

Abstract

This course presents “the museum” as an object of ethnographic inquiry, examining it as a social institution embedded within a larger field of cultural heritage that is perpetually under negotiation. We reflect on how museum principles of classification and practices of collection and exhibition have influenced how knowledge has been formed, presented and represented. This class examines the role of museums as significant social actors in broadly anthropological debates around power, materiality, value, representation, culture, circulation, history, and nationalism. The museum is not simply a repository of arts, cultures, histories, or scientific knowledges, but also a site of creativity within a complex field of social relations.

Materials contributed by Christopher D. Berk

Lecturer

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These materials are from my first time teaching a 2000-level course about Museum Studies in Anthropology in Spring Semester 2020 at Auburn University. The course was with 25 undergraduate students, the majority either Anthropology majors or minors.

This discussion-based course was organized around major topics and issues within museum anthropology. It focused mostly on concepts and ways of thinking about things in museum collections and worked in tandem with the more practice-oriented Curation course taught by my colleague Dr. Meghan Buchanan. I composed discussion prompt questions for each assigned reading. Students were required to submit a specific minimum number of short, informal responses before each class meeting with assigned readings. These prompts help guide student’s readings, highlighting what to focus on, and serve as foundations for class conversations. I also had several in-class reflections on specific readings.

I included two film viewings as part of this course (see syllabus). These films provided students with valuable examples of ethnographic filmmaking and approaches to materiality and culture. Students were required to compose short film reviews for each, focusing on how they related to, or perhaps illuminated, course topics/readings, and their personal reactions and thoughts.

A great deal of the course’s execution was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, as our course did not return to in-person instruction after our Spring Break. However, many of the short assignments included below were valuable and worked well. I’ve included the proposed final assignment, which had to pivot to a virtual exhibition review. It did not work as well as the original assignment would have. We were able to take our two local trips to university-affiliated museums.

Materials posted (from Spring 2020):

- 1) Syllabus with course readings and topics
- 2) Assignments
 - a. Museum Anthropologist Profile
 - b. Circulation
 - c. Final Written Assignment

- 3) Activities
 - a. Objects

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Anthropology 2600: Museum Studies in Anthropology
Spring 2020 Tuesday/Thursday 2-3:15pm Mell 4546

PROFESSOR: **Dr. Christopher Berk**

Course Description: This course presents “the museum” as an object of ethnographic inquiry, examining it as a social institution embedded within a larger field of cultural heritage that is perpetually under negotiation. We reflect on how museum principles of classification and practices of collection and exhibition have influenced how knowledge has been formed, presented and represented. This class examines the role of museums as significant social actors in broadly anthropological debates around power, materiality, value, representation, culture, circulation, history, and nationalism. The museum is not simply a repository of arts, cultures, histories, or scientific knowledges, but also a site of creativity within a complex field of social relations.

Objectives: Through lectures, readings, films, and class discussions, we will explore anthropology in and of museums. Students are expected to think critically and creatively and to talk in-depth with their classmates. Students will be evaluated in large-part through writing assignments that will develop their creative and critical thinking. Upon completion of the course, students will gain an understanding of the following methodological and thematic areas:

- 1) Students will consider the role of museums in society
- 2) The vibrant relationship between the history of museum anthropology and the anthropology of museums
- 3) Discover the histories of collection and how to “read” objects
- 4) How is meaning associated with objects (or groups of objects) constructed and how are they classified?
- 5) The complicated relationships between museums and source communities
- 6) Display and representation of culture for public viewing
- 7) The variety of career options in/about museums

Reading Schedule and Course Outline

Introductions

1/9 Introductions and Course Overview

The History of Museum Anthropology

1/14 Jenkins, David. 1994. “Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36 (2): 242-270.

Hochschild, Adam. 2020. “When Museums Have Ugly Pasts.” *The Atlantic* 325 (1): 90-97.

1/16 Shelton, Anthony. 2006. “Museums and Anthropologies: Practices and Narratives.” In *A Companion to Museum Studies*, S. Macdonald, ed., 64-80. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Boas, Franz. 1974 [1887]. “The Principles of Ethnological Classification.” In *A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911*, G. Stocking, ed., 61-66.

The Objects of Ethnography

- 1/21 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1998. "The Objects of Ethnography." In *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, 17-78. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1/23 Errington, Shelly. 1998. "Two Centuries of Progress." In *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress*, 1-45. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1/28 **Field Trip #1:** Auburn University Museum of Natural History
Museum Anthropologist Profile Due

Collecting Difference, Collecting Ourselves

- 1/30 Edwards, Elizabeth. 2001. "Re-enactment, Salvage Ethnography and Photography in the Torres Strait." In *Raw Histories: Photography, Anthropology and Museums*, 157-182. Oxford: Berg.
- 2/4 Clifford, James. 1988. "On Collecting Art and Culture." In *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, 215-251. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- 2/6 **Film:** Couple in the Cage (1993) (in-class)
Local Museum Assignment Due

