

REL 490 Senior Capstone Seminar: "What's in an Archive?"
Wednesday, 3:30-5:50, Presidents Hall 210
Spring 2021

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"what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way."
—Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

Course Description:

In this senior capstone course for REL majors, we will be talking about the way scholars approach and deploy archival research. Specific questions within archive theory relevant to this class include: What kind of authority can an archive be said to have in scholarly renderings of the past? How do contemporary interventions like media studies and posthumanism complicate our understanding of archives as stable artifacts? Looking at archives as exercises in present-day curation rather than windows into history, we will discuss archives as sites of productive tension for social theorists invested in contextual specificity.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students in REL 490 will:

- 1) Learn basic trends in archive theory
- 2) Apply contemporary media studies to historical analysis
- 3) Gain skills in close reading and apply them to archive curation
- 4) Create their own scholarly archives and reflect on the editorial process

Texts and Web Resources:

[recommended] Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (2017). **available electronically as an e-book through Gorgas Library.

Statement on Academic Misconduct:

All academic work must be the product of the student submitting it. Plagiarizing the work of someone else (quoting or summarizing another person's ideas or intellectual labor without giving them credit through proper quotations, citations, and acknowledgment) is a serious offense. Suspected cases of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. You are bound by UA's Honor Code in this class.

Statement on COVID-19:

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. In the interest of your health and safety and that of all UA students, faculty and staff, the University reserves the right to change the mode of instruction or schedule of instruction at any time, based upon prevailing public health and other guidance. While the method of delivery may change, educational instruction and opportunities will continue. As such, the University will not provide a refund of tuition, in whole or in-part, based on any such changes. Detailed information on changes in format or schedule can be found at <https://studentaccounts.ua.edu/> and <https://financialaid.ua.edu/>.

All students must be familiar with and abide by the requirements outlined in the UA Return Plan | UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan. Students must (1) wear a mask or face covering at all times while participating in face-to-face class; (2) adhere to social distancing standards; and (3) comply with all other health and safety restrictions. If a student refuses to comply with the requirements, the student will be asked to leave the class and reported for a conduct violation. Unless a student has an exemption from the requirement to wear a face covering, (more information can be found at <http://ods.ua.edu/covid-19-disability/>), the student will be reported to Student Life for further disciplinary action. More information on these requirements and UA Healthcheck system and screening can be found at healthinfo.ua.edu/returnplan. You are expected to visit the site and comply with all noted requirements related to in-person class attendance.

****how this affects REL:** See [this blog post](#) by Department Chair Russell McCutcheon, outlining REL's approach and response to UA policy and safety measures.

****how this affects our class:** For as long as the numbers of COVID-19 cases in Alabama remain a concern (and since UA's mandated social distancing guidelines limit the amount of students who can meet in our reserved classroom), we will begin the semester by meeting together synchronously on Zoom during class time each Wednesday. If/When possible (with close attention to what the numbers of cases are doing), we will hopefully move to in-person meetings for our full synchronous class time (even if not necessarily in the classroom), using Zoom as backup when needed. Regardless and for the time being, there will also be an in-person, socially distant component of the course in the following ways:

- I will have an office hour each week before our class begins (so, from 2-3). During this time, students can visit with me face-to-face (with 6 feet distance and with masks).
- I will meet with the whole class in person (outside, distanced, and masked) at least once each month (as stated above, this can happen more frequently if students wish and weather permitting).

To this end, all students must have a mask ready for use with any in-person meeting, as well as the technology that allows full participation in online settings. Details will be discussed on the first day of class. Meanwhile, I am happy to meet with any student individually outside my regular office hour as needed. If you wish to set up an in-person meeting at a different time, just let me know, and we'll make arrangements.

Assessments:

