SOCIOLOGY 476
SEMINAR IN COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Thursday 10:00-12:20
Seminar Room, 1812 Chicago Avenue

Gary Alan Fine
#212, 1810 Chicago Avenue
1-3495 (home: 847-657-0113)
g-fine@northwestern.edu

Office hours: Thursday 2:00-3:00 and by appointment

This seminar is designed to expose graduate students to the realm of sociological research (and research in other disciplines, notably history and anthropology) that addresses how we think about and memorialize the past. How is history constructed? How are historical events shaped and made socially meaningful? Who are the shapers and who are the shaped?

We will be reading a considerable number of texts this quarter. Because of the amount of reading, I will assign a primary reader for each text each week, and I will ask that you submit to me (and to each other) by email by 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday a list of at least five questions from the readings that you think are important for our discussions. I expect you to know the fundamental arguments of each of the readings, and if you were called upon you could provide a reasonable exegesis of each reading. This does not mean that you need to have read every line of every reading. Informed skimming is a fundamental skill of graduate education. I should have no fear in giving you hundreds of pages of reading each week, assuming that you will be able to fit it into your schedule.

There are four ways that this graduate seminar can be run in terms of the requirements of the course. Each technique has its strengths and weaknesses, and I am open to each.

First, each of you can prepare a research paper on a topic of your choice related to collective memory. The advantage of this approach is that you will be able to choose the topic of greatest appeal to you. The disadvantages are that such an approach is likely to lead to a set of incompletes and, since I will ask for reports on your progress most weeks (in the last half of class), to a disjointed discussion.

Second, you can all work on related or coordinated projects. This has the advantage that our discussions will be focused and the outcome can be more or less coordinated. It is also possible that the outcome will be publishable if our coordination is
adequate. The disadvantage is that not everyone will be working on a topic of primary interest. Incompletes may also be a problem here, although probably less than in the first option, since there will be a push to be at the same stage of the project. This is a particular advantage if the enrollment in the seminar is fairly small.

Third, we can avoid a lengthy paper entirely, and instead you will be asked to hand in short papers (two to three pages) on some aspect of the assigned readings on six of nine weeks. The advantage here is that there will be no incompletes. The disadvantage is that we will be sticking close to the readings without creating new knowledge. Doing research provides you with an opportunity to understand the methodology of collective memory research.

Fourth, as a “compromise,” we can have shorter research papers (ten pages), coupled with a smaller number (three) of short papers. Like most compromises, this may provide the best or the worst of each world.

The choice will be addressed the first week of class.

Books Available at Norris:

Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (paper)
Gary Alan Fine, Difficult Reputations (paper)
Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory (paper)
Sanford Levinson, Written in Stone (paper)
Barry Schwartz, Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory (paper)
Eviatar Zerubavel, Social Mindscapes (paper)

September 22     INTRODUCTION

September 29     COGNITIVE SOCIOLOGY

Eviatar Zerubavel, Social Mindscapes (all).
October 6  REPUTATIONS

Gary Alan Fine, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2
Barry Schwartz, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 5, Conclusion

October 13  HOW PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE PAST

Maurice Halbwachs, Introduction, Preface, Ch. 3
Astrid Erll, “Travelling Memory.” Parallax 17, 2011, 4-18

October 20  NO CLASS

October 27  IDENTIFY AND COMMEMORATION

Benedict Anderson, Introduction, Chapter 11
Sanford Levinson, all

November 3  NATIONAL TRAUMA


November 10 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND MEMORY


November 17 GENERATIONS


November 24 THANKSGIVING

December 3 REPORTS AND SUMMARIES