Introduction

This research seminar will explore the cultural and political history of death and memorializing in America, from the colonial period to the present. How people understand death and accommodate it can tell us much about their lives and the historical worlds they lived in. Our attention will focus on cultural and religious ideas of death and dying, the rites of passage that mark the end of life, and the memorial practices that seek to remember or forget the dead--keeping them near or, alternately, seeking "closure" and distance.

Death is a historical phenomenon--although pervasive and unavoidable, it has not been understood or experienced in a uniform fashion over time. Death has visited some times and places more heavily than others; ideas about death, rites surrounding it, and the memorials and monuments commemorating it have varied over time and place. Death and mortal remains are also political, as controversies and reflections about the meaning of departed heroes and martyrs, sacred historical sites (such as battlefields or national cemeteries), and holidays such as Memorial Day suggest.
Common readings and weekly discussions will probe these themes, while individually students will define their own research projects, conduct research in primary sources, write original historical essays, participate in critique sessions, and revise and rewrite their work.

Students will have the freedom to examine a wide array of topics, which can center on any period or place in American history, as long as they relate to the seminar's themes. They might range from an examination of Indian burial mounds to a study of the recent controversy over "Kennewick Man," . . . to a historical essay on graveyards or a particular cemetery, . . . to a historical analysis of funeral orations, . . . to a historical inquiry into the changing meaning of memorial art or monuments, . . . to an answer to the old question, "Who's Buried in Grant's Tomb?" The possibilities are virtually boundless.

**Assigned Books**


**Course Calendar**

Week 1 (September 26): Introduction.
Reading (hand-outs): newspaper stories.

Week 2 (October 3): Death and Memory in American History.
**Assignment:** Bring to class and be prepared to discuss briefly a list of potential essay topics, specifying potential primary sources.

Week 3 (October 10): Death and Mortal Remains in the Early American Republic.
**Assignment:** Present and submit short paper prospectus and preliminary bibliography.

Week 4 (October 17): Death, Memory, and Memorializing in 19th-Century America.

Week 5 (October 24): 20th-Century America.
**Assignment:** Present working outlines of papers to class.

Week 6 (October 31): Mourning, Victimization, and the Politics of Mortal Remains.
Week 7 (November 7): Writing History.
Discussion of individual research and writing projects.

**Paper Drafts due Friday November 10.**

Week 8 (May 18): Discussion of Paper Drafts.
Students will read each other's drafts and prepare brief, constructive (written) critiques, to be presented in class. Note: it may be necessary to schedule additional time during week 8 to complete our critique and discussion of individual papers.

Week 9 (November 21): No Class.
Revise papers for final submission.

Week 10 (November 28): Concluding Discussion of Death and Memory in American History.

**Final Papers due Friday December 1.**