- **Participation:** You are expected to attend every class, arrive on time, and contribute substantively to the discussion in a way that demonstrates your having read the assigned material. At the end of each class meeting, I will record a participation score for each student: either a 1, 5, or 10. 1 = not having read the material and/or no participation; 5 = minimal participation; 10 = substantive contribution.
**note on absences:* After one absence, a student's final grade will be reduced by one letter for each additional absence. In other words, if your grade average was A at the end of the semester but you had three absences, your final grade for the course would be C. If the absences are beyond your control due to health or family reasons, let me know as soon as possible. You remain responsible for anything that you miss in class, including announcements.
- **Collaborative Assignment 1:** In pairs, read entries on archive in Derrida's *Archive Fever* (<https://returntocinder.com/motif/archive/sources/AF>). Based on these entries, write a paragraph description of Derrida's approach to the archive (like you would see in a museum). Specific guidelines will be given in advance of the due date.
- **Collaborative Assignment 2:** In pairs, choose an event/figure/phenomenon from the past (broadly construed) whose archive is complicated but whose cultural narrative is simplified. Record a conversation together that discusses the consensus narrative, some reasons you think that narrative is so prevalent, and some factors that complicate that narrative. Specific guidelines will be given in advance of the due date.
- **Notebook:** Record at least one entry (in any form) each week based on the readings/discussions. Include one question or theme you'd like us to take up in that week's conversation.
**I will do two checks of the notebook at intervals during the semester to keep everyone on track.*
- **Presentation:** Once through the semester, you will lead our class discussion by presenting your notebook's entry/ies for that week. Your opening presentation should last about 10 minutes, and then you will play a central role in keeping the discussion going.
- **Final Project:** With Adobe Creative Cloud (can be installed on your PC and/or accessed through your phone—login with crimson email and mybama username/password), use Adobe Scan and Adobe Acrobat DC to create a portfolio/archive from pages in your notebook. It needs to be no more than 10 pages. Include an Introduction of 2-3 pages that discusses your editorial choices in compiling your archive. Specific guidelines will be given in advance of the due date.

Grading

Final grades are calculated out of 1,000 total possible points broken down as follows:

- Participation 15% (150 points)
- Collaborative Assignment 1 10% (100 points)
- Collaborative Assignment 2 10% (100 points)
- Notebook 30% (300 points)
- Presentation/Discussion leading 10% (100 points)
- Final Project 25% (250 points)

Consultations/Safe Zone:

All students are encouraged to make an appointment and/or contact me by email for assistance or with any questions. Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate routine absences. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance my ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you. I am a Safe Zone Ally, one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

- The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.

Classroom Environment:

In this small group setting, students are responsible for contributing to both their own learning experiences and the learning experiences of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the learning process, any behavior that creates an uncomfortable learning environment will not be tolerated. This includes interrupting others while they are talking, carrying on conversations separate from the class discussion, or making comments that could be perceived as offensive in terms of race, gender identification, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, etc. Please make every effort to maintain an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing and responding to ideas.

Disability Accommodation:

If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 348-4285 or visit Houser Hall, Suite 1000, to register for services.

UA Severe Weather Protocol:

UA's primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at www.ua.edu. In the event of an emergency, students should consult this site for further directions. In the event of an emergency, I will provide additional course information via email. If you have not done so already, please set up your weather advisory through Connect-ED--faculty, staff and students (sign up on myBama). Alternatively, you can listen to weather advisory broadcasts over WVUA 90.7 FM, Alabama Public Radio 91.5 FM or use WVUA 7 Storm Watch, which provides a free service you can subscribe to that allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail, pager or cell phone.

Calendar

(subject to minor changes, depending on the course our conversations take)

January

- 13 Archive free association; what types are there, where do we find them, who writes them
- 20 problem of the “obvious archive”
**You’re Wrong About* episode
- *Judith Butler, “Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia” (1993)
- 27 *Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” (1967)
- *Michel Foucault, from “The Statement and the Archive” (Part III of *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, 1972)

February

- 3 *Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message” (1964)
<https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/mcluhan.mediummessage.pdf>
- *Dominic Pettman, “Twenty Theses on Posthumanism” (2017)
<https://publicseminar.org/2017/03/twenty-theses-on-posthumanism-political-affect-and-proliferation/>
- 10 Hayden White, “Historicism, History, and the Imagination” (from *Tropics of Discourse*, 1978)
***Collaborative assignment 1 due/discussion** (<https://returntocinder.com/>)
- 17 Sarah Marshall, “Remote Control: Tonya Harding, Nancy Kerrigan, and the Spectacles of Female Power and Pain” (2014)
<https://believermag.com/remote-control/>
- 24 Joan Wallach Scott, “Women’s History” (from *Gender and the Politics of History*, 1988, 2018)

March

- 3 Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Taste of the Archive” (2012)
***Collaborative assignment 2 due**
- 10 Ethan Kleinberg, excerpt from *Haunting History* (2017)
***Collaborative assignment follow-up**

Case study: slavery archives

- 17 Stephen Best, excerpt from *None Like Us* (2018)

(all readings for the next two weeks come from a special issue of Social Text, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2015).

24 Laura Helton, et al., "The Question of Recovery: An Introduction"

31 Lisa Lowe, "History Hesitant"

April

7 *Vincent Brown, "Mapping a Slave Revolt: Visualizing Spatial History through the Archives of Slavery"

*Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "By Design: Remapping the Colonial Archive"

14 Jennifer L. Morgan, "Archives and Histories of Racial Capitalism: An Afterword"

21 ***Final project due, discussion**

Final grades due: May 4