

Essay #4: The Commons of Public Space

Background

Over the past few weeks, we have been discussing and debating the issues raised by John Ahearn's art, as described in Kramer's *Whose Art is It?* and by a more recent, local issue, the Lafayette "memorial." Both of these controversies bring up some difficult questions: When the public disagrees over what goes in public space, who should decide? If we can't agree, are we better off with nothing in public spaces (the fate of the Bronx neighborhood)? Are we free to display images on our own "private" space if the public is upset by these images? This essay gives you a chance to reflect on some of these questions.

What to do

- Option One: Did John Ahearn do the right thing in removing his art from the 44th Precinct site? In addition to defending your own position, consider at least two counterarguments.
- Option Two: Should Louise Clark remove the Lafayette memorial? In addition to defending your own position, consider at least two counterarguments.
- Option Three: Who should make decisions about what goes in public spaces? In your response, discuss both the Lafayette and Bronx issues. Did John Ahearn do the right thing in removing his controversial art? Should Louise Clark remove the crosses from the Lafayette hillside? You may also consider different issues of public art or the use of public space that interest you, such as controversial murals or graffiti.

For any of the above options, your essay should be 4-6 pages. You should be able to identify your own premises, as well as counterarguments, refutations, and concession.

How to do it

In your **introduction** you may want to provide background information about just one of these issues or about controversies over public space in general. You may also start with a personal experience—describe something that you see in public space that you like or dislike (such as graffiti, billboards, a particular work of art). If you are choosing options one or two, you will need some background about the particular issue.

Your **thesis** should answer the question for whichever option you chose.

The **body** of your essay should develop your response by considering the way different groups respond to the public art you have chosen. Who is offended by it? Who thinks it is appropriate or meaningful?

Remember to write fluently, proofread carefully, and cite quotations using the MLA style.

We will work on this in class, but remember that you should also go to the writing center and come to me for help.

Due Dates

Rough Drafts due:

Final Essay due: