

SOUTHERN LEGACIES: THE DESCENDANTS PROJECT

ANTHROPOLOGY/FOLKLORE 370 - FALL 2018

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Where does the mind travel when thinking of the term “Southern Legacies”? For many, the answer has long been, “a land of terror.” And for good reason. One need only step by the not-so-silent statue that faces Franklin Street to understand why. The monument is, for many, a testament to terrorism, reminding us every day that what some call “pride” also stands for the habits of oppression, enshrining past regimes within a cloak of misplaced “honor.”

This claim to “honor” can survive only when the experiences of those *dishonored* are erased, removed from presumably “trustworthy” histories and cast aside. The Descendants Project invites you to challenge this erasure, and to step into those experiences. It will do so by giving you the tools to recapture hidden histories of Black experience, drawing you into both the archival record and the deep wellsprings of personal testimony. In so doing, it will most assuredly invite you to rethink the power of resilience, and to re-envision—in collaboration with consultants whom we’ll meet along the way—the potential for racial reconciliation.

This semester marks the first time that “Southern Legacies: The Descendants Project” has been taught. In two previous years, a different version of the class—one that also focused on the legacies of racial terror—initiated the Descendants Project. What became apparent in those earlier semesters was that the task that we had assumed demanded more time for research, and more time for careful engagement with the communities in which the racial violence that we were investigating originally occurred. Consequently, our reconceptualized class—now a Course-Based Undergraduate Research Experience (CURE)—hopes to better meet the goals that victims’ families, community members, and our many collaborators have set for this research project.

... so what exactly do we hope to accomplish?

The “descendants” to whom the course title refers are the descendants of lynching victims in North Carolina. They’re the people whose stories largely *haven’t* been told, the individuals who have lived fulfilling lives and pursued new possibilities in the wake of the violence inflicted on their families generations before. They’re also the people whom most histories of racial violence never discuss. We hope to change that. And while so doing, we hope to



Between 1920 & 1938, the NAACP offices in Manhattan unfurled this banner every time another Black person was lynched.

help foster a fuller public awareness—and eventual public acknowledgement—of the region’s history of racial violence.

To do this, though, we need to *find* these descendants. And that means beginning in the archive, locating the stories of those who were lynched, and working outwards from there. That’s Part One of the project, which is all about learning to see through the erasure, learning to creatively extrapolate, and learning to adventurously collaborate to discover patterns and pathways never imagined by researchers who work alone.

Part Two of this journey unfolds in our fieldwork, as we work to *expand* the historical record by adding to it the recorded voices and stories of the descendants. This part is not, however, just about *hearing*. Instead, it about learning how to incisively and empathically engage in conversation, about learning when to listen and when to lead, about learning to transform that which is heard into fuller narratives whose meanings resonate far beyond the specifics of individual’s stories.

Part Three takes the archival work of Part One in a different direction, following not the stories of descendants, but those of the community in which the violence occurred. This year, we’ll be meeting with Black residents of Warren County, where a double lynching occurred in 1921, and where the county’s “official” historical record has virtually erased all mention of the racial terrorism that once reigned there. We’ve been invited by community members to help open a public conversation about the county’s legacy of racial violence, and to begin the process of creating a public memorial to the victims. Again, in this different context, we’ll be learning how to listen; we will also, though, be learning how to build arguments that can convincingly challenge generations of assumptions/claims on the part of those in power, and hopefully help open paths to fuller cross-racial conversation and reconciliation.

... *how do these project take the form of assignments?*

Though the archival, oral historical, and community-based projects will admittedly be challenging, the class itself should be an adventure, filled with unexpected twists, demanding passages, and serendipitous epiphanies. Here’s how we’ll make that happen, with collaborative, team-based work as our key. As the semester unfolds, each of you will join in the following:

- **A team-based archival project** that entails searching for descendants in archival (and inherently elusive) sources.
- **A team-based fieldwork project** that entails recording conversations, logging those recordings, writing reflectively about the field encounters, and crafting a set of group presentations.
- **A set of in-class team presentations**—conducted at least three times over the course of the semester—analytically exploring the team’s research progress.
- **A poster presentation by your team at the QEP Research and Making Expo**, marking the last class session with a presentation alongside research teams from other CURE classes.
- **A 20-minute ‘final exam’ presentation** by your team addressing lessons learned from the field research and community meetings, and proposing new research paths for the project.

