Monuments to Memory: The National Park Service and the Making of America's Historic Landmarks

Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities, Rutgers University – Camden

Spring Semester 2025

Instructor:

Dr. Lucas Wilder

Virtual Office Hours by Appointment

This course introduces students to the history of the National Park Service, its mission, and the establishment of historic sites. Students will learn about the tumultuous history of putting together the first National Park and the political ramifications of starting the National Park Service. The course also covers the environmental problems faced by park service employees, as well as regular citizens, in the preservation of historic areas. Students will learn how to navigate the forms necessary for sites to be declared historical and federally protected. This course will serve as a foundation for understanding the National Park Service, its environmental history, problems that arose in its 100+ history that are still relevant today, and the process of establishing historic sites.

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

* Explain the history of the National Park Service
* Identify key problems facing historic sites, both environmental and political
* Understand how historic sites are identified
* Assess a National Park Service site or other historic sites’ historical interpretation
* Find and Identify an historic sites’ enabling legislation and use that document to assess that sites’ historical interpretation

**Course Format**

This course will be conducted online via a blend of at-home readings, synchronous online lecture and discussion, and a final writing assignment. The synchronous lecture discussion will take place via Zoom on March 26th and April 2nd, 9th, 16th, & 23rd. The discussion will explore that week’s readings so please complete them before the class. The lecture and discussion will take place from 7PM – 8:30PM

You are encouraged to participate in the synchronous sessions with your webcam turned on and with yourself visible to the other students. If, for any reason, you are not comfortable appearing on webcam, you are not required to do so.

When you join the Zoom you will enter a waiting room, which I will be monitoring and admitting

only enrolled students. The waiting room feature will help us avoid being "Zoom-bombed." Please

make every attempt to join the Zoom meeting a few minutes early to avoid being in the waiting

room for longer than necessary. If you arrive late, please be patient with me while I work to admit

everyone into the session.

**Attendance Policy**

This course is Pass/Fail. In order to receive a passing grade and credit for the Certificate in Historic Preservation, you will need to attend class and complete the final assignment. If you know you are going to miss class, please let me know in advance.

Participants risk losing the opportunity to earn CEUs if they miss more than one session of a five-week class. Instructors reserve the right to assign make-up assignments.

**Readings**

All readings are required and will be made available electronically on Canvas under the week’s Module. The readings for this course include book chapters, scholarly articles, and governmental documents. The goal of readings are for the students to better follow along with the lectures and be able to contribute to the online discussions.

**Assignments**

Weekly Discussions: Each week, the instructor will post two reflective questions in the discussion board. You are required to write a 300 word response to **ONE** of the questions. You have the option to respond to other students, but it is not required.

Final: Pick a historic site, it can be a National Park Service site, state historic site, or other historical location. The only requirement for choosing the site is that it must have an enabling legislation/foundational document or equivalent document. Students will examine the sites enabling legislation/foundational document, taking note of its key areas of historical significance, then proceed to either to in person or to the site’s webpage and critically assess whether that site fulfills its enabling legislation/foundational document. This critical analysis needs to be 3 to 5 pages in length.

**Your final assignment must be submitted by Friday, May 2nd at 11:59 PM.**

**Class/Reading Schedule**

**Week 1: March 26**

Reading: Yellowstone National Park from Crimes Against Nature by Karl Jacoby

Lecture: Early National Park Service History and It’s Problems

**Week 2: April 2**

Reading: Chapter 3 from Preserving Nature in the National Parks by Richard Sellars

Lecture: National Park Service in the Great Depression

**Week 3: April 9**

Reading: “The Trouble with Wilderness” Education in the National Park Service: The Case of the Lost Cattle Mounts of Congaree by Matthew Lockhart

Lecture: The Problem with Wilderness: The Wilderness Act of 1964 and the National Park Service

**Week 4: April 16**

Reading: Charleston, South Carolina and Historical Interpretation

Lecture: Interpreting History and Foundational Documents

**Week 5: April 23**

Reading: Promoting the Preservation of Historic Buildings: Historic Preservation Policy in the United States by Charles Fisher

Lecture: Establishing Historic Sites and Problems Facing Public History