Materiality, Movement, and "Reading" Objects

- 2/11 Ingold, Tim. 2009. "On Weaving a Basket." In *The Object Reader*, C. Candlin and R. Guins, eds., 80-91. New York: Routledge.
- Thomas, Nicholas. 1991. "Objects, Exchange, Anthropology." In *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*, 7-34. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- 2/13 Kopytoff, Igor. 1986. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process." In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, A. Appadurai, ed., 64-91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 2/18 **Film:** In and Out of Africa (1993) (in-class)
- 2/20 **Circulation Assignment Due**
- 2/25 **Field Trip #2:** Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art, Auburn University
- 2/27 **Objects Activity/Assignment Due (in-class)**

Heritage and Identity

- 3/3 Handler, Richard. 1991. "Who Owns the Past? History, Cultural Property, and the Logic of Possessive Individualism." In *The Politics of Culture*, B. Williams, ed., 63-74. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Macdonald, Sharon. 2003. "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities." *Museum and Society* 1 (1): 1-16.
- 3/5 Isaac, Gwyneira. 2015. "The Price of Knowledge and the Economies of Heritage in Zuni, New Mexico." In *Museum as Process: Translating Local and Global Knowledges*, R. Silverman, ed., 152-168. London: Routledge.

3/9-3/13 **Spring Break — NO CLASSES**

The Contested Museum

3/17 Dubin, Steven. 2006. "Incivilities in Civil(-ized) Places: "Culture Wars" in Comparative Perspective." In *A Companion to Museum Studies*, S. Macdonald, ed., 477-493. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Dubin, Steven. 1999. "A Matter of Perspective: Revisionist History and *The West as America*." In *Displays of Power: Controversy in the American Museum from the Enola Gay to Sensation*, 152-185. New York: New York University Press.

3/19 Ruffins, Fath Davis. 2006. "Revisiting the Old Plantation: Reparations, Reconciliation, and Museumizing American Slavery." In *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Karp, Kratz, Szwaja, and Ybarra-Frausto, eds., 394-434. Durham: Duke University Press.

3/24 **Film:** The Rape of Europa (in-class)
Final Written Assignment Overview Due

Decolonizing Museums

3/26 Clifford, James. 1997. "Museums as Contact Zones." In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 188-219, 360-363. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

3/31 Mithlo, Nancy. 2004. "Red Man's Burden: The Politics of Inclusion in Museum Settings." *The American Indian Quarterly* 28 (3&4): 743-763.

Ames, Michael. 1992. "Museums in the Age of Deconstruction." In *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, 151-168, 173-174. Vancouver: UBC Press.

4/2 Berk, Christopher. 2015. "This Exhibition is About Now: Tasmanian Aboriginality at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery." *Museum Anthropology* 38 (2): 149-162.

Museums, Source Communities, Collaboration

4/7 Thorner, Sabra, Fran Edmonds, Maree Clarke, and Paola Balla. 2018. "Maree's Backyard: Intercultural Collaborations for Indigenous Sovereignty in Melbourne." *Oceania* 88 (3): 269-291. Video Conference with Sabra Thorner

4/9 Brown, Alison. 2017. "Co-Authoring Relationships: Blackfoot Collections, UK Museums, and Collaborative Practice." *Collaborative Anthropologies* 9 (1/2): 117-148.

Virtual Exhibition Assignment Due

Collaboration in Action

4/14 Henare, Amiria. 2004. "Rewriting the Script: Te Papa Tongarewa the Museum of New Zealand." *Social Analysis* 48 (1): 55-63.

Morphy, Howard. 2006. "Sites of Persuasion: Yingapungapu at the National Museum of Australia." In *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Karp, Kratz, Szwaja, and Ybarra-Frausto, eds., 469-499. Durham: Duke University Press.

4/16 **Film:** Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole (2003) (in-class)
Film Reviews Due

Future of Museum Anthropology

4/21 Bell, Joshua. 2017. "A Bundle of Relations: Collections, Collecting, and Communities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 46: 241-259.

Greene, Candace. 2015. "Museum Anthropology." In *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, R. Scott and S. Kosslyn, eds. 1-15. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

4/23 Final Thoughts

4/30 **Final Written Assignment Due at 5pm**

Syllabus is subject to change.

ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES: For this assignment you are to choose a scholar who works in museums (preferably an anthropologist or related field) and provide the following information (**100-150 words each for #2-5; roughly 3-4 total pages**):

- 1) **Name, Affiliation, and Job Title:** Who are they? Where do they work? In what capacity? What is their contact information?
- 2) **Research and Expertise:** What is their research and area of expertise? How does it relate to larger course topics and themes? Where were they trained? Please provide information from their C.V. if you can find it.
- 3) **Publications:** Provide the citations for two publications.
- 4) **Web Resources and Why You Chose Them:** Please identify a museum anthropologist who interests you. Summarize the reasons why you chose this individual. Finally, include the web resources you used to answer these
- 5) **Additional Points of Interest**

