



Public Lecture Offerings

Katrina's America

When the levees surrounding New Orleans collapsed during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, many observers regarded the catastrophe as extraordinary: a disaster without precedent that was somehow unique to that time and place. But looking back through the dystopian fog of the pandemic and the climate crisis, Katrina now seems to herald a possible future for twenty-first-century America writ large. Drawing from his Bancroft Prize-winning book *Katrina: A History, 1915–2015*, historian Andy Horowitz traces Katrina's causes and consequences across a century, considering the questions that New Orleans's history gives rise to about race, class, community, trauma, inequality, the welfare state, extractive industry, metropolitan development, and environmental change in America's future.

Why U.S. History Matters

The study of U.S. history is under intense pressure. As the nation marks the 250th anniversary of its founding, the White House issues executive orders on "restoring truth and sanity to American history," and states pass laws regulating what can be taught in history classrooms and which books are allowed on library shelves, history has emerged as a central battleground in contemporary culture wars. At the same time, academic historians and university history departments face declining funding, while advances in artificial intelligence leave some questioning whether human critical inquiry is itself fast becoming outmoded. Many are left to wonder: Does history matter more, or less, than ever? Why?

Informed by his work as a teacher, scholar, and as Connecticut's State Historian, Andy Horowitz reckons with the challenges facing the discipline, and the humanities broadly, while arguing that history remains an essential tool for making sense of our bewildering present.

Classroom Discussion Topics

Public History in Polarized Times

1. Museums, historic sites, and textbooks are political battlegrounds. We will discuss how historians attempt to tell true stories that satisfy competing audiences.

Writing History

2. Best for smaller groups with works in progress, we will discuss writing strategies with an emphasis on making fair, compelling, and engaging arguments.

What is Environmental Justice?

3. Using the Katrina flood in New Orleans as a case study for the climate crisis writ large, we will discuss competing visions of recovery.

What is a Disaster?

4. Floods and earthquakes, wars and famines, engineering failures and economic collapses — these frightening events seem to define modern life. We call them “disasters.” But what makes a disaster different from other periods of time? We will discuss why some kinds of bad news are considered disasters while others are not, and what difference it makes.