FAIR 381G: Topics in Literature

**Berlin: City of Remembrance and Forgetting**

A Global Learning Program

15 credits

Spring 2022

Instructors:

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In this course, we will travel to the major European metropolis of Berlin, a city marked by historical trauma and complex cultural layers. Through reading, writing, site exploration, art, collaboration, and critical discussion, we will interrogate how violent histories have been remembered and overwritten in the city, and how they continue to shape the present. As an interdisciplinary course, we will investigate acts and spaces of memorialization through both critical and artistic inquiry. In addition to our time in Berlin, we will venture to nearby locations like the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp Memorial and Museum and the MyLife Archive of Human Destinies at the German-Polish border in Frankfurt-Oder/Słubice, immersing ourselves in a regional network of commemorative sites, ruins, and community projects. Our journey together will investigate and respond to the force and remnants of German colonization and genocide in Namibia, Nazism and the Holocaust, the Allies' bombing destruction of Berlin, the GDR, and contemporary migrant diasporas. Most importantly, we will walk extensively, engaging Berlin in everyday place-responsive practices of witness, critique, and relationality through urban space, literature, art, and theory.

During our collective study, we will continue to work through core questions: How do we engage with invisible landscapes underlying visible spaces? What are our own documentary and representational impulses and what ethical-aesthetic implications do they bear? How do we memorialize an event that is ongoing? How is the past negotiated within and between different demographic groups within and outside of Germany? What is the role of art, literature, and cultural activism in building historical consciousness?

A faculty-led study abroad experience, this course will span intensive on-campus introductory sessions and five weeks of engagement in Berlin, Germany. In Berlin, we will meet three full days a week, balancing classroom time with site visits, and leaving the rest of the week for solo and group project work, free space for rest, integrating heavy materials and exploring Berlin. At most, two days a week will involve exploring places by foot and visiting institutions and cultural sites, broken up by breaks and a meal. Within such contexts, participants must be able to walk for three-five hours in a day with or without reasonable accommodations. Our last meeting each week will include extensive space for reflection and discussion. Refrigeration will be available for program duration. In addition to traditional course work and site visits, students will have the opportunity to meet and, in some cases, work with Berlin-based artists, scholars, community groups, organizations, and activists. With or without reasonable accommodations, The program will end the last week of Spring quarter in Berlin, not returning to Western, so students will have the option to continue traveling in Europe afterwards. No previous study with memory or culture in Germany is required.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will:

—Understand ways in which official, communal, and private memory is shaped, altered, and erased in Berlin.

—Analyze the stakes in the creation, maintenance, and erasure of memory in Berlin.

—Examine and critically reflect on the uses of history and historical narrative under contemporary conditions by artists, writers, and activists working in Berlin.

—Realize connections between German memoryscapes and memoryscapes in the US.

—Materialize research in a variety of forms, including critical prose, creative writing, interdisciplinary art forms like performance, and collaborative labor.

Assignments:

-A daily notebook: You will be required to keep a notebook during our travels. This will help you both to process the small and insignificant as well as the more challenging, and, perhaps, mysterious that tends to be part of any extended travel experience. You will occasionally receive specific journaling prompts, which we will share at the beginning of our scheduled class time. We will introduce journaling practices and methodologies at the beginning of the course.

-Ongoing documentation: Whether through photography, video, the creation of mixed-media art works, ephemeral performances, or the intentional foraging of found objects and materials, you will be asked to catalogue your experiences in your own specific ways

-Analysis of a site: You will have to produce one in-depth analysis of a site visit that includes your observations and critical reflection (including secondary sources). While there may be a spontaneous resonance with a site, we will determine a schedule in advance so that you can prepare yourself and revisit the space if necessary (min. 1200 words).

-Material guides: You will be responsible to critically introduce one text, multimedia material, or guest speaker assigned for this course to the class. Material guides will begin each discussion with a few thoughts, questions, and a close analysis.

-—Final portfolio and presentation: For your final portfolio you will be asked to produce three critical and/or artistic pieces developed from our weekly prompts and experiences. Presentations will take place throughout our last week of