Your profile is due project description is due on **Tuesday January 28th at 2pm**. Responses are to be submitted as an electronic copy on our course canvas site. Your response should be **double-spaced, in Times New Roman font (12 point), and with one-inch margins**. Your profile grade will be reduced by 1 point for every 24 hours that it is late. Responses will not be accepted 3 days (72 hours) past the due date and will result in a 0% for the assignment. **This is a hard deadline.**

Identify a museum anthropologist by internet searching for a specific topic or region you are interested in. You could also go to the websites for major museums or institutions. Finally, you could choose to profile one of the editorial staff/board for the Council of Museum Anthropology:

<https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/hub/journal/15481379/editorial-board/editorial-board>

(NOTE: stick to the editors, editorial board, officials, and CMA Board Members)

ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES: This assignment is designed to give you 1) experience with searchable databases, and 2) a new perspective on provenance and the movement of museum objects. Select **4** objects from the Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology database: <https://collections.nmnh.si.edu/search/anth/>

They must be from different cultures, be different object "types," and come from a minimum of two different countries outside of the United States. Objects have differing amounts of information. Please select objects that have their card catalogue entry digitized and an online image (objects with images have a darkened "+" sign). Provide the following information for each (labeled Object #1-#4):

- 1) Catalogue Number
- 2) Object Name
- 3) Index Term
- 4) Culture
- 5) Collector(s)
- 6) Donor Name (if available)
- 7) Accession Date
- 8) Further Description/Notes

Further, include images of the objects themselves and of the card catalogue entry (you can save as images or drag to your desktops). Copy and paste them into the word document itself.

In addition to the object information, compose a 2-3 page response. Your response must be **double-spaced, in Times New Roman font (12 point), and with one-inch margins. The minimum is 2 full pages.** What *type* of information present on the online database? What information was perhaps missing? *Why* did you select the objects you did? Reflect on your experiences using the database and its various search fields.

This assignment is due **February 20th at 2pm. However, I STRONGLY recommend you complete this assignment earlier.** Responses are to be submitted as an electronic copy on our course canvas site. Your assignment grade will be reduced by 1 point for every 24 hours that it is late. Responses will not be accepted 2 days (48 hours) past the due date and will result in a 0% for the assignment. **This is a hard deadline.**

ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES: Write a **6-8 page** response relating to a visit to a local museum. Your response must be **double-spaced, in Times New Roman font (12 point), and with one-inch margins. The minimum is 6 full pages.** Please do not include a cover page. All citations must use the Chicago citation style for both in-text citations and for the works cited page. If you are more comfortable with a different citation style you must specify what style you are using. You can also ask me for further details (about content, formatting, and citations). Your written assignment must be proof-read, edited for spelling/ grammar, and have page numbers. Consider using section headers to help clearly delineate different parts of your paper.

Your paper is due project description is due **April 30th at 5pm.** Papers are to be submitted **BOTH** as a **stapled hard copy** in my departmental mailbox in **7030 Haley Center**, and as an electronic copy on our course canvas site. Your paper grade will be reduced by 10% (approximately one letter grade) for every day it is late. Papers will not be accepted 2 days (48 hours) past the due date and will result in a 0% for the assignment. **This is a hard deadline.**

The **Final Written Assignment Overview** is due **March 24th** at 2pm. This assignment is 2-3 pages, with the same formatting described above. It includes 1) The name, location, website, and mission statement (if available) of the museum you are visiting, and 2) when you expect to make your visit, and 3) an annotated bibliography of **four** course readings that addresses how they might potentially valuable in relationship to your chosen museum (roughly 100 words each).

Assignment and Requirements

For this assignment you are to visit a “local” museum of your choosing. However, it **must** have a website and public visiting hours (i.e. not a research museum like the Auburn University Museum of Natural History, for example). It also **must** feature objects and culture, broadly defined. With this in mind, I **strongly encourage** you to select an anthropology, natural history, history, or art museum. If you have questions about a specific option please ask me. Your written assignment must include the following:

- 1) **Introduce Your Local Museum:** What is its name and focus? What is its history? Does it have a mission statement? Refer directly to specific information found online or in person. Provide website information and links in your Works Cited page (Suggested length: 1 page).
- 2) **Walkthrough and Description:** Provide an in-depth description of your experiences and reactions as you walk through its various exhibits. This involves a description of the exhibits themselves (Suggested length: 3 pages).
- 3) **Literature Review:** Relate your experiences visiting a local museum to **a minimum of three** course readings. These can be topical and/or theoretical. Select the most relevant readings (Suggested length: 3 pages).

This in-class activity is organized around objects *as physical manifestations of interplay between human labor and materials from the natural world*. It is an exercise in deep looking in an inductive, rather than deductive manner. As such, **I ask you to actually look rather than “practicing what you already know,”** i.e. what you’ve read, what you’ve studied, namely your background knowledge. It is critical to not let that knowledge color and dominate your interpretations of unfamiliar (and perhaps familiar) objects you are observing.

Work with your group in answering the following questions with respect to your particular object. Each group will then “introduce” their object to the rest of the class.

- 1) In the knowledge that we are not equally artistically skilled, please draw your object below:

