museum field trips will include the American Philosophical Society, Penn Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, British Museum, and the Museum of the American Revolution, among other locales.

**Zoom Link for Remote Class Sessions:**

Join Zoom Meeting: [https://upenn.zoom.us/j/96384058696](https://upenn.zoom.us/j/96384058696)
Meeting ID: 963 8405 8696
Passcode: 098484

**Required Textbooks & Readings:**


All of the textbooks are available as free e-books on-line through the Penn Library system.

Reading assignments will also include a series of articles, available as PDFs on the course Canvas site.
**CLASS STRUCTURE & REQUIREMENTS**

**Class Attendance:**

This course will be conducted mostly in person (and, on occasion, remotely) with both synchronous and asynchronous assignments managed via Canvas. All in-person sessions will be held either in the classroom (Penn Museum room 345) or in the Penn Museum Collections Study Room.

Every Wednesday students are expected to be present during the class session, held between 1:45 and 4:45 pm, arriving on time and actively participating in class. In each class session, students will be assigned to lead a brief discussion of a specific reading or research topic for that week. These presentations should last about 10 minutes, and should closely focus on the most important questions and insights; guidelines for these presentations will be explained in class. Please note that active participation counts as an important part of your grade. All students are encouraged to offer insights, explore controversial topics, and ask questions in an atmosphere of respectful, lively discussion.

Each week, students must set aside a dedicated block of time – at least three hours each week, sometime between Thursday and Tuesday – to complete the required assignments. These assignments will include a selection of: readings; discussion comments; assigned papers; videos; object studies; on-line research; virtual museum field trips, etc. The time spent on writing these assignments will vary from week to week, depending on the topic, scheduling, and the amount of independent research required.

Every Tuesday before 12 noon: Students will submit their written assignments to Canvas. Follow the guidelines posted in the Modules each week for that week’s readings and assignments. Comments will be posted to “Discussions” on Canvas. Papers and drafts of research blogs will be submitted to “Assignments” on Canvas. Detailed directions for all Discussions and Assignments will be outlined in class and posted on Canvas. Please do not hesitate to ask the Professor or TA if you have any questions.

**Course Objectives:**

Students will learn how to develop the following intellectual and practical skills in museum contexts:

- Learn how specific objects in museums are used to exemplify distinctive cultures, technologies, belief systems, geographical regions, cultural expressions, etc.
- Learn how to distinguish among different categories of objects in museums (e.g., art, funerary objects, sacred objects, tourist objects, cultural patrimony, forgeries, etc.).
- Learn how behind-the-scenes processes of organization and categorization can exert influence over objects and exhibitions, and practice seeing through those processes to detect hidden information.
- Practice research skills in object provenance and cartography, by tracking several individual objects over time through various collectors and collections.
- Practice skills in archival research, with an emphasis on reading primary sources.
- Develop a keen eye for cultural and material details through surveying and examining objects. Learn how to visually distinguish among different source materials, modes of construction, symbols and decoration, evidence of wear and repair, etc.
- Improve critical analysis skills by weighing a wide range of sometimes competing data gleaned from personal observations, museum representations, primary records, oral testimony, and published scholarship.
- Improve anthropological writing skills by composing research reports that include both scientific data and comparative analyses of related objects and collections.

**Exams & Quizzes:**

There will be no mid-term or final exam in this course. Instead, students will answer several spot quizzes consisting of brief definitions and questions based on the required readings.
Discussion Posts:
The required readings for each week are listed in the syllabus. Make sure you read all of the assigned readings before the date indicated, and be prepared to discuss these readings in class. Even if you miss a class, you are still responsible for completing the readings for that week, and for completing and uploading any written assignments on time.

Discussion posts, due on the dates listed in the syllabus, may consist of any of the following: reading reflections in response to prompt questions; transcription of archival documents relating to a museum collection; description of a single material object; internet research; or critique of a museum display.

Each week, in class, a team of two students will be expected to lead a brief discussion of a specific reading or research topic, lasting about 10 minutes, and closely focusing on the most important questions and insights.

Response Papers:
Your writing assignments will include TWO Response Papers. Each of these must be created as Word documents and uploaded to “Assignments” on Canvas. The formatting must follow this structure: 11 pt Times Roman with 1 1/2 line spacing and 1 inch document margins. All sources cited must be noted in-text or in footnotes, and also listed in the bibliography for each paper.

