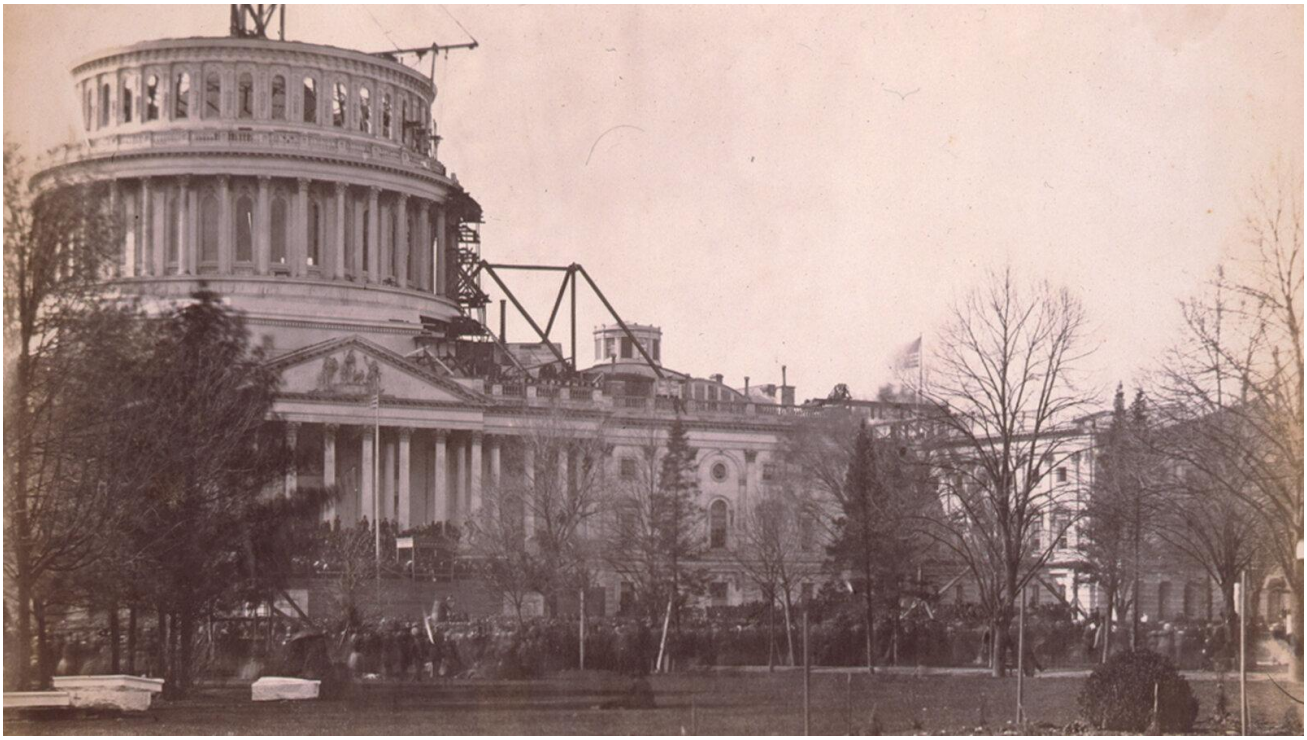
The Politics of National Memory



Course Information
PSCI 4373
The Politics of National Memory
Archer Center

Fall 2026

Lecturer Contact Information

Lecturer (Anacostia): **Prof. Irene Newman, Ph.D.**
Email: Irene.Newman@UTDallas.edu
Office hours: By appointment

Lecturer (Brookland): **Prof. Mary Nugent, Ph.D.**
Email: Mary.Nugent@UTDallas.edu
Phone: 802-777-0654
Office hours: By appointment

Lecturer (Capitol): **Prof. Shema Mbyirukira, JD**
Email: Shema.Mbyirukira@UTDallas.edu
Phone: 571-214-4385
Office hours: By appointment

Lead Instructor (Dupont): **Derek O'Leary, Ph.D.**
Email Address: Derek.O'Leary@UTDallas.edu
Office hours: Monday to Wednesday, 5-6 PM, and by appointment

We enthusiastically encourage you to meet with the faculty—both your and the other lecturers—in office hours throughout the semester. All faculty are available to meet by appointment, either individually or with a group of fellows, to discuss the course as well as your academic and career development. Please reach out to faculty by email to schedule a time to meet virtually or in-person.

Note: Please use only your University of Texas at Dallas account to email Archer Center faculty.

Course Description

Course overview: This course approaches the archives, monuments, memorials, museums, and other sites of memory across Washington, D.C. as a classroom to examine the stories that the United States has told about itself. In four course modules, we will explore these sites and analyze the historical context, ideological structures, and political stakes behind these narratives. This enables us to engage with difficult but essential civic questions related to our historical legacy, national identity, and responsibilities to each other. In doing so, you will cultivate a lifelong relationship with the nation's capital; strengthen your ability to make sense of historical sites and narratives in and beyond Washington, D.C.; sharpen your critical thinking and communication skills, and enhance your confidence and effectiveness in civic dialogue.