Additionally, each of you will be *individually* responsible for:

- **4 short written responses to the assigned readings.**
- **One class where you and two others will lead the class’s Tuesday discussion.**

- **A final 10 page paper** addressing three key themes emerging from the semester’s research. While Sakai has more details, you should know that the first of these will be a personal reflection on the project’s impact on you as both a researcher and a socially aware individual.

... *why will we be focusing on the aftermaths of lynching?*

In 2015, the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) published the results of four years of research into the history of lynching in the American South. In their report, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, they chronicle almost 4000 lynchings that occurred in twelve southern states between 1877 (the end of Reconstruction) and 1950—a number far higher than any previous accounting. In setting forth these numbers, EJI argues that this extended reign of terror profoundly shaped the course of southern history, transforming both black and white experience in ways that we can hardly begin to imagine. They point, for instance, to the ways that these murders prompted waves of northbound black migration in the early 20th century, framed white understandings of black bodies and black character, and informed legal attitudes that have contributed to the dramatically imbalanced incarceration of African Americans. They also remind us that the southern landscape—so filled with monuments to a revered white past—until this year held no memorial for the victims of southern ropes.



Black artist Charles White’s “Hope for the Future” (1945)

What does all this have to do with anthropology and folklore? Both disciplines explore the ways that meanings are created and sustained in communities. Further, both ground their exploration in *conversations*, recognizing that the best way to understand the workings of culture is to ask those who *live* it, those who are the experts—as it were—of the everyday. In this class, we will learn how to do this asking—how to step into communities that aren’t our own; how to build conversational relationships with strangers; how to sensitively hear their stories, and to sensitively ask probing questions; and how to interpret the meanings that infuse their words. In other words, we will take the first steps towards doing what social scientists call “ethnography.”

Doing ethnography, however, doesn’t mean just building relationships and asking random questions. Instead, it involves the *focused* exploration of worlds of meaning—with emphasis here on the word “focused.”

Ethnographers step into communities with questions in mind, and then learn from those communities the questions that they *should* be asking. Our focus this semester will be the stories of families whose ancestors were victims of lynching. Some will be stories about the violence itself, and perhaps of its recounted impact on the families. Some will be stories of family members’ transcendence of those “back-then” times. Some will be stories told by descendants who didn’t

even know that an ancestor was a victim. Our task is to hear, record, return, and archive these stories, with an eye towards filling in chapters of history that have remained unwritten. Think of this project as a correcting of the historical record. And think of it as an opportunity to reflect—with elders as our guides—on ways to offer their stories to the world.

... but how are we going to find these descendants, and how are we going to engage them in conversation?

At the heart of this class are the ethnographic projects that will draw us into communities far from our own. This is how we'll begin to understand ethnography. Here's a brief guide to our process; a more elaborate discussion—with specific guidelines—appears in the "Assignments" section of the class's Sakai site.

- We'll begin by collectively exploring the histories captured in "Locating Lynching," a digital map and archive of recorded lynchings in North Carolina, created by UNC students. Then, in the second week of the semester, the class will divide into small **ethnographic teams**. Each team will begin the process of using online archival sources (Ancestry.com, digitized newspapers, etc.) to identify living descendants of lynching victims.
- After a series of **in-class training sessions** in ethnographic methods (when we'll discuss recording strategies, ways of questioning, ways of listening, and more), each team will contact a consultant and arrange to digitally record an initial conversation.
- Each team will then travel to **meet with their consultant, record a conversation** of at least 45 minutes, and collectively sign consent agreements (one copy of which will be left with the consultant). The group will then transfer the recording to an archivable medium (a CD or thumb drive) and create a detailed log of the conversation.
- After writing the log and posting it on Sakai, the group will collectively craft a **set of follow-up questions** for their second meeting with their consultant; this must be submitted and approved before the second recorded conversation, following the schedule set forth on Sakai.

