Seminar on Public Monuments
Sarah Blake McHam
Spring 2012

This seminar will address the issues surrounding public monuments from the nineteenth century through the present day. It will focus on sculptures commissioned to commemorate major events in the United States, for example, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, but will also consider some important recent European examples, particularly those memorializing the Holocaust. The location of these monuments in the streets and squares of cities and their construction in permanent materials like stone and steel convey official sanction and the goal of lasting into posterity. Their public situation, durability, and universal legibility as images mean that they play a powerful role in creating viewers’ memories of what they commemorate.

Until the unveiling of Maya Lin’s *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in the early 1980s, conventional wisdom held that the public monument was a dead form, killed by the lack of common cultural associations and bonds among the citizenry. That evaluation has radically changed, and a large group of memorials have been built in the intervening decades. They mark a rupture with the tradition of public monuments that began as early as ancient Greece and Egypt. Recent monuments no longer commemorate gods and heroes – who can agree on them? -- but instead victims. Each has occasioned vehement controversies about who and what should be remembered and honored, how the event and persons should be interpreted, where the monument should be located, and what advantages accrue to the monument’s commissioners from these choices. At stake are crucial questions surrounding national identity and the shaping of the historical record.

Through the discussion of weekly readings about a selected group of recent memorials, the seminar will investigate how and why these groundbreaking changes occurred. There will be two class trips to study a group of public monuments on site. Students will be expected to prepare the readings, and ultimately to select a specific monument that they can study in person and do research on by reading original sources and documents, for example, through the Smithsonian inventory of American monuments and at the archives of local historical societies. They will then present their research to the class as a short oral report, and write it up as a 10-page term paper.

Week I (January 23) – Introduction to Issues concerning Public Monuments

The statue of George Washington by Horatio Greenough compared to the Richmond Monument to Washington and to the Washington Monument in DC.

Week II (January 30) – The Roles of Memory and Historical Contingency in Defining National Values

Readings for Discussion:

Editors’ Introduction and chapter 1 and 2 in *Critical Issues in Public Art* ... by Kirk Savage, “The Self-Made Monument: George Washington and the Fight to Erect a National Memorial,” 5-32 and Sally Webster, “Writing History/Painting History; Early Chronicles of the United States and Pictures for the Capitol Rotunda,” 33-44

Week III (February 6) – The Roles of Memory and History in Constructing National Identity and Defining National Values (and how public response affects the identity of a monument and the values it projects)
Readings for Discussion:

Week IV (February 13) - The Roles of Memory and History in Constructing National Identity and Defining National Values
Readings for Discussion:
Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves. Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*, 89-128 (Freedman’s Memorial to Lincoln; 129-61 (Lee Equestrian on Monument Ave., Richmond); 162-208 (Saint-Gaudens & McKim, Shaw Memorial, Boston Public Gardens)

FEBRUARY 26 – TRIP TO WASHINGTON, DC

Week V (February 27) – Maya Lin Video
Readings for Discussion:
Elizabeth Hess, “A Tale of Two Memorials....,” *Art in America*, 71 (April 1983), 121-7 (PDF)

Week VI (March 5) – Problems and Resources re NJ Public Monuments
Readings for Discussion:
*Public Sculpture in New Jersey: Monuments to Collective Identity*
Discussion of issues and research problems concerning NJ monuments

Week VII (March 19) – Iwo Jima Memorial, Korean Veterans’ Memorial, and Kent State Memorial
Readings for Discussion:
Harriet Senie, “Memorials and Monuments Reconsidered,” *Contemporary Public Sculpture*, 18-60 (book on reserve)

Week VIII (March 26) -- Holocaust Memorials
Readings for Discussion:
James E. Young, “Holocaust Memorials in America…,” in *Critical Issues in Public Art*, 57-70
James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 1-15; 283-349 (book on reserve)
Matthew Baigell, “Segal’s Holocaust Memorial,” *Art in America* (Summer 1983), 134-6 (PDF)

Week X (April 2) -- World War II Memorial and Martin Luther King Memorial
Readings for Discussion:
*www.savethesmall.org/updates/20040624.html*
*www.mlkmemorial.org*

Week XI (April 9) – The World Trade Center Memorial and the Martin Luther King Memorial
Readings for Discussion:
*www.mlkmemorial.org*
APRIL 15 – VISIT TO NEW YORK CITY AND THE WTC

Week XII (April 23) -- Reports

Week XIII (April 30) -- Reports