In these papers, you must reference the readings, but these papers are not summary reports. Follow the prompt questions, and discuss, in your own words, thoughts, insights, and analyses of the topics assigned. Include citations to texts and articles from the syllabus as noted. Detailed guidelines for each of these writing assignments will be provided in advance and posted to Canvas.

Museum Blog Articles:
Students will tour and sample collections at the Penn Museum, select objects for study, meet virtually with the Teaching Assistant in the Object Study Lab to examine and analyze these objects, and conduct further research on their own. Consider the following questions: Are there any observations or assumptions about this object that need clarification or verification? Are there any comparable objects in other museums? How has knowledge of this object, and its monetary and cultural value, been constructed by any of the following: artisan; community of origin; collector; museum; art dealer; scholar, etc.?

Students will be required to compose ONE rough draft and ONE complete research Blog Article, approximately 1,000-1,500 words, matching the format of the Penn Museum Blog “Beyond the Gallery Walls.” These articles must include relevant primary sources, citations, and links to any relevant on-line sources. The best of these articles will be selected for publication on-line. See this example on the Penn Museum Blog for inspiration: https://www.penn.museum/blog/museum/eastern-turkey-feather-headdress/

Final Paper/Museum Review/Blog Article:
For this assignment, students will select a single museum exhibition. Students will briefly study this institution and exhibition (on-line or in person), interview the curator (via email), locate reviews of this exhibition (if available), and gather more background history. See this example on the Penn Museum Blog for inspiration: https://www.penn.museum/blog/museum/moundbuilders-a-physical-reflection-of-cultural-significance/

Students will write a final paper in the form of a 4-5 page (minimum 1,500 words) article/review of this museum and exhibition, focusing on: content, themes, audience, message, design and physical structure, cultural representations, language, interpretive strategies, etc.

Grading Assessments:
Students will be graded and assessed on class activities as follows: individual contributions to weekly discussion posts (25%); museum study paper #1 (20%); attendance and participation in class discussions (20%); object study, research, interpretation, and blog writing (25%); museum exhibition review (10%).

A = 94-100   A- = 90-93   B+ = 87-89   B = 83-86   B- = 80-82   C+ = 77-79
C = 73-76   C- = 70-72   D+ = 67-69   D = 63-66   D- = 60-62   F = 59 or less
WEEK ONE: January 19, Introduction to the Anthropology of Museums

READING:
Read the syllabus and course guidelines posted to Canvas.

LECTURE: Museum Origins

WEEK TWO: January 26, Objects, Relations, and University Museums

READING:

DISCUSSION COMMENTS DUE JANUARY 25: OBJECTS, RELATIONS, AND UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS.

WEEK THREE: February 2, Cabinets of Curiosity

READING:

DISCUSSION COMMENTS DUE FEBRUARY 1: CABINETS OF CURIOUSITY.

WEEK FOUR: February 9, The “Science” of Museum Collection & Display

READING:

LECTURE: Representing Science in Museums

DISCUSSION COMMENTS DUE FEBRUARY 8: THE "SCIENCE" OF MUSEUM COLLECTION & DISPLAY.
Throughout late February and March - PENN MUSEUM OBJECT STUDY
Students will learn about curatorial storage and cataloging and display of objects in the Penn Museum Collections. Students will also learn about object handling techniques and begin object studies in the American Section of the Penn Museum.

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WEEK FIVE: February 16, Cataloguing and Curating Objects
READINGS:

Discussion Comments Due February 15: Cataloguing Culture.

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WEEK SIX: February 23, Histories of Collectors
READINGS:

LECTURE: Histories of Collecting and Displaying Native America

MUSEUM STUDY PAPER #1: ANTHROPOLOGIZING COLLECTORS – DUE MARCH 2
Discuss any one of the collectors from the Collecting Native America 1870-1960 textbook. Briefly discuss how this collector’s personal desires shaped their collections and influenced public perceptions of Native people, in general. For each collector, discuss how any one object they collected might be compared to a similar object currently on display in the Native American Voices exhibit at the Penn Museum. How were these two different styles of display intended to influence viewers’ perceptions of Native people and Native artistry? Format: 4-5 pages long, 11 pt Times Roman type, 1½ line spacing, minimum 1,500 words. Cite all sources in the text or in footnotes, and include a list of all references cited. Upload as a document to Assignments on Canvas.