... will we actually visit any of the communities that we'll be discussing?

Absolutely. In addition to the trips that teams will take to record consultants' life stories, we'll travel as a class to Warren County, the site of a double lynching in 1921. The story of these murders is both tragic and triumphant, with the "triumph" resting in one of the intended victims' escape to Canada, where he successfully fought fierce efforts on the part of North Carolina to extradite him. This will be a Saturday trip, marked by meetings with Black leaders and activists in the county, where we'll join a collective effort to create the state's first public memorial to victims of racial violence. Our first visit will happen on Saturday, Sept. 29; stay tuned for details about a possible second one . . .

In early November, we hope to spend a weekend in Washington, D.C., where we'll meet and interview descendants of one of the Warren County victims, and meet with curators at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. If we end up going, transportation and lodging will be provided.

... how will we balance our research and class discussion?

The key feature of CURE classes is their focus on research. While most such classes engage their students in a single, semester-long research project, ours is a bit different, in that our research agenda is quite multifaceted. This means that you'll be learning a range of methodological, analytic,

and presentational skills, which you'll be called upon to creatively apply in a set of shifting (and inherently unpredictable) contexts. We'll dedicate one class every week to actually *doing* the research; you'll also be doing much of it (e.g., interviews, logging, poster preparation) *outside* of the classroom, often alongside your research team.

But in order to understand *what* we're finding, and *how* to comprehend its layered meanings, we'll need to spend time exploring its social and historical contexts. This is where class discussion—and the assigned readings—come in; they'll be the focus of every week's *Tuesday* class (unless otherwise announced).

We're going to be talking about some hard issues this semester; this means that advance preparation and full engagement are deeply important. Notice that I foregrounded the "we" in that previous sentence; this class will be built around discussion rather than lectures. Consequently, you should always come to class prepared to talk. I've chosen this semester's readings to both inform and *provoke*. To accept that provocation's challenge, though, you'll have to do the readings.

To facilitate this engagement, four times this semester you'll submit a single-page reflection that discusses issues raised in one or more of the week's assigned readings. We'll designate the dates for your responses early in the semester, thus insuring that a shifting set of folks will be submitting reflections every week, allowing the rest of us to read their thoughts. You'll need to upload these to the appropriate Sakai folder by Monday morning of your assigned week (with late submissions not accepted). Additionally, each Tuesday's discussion will be led by a team of 2-3 students, who will post discussion questions by Monday morning. Further instructions appear in the Sakai "Assignments" folder.

Of course, the success of our discussions and the team research hinges on your being in class. Consequently, we'll be taking attendance every session. I expect everyone to be always present, unless you've got a legitimate medical excuse. Full attendance, and a full schedule of weekly reflections, will figure prominently in your final grade.

... *what will we be reading/watching/hearing?*

We've only got one required "textbook" for the class, the Equal Justice Initiative's *Lynching in America*, which they are providing free for every class-member. As suggested above, though, this is by no means all that we'll be reading this semester. We'll also rely on a host of readings that are posted in the "Course Readings" folder in Sakai, where they appear as pdf files or web-links. Don't be surprised if additional readings/watchings/listenings find their way onto the syllabus as the semester unfolds. This is, after all, a discussion-based class, which means that our direction will be determined, in part, by our conversations. If our discussions suggest interest in areas not covered by the assigned essays, then we'll add materials accordingly.

... *how will all this be graded?*



Flexibility is the rule here, taking into account your growth through the semester and the particular challenges that often mark archival research and fieldwork. If forced to break down your final grade according to assignments and class participation, I would estimate the following:

- Your group archival and fieldwork project (including the individual reflections, the logs, & your group presentations)—40%
- Your team’s poster session and final class presentation—20%
- Your final paper—20%
- Your attendance/class discussion/reading reflections—20%

Black artist Alison Saar’s sculpture, “Strange Fruit” (1995), reminds us that racial violence targeted women as well as men. Here, the hanging figure is clad in metal plates, suggesting a protective armor that testifies to both defiance and resilience.

