

Workshop Proposal for “Teaching Rome at Home”

Rome in the Art and Architecture of Washington, D.C.

America’s Founding Fathers sought to adopt and adapt “Rome at Home” not only in their political, literary, and intellectual pursuits, but in the design and decoration of our nation’s capital city. This workshop features three papers that examine the adoption and adaptation of Roman artistic and architectural vocabulary in Washington, D.C., with a special focus on the U.S. Capitol. Each paper will provide models for thinking and teaching about nineteenth century use of Roman visual forms to establish American identity and history. Special emphasis will be placed on the ways in which some of the early American artistic adoptions continue to reflect America as the “New Rome,” while others are no longer viable vis a vis 21st century American values of social justice.

1) Classical Washington: Greece & Rome in the Art and Architecture of Washington, D.C.

Architecturally and artistically, Washington, D.C. is a city like no other in the United States: an elongated version of the Pantheon’s dome dominates its skyline; Roman-style equestrian statues of military leaders inhabit many of its circular plazas; and a triple-bay, Roman triumphal arch provides entry to its main train station. This paper presents an undergraduate course in the reception of ancient art (currently being developed into a book) that surveys of the development of the urban plan, governmental halls, and public art of 19th- and early 20th-century D.C. “Classical Washington” demonstrates for students that our Founding Fathers and the architects and artists they employed were importing “Rome to Home” in very specific, learned, and purposive adaptations of ancient art and architecture, in some cases borrowing modes of depiction which defy our 21st century principles of social justice. During the semester, each student adopts a monument and conducts research in primary and secondary sources with the goal of revealing the Greek and Roman models that our early nation’s architects and artists adopted and adapted, the sources via which those classical models crossed the Atlantic to the US, and the historical, political, and visual motives that resulted in the classical cityscape we inhabit today. By studying the original Greek and Roman monuments through selected readings that highlight how they functioned in antiquity as well as how and why these classical sources were selected and transformed for the young American capital city, students become familiar with the ancient and early American symbols that permeate D.C. They also gain a new appreciation for the role of ancient art and architecture in establishing the foundational legends, early history, and international profile of our nation.

2) D.C. as a Latin Classroom: Capitoline Hill vs. Capitol Hill

The legacy of the Classical world surrounds us in our day-to-day lives, yet this fact is virtually ignored in many Latin textbooks. The relevance of the ancient world to our modern world should be emphasized through the study of Latin. Washington, D.C. is filled with references to the Roman world in its architecture, art, and layout. Thus, I created the workbook, “D.C. as A Latin Classroom” to encourage comparisons between Washington D.C. and Rome, to teach middle and high school Latin students about the larger classical world, to show students how their Latin study is relevant to the modern world, and to further translation skills and critical thinking skills in a way that is fun and that will inspire students to continue their Latin careers. The workbook consists of five units, each revolving around a certain theme that connects to both Rome and D.C. Each unit includes a narrative about the theme, at least three passages of unadapted Latin, lists of key vocabulary, figures, and concepts, and worksheets for suggested site visits. In April 2015, the project was reviewed by a panel of five Washington area Latin teachers. The project was received with much enthusiasm from the 45 attendees of the event, as well as from the

students who have worked with it in their Latin classrooms. In this workshop, I would revisit the chapter “Capitoline Hill vs. Capitol Hill” in order to investigate what these ancient and modern connections tell us about urgent societal and cultural topics including legacies of gender and social inequality and of slavery. What can we learn from the attitude with which our Founding Fathers built our nation’s capital, an attitude and mindset resounding with echoes from the ancient past?

3) Art and Propaganda: Using Classicism to Legitimize Native American Displacement

The art and architecture of the United States Capitol draws direct inspiration from ancient Rome and Greece. Just as Greek democracy and Roman Republicanism shaped the formation of American democracy, classical antiquity was the touchstone for the Capitol’s grand sculptural program. This paper will examine how 19th century sculptors employed classicism to legitimize the underlying narrative of Manifest Destiny illustrated in such works as Luigi Persico’s *Discovery of America* (1837-1844), Horatio Greenough’s *Rescue* (1837-1853) and Thomas Crawford’s *Progress of Civilization* (1853-1863). The pair of East front cheek block sculptures by Persico and Greenough linked the arrival of Columbus with westward expansion. In addition, the Senate pediment also celebrates American progress at the expense of indigenous peoples. Thomas Crawford’s conception for the *Progress of Civilization* mirrored many ideas that were widely shared by politicians and the American public, and his depiction of the defeated Native American warrior is a direct translation of the *Dying Gaul*. In these monumental sculptures, artists patterned Native American figures on classical prototypes, employing a vocabulary that reinforced the trope of the noble savage destined for extinction. As Curator for the Architect of the Capitol my job is to both preserve and interpret the Capitol’s public art. What does being a responsible steward mean when the objects to be conserved are patently offensive? What information should be shared with the public and how? Finally, how does an understanding of classical antecedents enable us to better decode the meaning of these problematic sculptures?