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WEEK SEVEN: March 2, Exhibiting Native North America
READINGS:
OBJECT STUDY RESEARCH REPORT: Full Draft - DUE MARCH 16
Students will use notes from their object studies in the Penn Museum collections to consider the following questions: What information is available on the collections card, in the Penn Museum archives, or in museum publications? What have you learned from close material observations of this object, and what questions arise? Are there any comparable objects in the Penn Museum collection, or in other museums? How has knowledge of this object been constructed by the community of origin, by the collector, and by the museum? Draft a rough research report that includes transcriptions of your study notes, details from all relevant primary sources, citations to scholarly articles, and links to any relevant on-line sources. This will form the foundation for your Research Blog Article.

WEEK NINE: March 16, Reconsidering Curatorial Knowledges
READINGS:

Discussion Comments Due March 15: Reconsidering Curatorial Knowledges.

OBJECT STUDY BLOG ARTICLE: First Draft - DUE MARCH 23
Students will use notes from their Research Report to compose a rough draft of the object study research blog post. This draft should be approximately 1,000-1,500 words, matching the format of the Penn Museum Blog Beyond the Gallery Walls. These articles must include, at minimum, discussions of origins, materials, technology, provenance, and style. Cite relevant primary sources, scholarly citations, and links to any relevant on-line sources. Once the first draft of each Research Blog Article is complete, the Professor and TA will work with each Student to assist in editing and formatting these for possible publication on-line in Beyond the Gallery Walls.

WEEK TEN: March 23, Restitution, Decolonization, and Museum Futures
READINGS:
Affairs, Ministère de la Culture, and Vincent Négri, Jurist and researcher at the Institut des sciences sociales du politique, UMR 7220 (CNRS – ENS Paris Saclay – Université Paris Nanterre), 1-5, 27-42. Translated by Drew S. Burk.

FILM:  

**Discussion Comments Due March 22: Restitution, Decolonization, and Museum Futures.**

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**WEEK ELEVEN: March 30, Objects of Scientific Desire**

**READINGS:**  
--- **CAUTION:** These readings include insensitive images of human skeletal remains.---  

**Discussion Comments Due March 29: Objects of Scientific Desire.**

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**OBJECT STUDY BLOG: FINAL DRAFT DUE APRIL 6**

Set up an appointment with the Professor and TA to work on editing your research report notes from your object study into the form of a blog article (1,000-1,500 words) that includes relevant primary sources, citations to scholarly articles, and links to any relevant on-line sources. See Penn Museum Blog for examples.

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**WEEK TWELVE: April 6, Repatriation Concerns**

**READINGS:**  
**LECTURE:** NAGPRA Protocols and Challenges  
**Discussion Comments Due April 5: Repatriation Concerns.**

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**WEEK THIRTEEN: April 13, Decolonizing Museum Futures**

**READINGS:**  


**Discussion Comments Due April 12: Decolonizing Museum Futures.**

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**WEEK FOURTEEN:** April 20, Decolonizing Cultural Heritage

**READINGS:**


**Discussion Comments Due April 19: Decolonizing Cultural Heritage.**

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**MUSEUM STUDY PAPER #2: MUSEUM REVIEW - DUE APRIL 26**

For the final paper, students will select a single exhibition at any museum that showcases people of color. Students will briefly study this institution and exhibition (on-line), interview the curator or another relevant museum employee if possible (via email), locate reviews of this exhibition (if available), and gather more background history. Write a review of this museum and this exhibition, focusing on: content, themes, audience, message, design and physical structure, cultural representations, language, interpretive strategies, etc. Students may also contextualize this exhibition vis-à-vis other museums and exhibitions visited or read about in this class. Format: 11 pt Times Roman type, 1½ line spacing, minimum 1,500 words (approx. 3.5-5 pages). Cite all sources in the text or in footnotes, and include a list of all references cited. Upload as a document to Assignments on Canvas. See examples on the Penn Museum Blog for inspiration. More details on this assignment can be found in the *Museum Exhibition Review Guidelines* document.

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**WEEK FIFTEEN, April 27, Student Presentations**

**LAST DAY OF CLASSES – STUDENT BLOG & MUSEUM REVIEW PRESENTATIONS**

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**WEEK SIXTEEN**

**FINAL DRAFTS OF MUSEUM REVIEWS - DUE MAY 4**

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**NOTE:** The schedule for this class may change to include guest speakers, virtual museum visits, or other special events. Any changes will be announced in class and posted to Canvas.