One other note is worth making about grades. If you’ve got a question or a challenge, let’s talk about it, *in person*. I won’t be responding to e-mailed complaints about scores; I will, however, be happy to set up a meeting for a conversation. That’s always a better path.

... what’s our policy on academic integrity?

Much of the work that we’ll be doing this semester is team-based, with collaboration as the rule. I realize, though, that in group situations, it can be tempting to slack off a bit and let others do more of the work, or to “borrow” their words/ideas when you’re asked to write something on your own. I expect all of the work that you produce for this course to be yours, with no “borrowings” unless those are permitted by their creators, and then fully attributed. In this regard, I fully expect that you will act in accordance with the University’s Honor Code (<https://studentconduct.unc.edu/>). If you find yourself in a situation where you think you may have taken on more than you can handle, please come and talk with me. Working together, we may well be able to craft a solution.

... what is our discussions get a bit overwhelming, or if I’d simply like to talk to someone about them?

This semester’s journey may prove to be emotionally challenging. We’re going to be encountering images and stepping into conversations that will likely be uncomfortable . . . which means that you’ll want to pay attention to how you’re feeling. Stress makes itself evident in a host of subtle ways—difficulty focusing, increased irritability, sleeplessness. These experiences are only compounded by the political climate in which we’re living, where so many folks are feeling unsafe, and where so much now-sanctioned talk echoes talk of times best left behind. If you start feeling anxious or uneasy, please pay attention, and please reach out for support. Perhaps consider heading to a space that feels safe and welcoming, like the Upendo Lounge in SASB North. Or maybe drop in at CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services), in the Campus Health Services building; counselors there offer walk-in consultations every weekday until 4:00. And you should always feel free to drop by my office at 409-F Alumni Hall . This is not an easy path; there’s no need to walk it alone . . .

If you need assistance, guidance, or just some reassuring words, don’t hesitate to come see me. I’ll always be in my office on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30-10:30, and then again on Wednesdays from 10:00 until noon. If those hours don’t work, just shoot me an e-mail at glenn@unc.edu, and we can set up another time to meet.

... so where does all this leave us?

Hopefully, ready to begin an exciting and provocative journey. As with any journey, I fully expect to meet some detours and rough traveling along the way. This is, after all, a course that's very

much “in development”; we’re definitely charting some untested ground. But if we work together and treat each other with respect, I think we’ll negotiate the difficulties with ease. Remember, we’re all colleagues in this undertaking. I’m looking forward to a most fulfilling semester. I hope you’re doing the same . . .

– Glenn Hinson

Class Assignments

Unless otherwise specified, all readings must be read before Tuesday classes

AUG. 21-23

Reality, Remembrance, and Mourning

The Class Syllabus (please read the full syllabus before Thursday’s class session)

Natasha Trethewey, [Southern History](#) (2006)

Claudia Rankine, [The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning](#) (2016)

AUG. 28-30

Communities of Memory—Remembering and Re-Membering

Fitzhugh Brundage, *No Deed But Memory* (2000)

Ta-Nehisi Coates, excerpt from *Between the World and Me* (2015)

SEPT. 4-6

Defying Erasure—Reclaiming the Trees that Once Bore Strange Fruit

Wendy S. Walters, *Lonely in America* (2016)

Brian Palmer, [For the Forgotten African-American Dead](#) (2017)

Kidada Williams, *Regarding the Aftermaths of Lynching* (2014)

SEPT. 11-13

Strange Fruit—Southern Legacies of Racial Terror

Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 4-53 (2015)

Glenda Gilmore, *Murder, Memory, and the Flight of the Incubus* (1998)

Horace Williams, *A Black Man Talks to God* (1985)

SEPT. 18-20

Murders at Midnight—The Killings of Mr. Plummer Bullock and Mr. Alfred Williams

Vann Newkirk, excerpt from *Lynching in North Carolina* (2009)

SEPT. 25-27

Tuesday: The Art of Erasure—Warren County “Histories”

Meet in the Lobby of Wilson Library

Raymond Gavins, *Fear, Hope, and Struggle: Recasting North Carolina in the Age of Jim Crow* (1998)

Thursday: Reflections on Strategic Invisiblizing . . .