Course format: In addition to engaging in weekly lectures, discussions, and activities with the entire class, you will meet each week with your assigned Neighborhood Group and lecturer. Each lecturer leads a Neighborhood Group of twelve fellows. Your

assigned lecturer will assess your weekly engagement and submitted assignments while supporting your overall success in the course.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

- Employ your historical skillset to analyze the creation, meaning, and impact of complex sites of memory.
- Analyze how historical narratives have intersected with politics and important policy questions throughout U.S. history.
- Engage constructively in civic dialog about how we understand, represent, and respond to the nation's historical legacy.

Calendar of Classes and Assignments

I. Text

How are we "doubly historical"—
both actors in history and narrators of history?

What do the nation's archives include and exclude,
reveal and withhold— and why?

How does our sense of history shape politics,
and politics our sense of history?

SESSION	DATE	LOCATION and SPEAKER	ASSIGNMENT	READING
Week 1: Our Archives	**I.**	**I.**	By Monday, August 31, submit your "Our Archives" assignment in Canvas. Complete your state-of-semester survey by Sunday the 6th.	Chapter 1 in Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (1995), pgs. 1-30. ~60 minutes.

Week 2: Founding Documents	**I.**		Prior to class on Thursday, reflect in your journal: *How was your experience at the National Archives, including in Rotunda of the Charters of Freedom? How would you describe your relationship with the U.S. founding documents—the Declaration of Independence in particular? What responsibility should the federal government have toward these documents?*	Reading for Thursday: Jack Rakove, *The Annotated U. S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence*, pgs. 74-101. In-class readings: "Petition for Freedom to the Massachusetts Council and the House of Representatives" (1777). Texas Declaration of Independence (1836). "Declaration of Sentiments" in *Report of the Woman's Rights Convention* (1848). Proclamation of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1945). Declaration of Indian Purpose (1961). 250th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Declaration of Independence (2026).

Week 3: State Secrets, National Interests		Guest speaker: Michael Thomas, Director of the Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO)	Bring your reflection journal to class. **Assignment 1 due Sunday, September 20 at 11:59 PM (Tutorial essays due September 27.)**	Reading: "The Protection of Classified Information: The Legal Framework" (Congressional Research Service, 2023). Oona Hathaway, "Keeping the Wrong Secrets," *Foreign Affairs* (2022).

Hands-on History: In the Archives (optional)

Get first-hand experience examining an archival collection at the Library of Congress. Meet Dr. O'Leary outside the Manuscript Reading Room in the James Madison building at the Library of Congress. Please sign up here if you will attend; space is limited, so we'll schedule additional dates/times as needed. We'll get coffee and debrief at le Bon Café afterward.

Before you visit the Manuscript Reading Room, you must get a (free) Library of Congress reader's card.

II. Stone

What is the purpose of a monument? What place should monuments occupy in the U.S.?

How do monuments influence our beliefs, identity, society, and politics?

Who does and who should have the authority and the legitimacy to create, alter, or remove monuments?

SESSION	DATE	LOCATION and SPEAKER	ASSIGNMENT	READING

Week 4: Contested Monuments		Lecturer: Prof. Mbyirukira	Please bring your reflection journal to the park.	*Read:* Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (2005), chapter 3, pgs. 76-106. ~60 minutes. Chapter 2 in *Monument Wars* by Kirk Savage (2009), pgs. 63-89. ~60 minutes.
Week 5: Monumental loss			Bring your reflection notebook to the memorial.	*Read:* Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, chapter 2, pgs. 44-84. ~60 minutes. Maya Lin, "Making the Memorial" (*New York Review of Books*, 2000).
Week 6: Women: A part and apart		Lecturer: Dr. Nugent	Prior to class, select any monumental or memorial site in the city and reflect on these prompts in your journal: *Who is represented in the monument or memorial—men, women, both? Describe the materials, style, and composition*	*Read*: Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens* (1985), pgs. 3-18. ~30 minutes. Public Law 116-217 (2020). ~Five minutes. Executive Order on Recognizing and Honoring Women's History (2024). ~10 minutes.

			used to depict people in the monument or memorial. What does the monument or memorial communicate about the attributes, identities, roles, and historical significance of men and of women? **Assignment 2 due Sunday, October 11 at 11:59 PM (Tutorial essays due October 18.)**	Public Law 118-226 (2025): "Women's Suffrage National Monument Location Act" (2025). ~Five minutes

Hands-on History at the Columbus Foundation (optional)

Examine the Christopher Columbus Memorial Fountain in front of Union Station, followed by coffee and discussion nearby at Ebenezer's Coffeehouse.

III. Space

How do museums both reflect and influence the course of history?

What purpose should museums serve for the public?

How should the content, message, and experience of museums be designed—and by whom?

SESSION	DATE	LOCATION and SPEAKER	ASSIGNMENT	READING
Week 7: Exhibiting national history			Prior to class, visit one of the Smithsonian museums and reflect on this prompt in your journal: *How does the museum organize objects and information, and how do visitors engage with the museum? What historical narratives and other meaning does the museum communicate? To what extent does the museum accomplish its purpose?*	*Read:* Edward Linenthal, "Anatomy of a Controversy," in History Wars: The Enola Gay and other Battles for the American Past (1996).
Week 8: Possessing and Dispossessing History		Guest speakers from the National Museum of the American Indian	Prior to class, visit the National Museum of the American Indian and reflect in your journal on the following prompts: *Describe your experience moving through the space of the museum. How do the design, collections, and interpretative materials compare with*	*Read*: "Repatriation of Native American Remains and Cultural Items: Requirements for Agencies and Institutions" (Congressional Research Service, 2024). ~10 minutes 25 USC Ch. 32: Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation. ~15 minutes

			other museums you have visited? How do we determine who has the authority to own and make meaning from historical objects? How would you advise the Smithsonian to approach the question of repatriating Native remains and objects?	20 USC Ch. 3, Subchapter XIII: National Museum of the American Indian. ~15 minutes. Philip Deloria, "The New World of the Indigenous Museum," *Daedalus* (2018). ~30 minutes
Week 9: Competing curations			**Third Assignment due Friday, November 6 at 11:59 PM (Tutorial essays due November 8.)**	*Read:* Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" (1882). ~45 minutes. Benjamin Filene, "Weaving a National Story as the Nation Frays: The National Museum of American History." *Curator* (2026), pgs. 248–253. ~30 minutes Executive summary of *Saving America's Story* (2026). ~15 minutes. *Optional viewing:* House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform hearing on

				"Rewriting American History: Examining the Smithsonian's Efforts to Reshape the Past" (July 2026)

Hands-on History: Curating History (optional)

Examine the depiction of history at Tudor Place in Georgetown, led by curator Amy Durbin and Professor Cassandra Good, experts on this site. Please sign up here if you will attend. We will cover the cost of admission and hot chocolate at Burdick's afterward.

IV: Voice

As a medium of recording and recounting history, what distinguishes the spoken word?

How does our sense of history appear in political discourse and influence policymaking?

SESSION	DATE	LOCATION and SPEAKER	ASSIGNMENT	READING
Week 10: Historical Consciousness and Political Discourse			Please bring your reflection journal to class.	Seth Cotlar and Richard Ellis, *Historian in Chief* (2019), Introduction, pgs. 1-26. ~60 minutes
Week 11: Speaking History		Lecturer: Dr. Newman	Please bring your reflection journal to class.	*Read:* Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different" (1979). ~30 minutes

				Kariann Akemi Yokota, “Oral Histories as Living Histories” (2002). ~30 minutes
Week 12: Local voices, national narratives			Please bring your reflection journal. **Fourth assignment due by 11:59 PM on Sunday, November 22 at 11:59 PM. (Tutorial essays due November 29.)**	*Read*: Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City* (2017), chapter 12, pgs. 355-389. *Peruse selections from*: DC Oral History Collaborative: “DC Council 50th Anniversary of Home Rule”

Hands-on History: (optional)

Meet at the Archer Center to participate in the recording of an oral history, led by Prof. Newman, with Archer Center co-founder Don Carlson.

SESSION	DATE	LOCATION and SPEAKER	ASSIGNMENT	READING
Week 13: Thinking and Working Historically			Please bring your reflection journal. Complete your end-of-semester survey by Sunday the 29th.	*Read:* Ernest May and Richard Neustadt, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (2011), chapter 1.

Pre and post-semester survey (10 points)

During the first week and the final week of the semester, you will submit a self-assessment and reflection survey related to our course objectives in Canvas.

The start-of-semester survey is due on Sunday, September 6 (5 points).
The end-of-semester survey is due on Sunday, November 29 (5 points).
You must submit these on time to receive credit.

Assignments and Engagement (80 points)

After each of the four course modules—Text, Stone, Space, Voice—you will submit a short assignment. Each assignment requires you to synthesize and apply what you have learned during that module.
Your grade for each will reflect both your submitted assignment and your classroom engagement during the class sessions for that module (15 points for the submitted assignment, 5 points for classroom engagement). Each assignment will be assessed according to a rubric, which you should consult as you develop your assignment.
For each assignment, we will provide guidance on the appropriate use, if any, of AI tools.
1. Assignment #1 (Text): Due Sunday, September 20, 11:59 PM (20 points)
2. Assignment #2 (Stone): Due Sunday, October 11, 11:59 PM (20 points)
3. Assignment #3 (Space): Due Sunday, November 1, 11:59 PM (20 points)
4. Assignment #4 (Voice): Due Sunday, November 22, 11:59 PM (20 points)

Tutorial (10 points)

For one of your four written assignments, you and two fellows in your Neighborhood group will meet with your instructor for a guided, in-depth conversation, or tutorial, about your essay.

First, you will submit your essay by the due date for the assignment, on Sunday. During the following week, you three will meet for an hour-long tutorial with your instructor to closely discuss the ideas in your essays. Based on the discussion, you will submit a revised version of your essay by that Sunday. Your grade will reflect your engagement in the tutorial and revision of your essay.