In-class Group Reports on Your Library Discoveries

SATURDAY, SEPT. 29

Alternative Perspectives—A Visit to Warren County

Saturday fieldtrip—Meet-up Location to be Determined

OCT. 2-4

Tuesday: Hearing Stories, Discovering Meanings—The Art of Fieldwork

Gloria Naylor, Preface to *Mama Day* (1988)

Valerie Yow, *Interviewing Techniques and Strategies* (2015)

Thursday: There's Nothing 'Neutral' About Asking Questions—The Play of Presumptions

Mitchell Duneier, *Race and Peeing on Sixth Avenue* (2000)

Zandria Robinson, *On the Continuing Significance of Race, and Racism Happens* (2014)

OCT. 9 & 11

Tuesday: Addressing Legacies of Trauma—Hidden Dimensions of Interviewing

A conversation with trauma therapist Dr. Amy Bauman

OCT. 16

Revisiting Troubled Ground—Reminiscences

A conversation with Dr. Claude Clegg, author of *Troubled Ground: A Tale of Murder, Lynching, and Reckoning in the New South* (2010)

OCT. 18: FALL BREAK

OCT. 23-25

Practicing Our Ethnographic Skills—An In-Class Fieldwork Conversation

A conversation with Caswell County elder Connie Steadman

Anne Valke and Lesley Brown, excerpt from *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South* (2010)

SATURDAY, OCT. 27

Testimonies—A Possible Second Visit to Warren County

Saturday fieldtrip—Meet-up Location to be Determined

OCT. 30 & NOV. 1

Another Kind of Lynching—Black Women as Targets of Racial Violence

Nancy Buirski, dir., *The Rape of Recy Taylor* (2017) [*Tuesday in-class viewing*]

Danielle McGuire, "It Was Like All of Us Had Been Raped": Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle (2004)

NOV. 6

Tuesday: Preparations & Reflections

Thursday: NO CLASS (in preparation for our weekend fieldtrip)

NOV. 10-11: WASHINGTON, D.C., FIELDTRIP

Following the Path of Forced Migration—Meeting Members of the Bullock Family

Weekend fieldtrip—Meet-up Location to be Determined

NOV. 13-15

Reflections on the Journey

Kidada Williams, *Resolving the Paradox of Our Lynching Fixation* (2005)

Bini Litwin and Barbara Timmons Strahl, *Revisiting History: Examining Post-Slavery and Post-Holocaust Events for Considerations on Advancing Atonement in the United States* (2014)

NOV. 20

Declarative Rememberings—Community, Contestation, and Public Memorials

Equal Justice Initiative, Confederate Iconography in the 21st Century (2018)
<https://segregationinamerica.eji.org/report/confederate-iconography.html>
Catherine Bishir, Memorial Observances (2003)

NOV. 22: THANKSGIVING RECESS

Nov. 27 & 29

Declarative Rememberings, Part II—“Silent Sam” in Context

Equal Justice Initiative, The Lasting Legacy of Confederate Monuments (2018)
<https://segregationinamerica.eji.org/iconography>
Micki McElya, Commemorating the Color Line: The National Mammy Monument
Controversy of the 1920s (2003)

DEC. 4

QEP Research and Making Expo—Poster Presentations on Group Projects

Location to be Announced

Final Paper Due

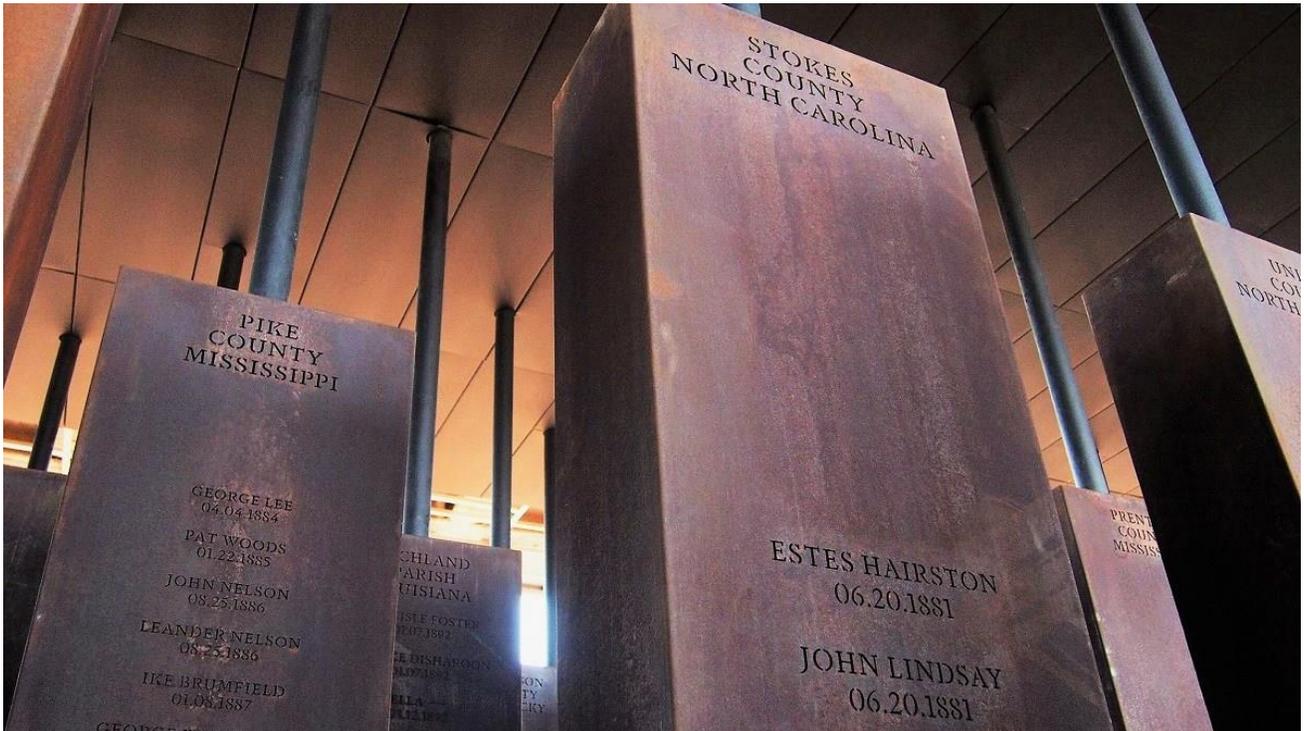
DEC. 8 (SATURDAY): FINAL EXAMINATION AT 12:00 NOON

Bringing It All Together—Fieldwork Presentations

20-minute presentations by each research/fieldwork team

Your individual contribution to your team’s presentation will count as your final examination. Please expect to spend the full three hours of the exam period.

Bibliographic citations for all the assigned readings appear in the Sakai “Syllabus” folder



Pillars hanging at the Equal Justice Initiative's National Memorial for Peace and Justice—the nation's only monument dedicated to the victims of lynching—memorialize each victim by name, date of death, and the state and county of their murder. The Memorial, which opened in the summer of 2018 in Montgomery, Alabama, offers the following words on its walls: (Photo courtesy of EJI)

**FOR THE HANGED AND BEATEN.
FOR THE SHOT, DROWNED, AND BURNED.
FOR THE TORTURED, TORMENTED, AND TERRORIZED.
FOR THOSE ABANDONED BY THE RULE OF LAW.
WE WILL REMEMBER.**