

Misericordia University  
Department of History and Government

**HIS 362: Seminar in American Visual Culture**

Course Credits: 3

Semester: Spring 2015 (#01)

Prerequisites: None

**Dr. Jennifer M. Black**

**Course Description:**

*From the University Catalog:*

This course will explore the ways that visual culture illuminates and alters our understanding of major themes and eras in U.S. history. Drawing upon popular culture, objects, films, monuments, architecture, and other artworks, this course explores the ways in which history can be taught and learned through images. The course investigates the ways in which different visual media documented, articulated, and embodied social, cultural, and political issues, ideas, and identities from the American Revolution through the end of the Cold War.

*Introduction*

Students in this course will develop a sense of visual literacy, including the skills required to read and interpret popular print images, cartoons, advertisements, photography, performance, painting, sculpture, architecture and other images of public space. Through the course of this semester, students will learn and practice a variety of interpretive strategies designed to instill a thorough understanding of the cultural work of images in American society—that is, how images function to reify, challenge, or transform existing cultural maxims and ideas; as well as the ways in which images can assist in the construction of new ideas or trends among the people. In particular, the course will question prevailing assumptions about visual culture, especially the notion that photography is almost always documentary (indexical). By the end of the semester, students will be able to critically examine and decode a range of image types that demonstrate the constitutive and illustrative roles of images in American history.

**Course Goals & Objectives**

University Goals: This course addresses the following University goals:

3. Consider ethical issues and values and make reasoned judgments about them.
4. Think independently and creatively, analyze information critically, and solve problems.
5. Respect and understand cultural differences.
7. Communicate and interact effectively.
8. Understand and appreciate the arts, humanities, science, and technology.

Program Goals: This course addresses the following Program Goals:

1. Broaden perspectives on local, national, and international issues.
3. Provide a critical approach to looking at historical and current events.
4. Cultivate writing and oral communication skills.
5. Foster cultural understanding.

Misericordia University  
Department of History and Government

Course Objectives: Upon successful completion of this course, a student will be able to:

1. Distinguish between various types of visual media and identify the primary uses of each
2. Identify and implement basic methodologies for interpreting visual images
3. Effectively interpret and evaluate a range of image types, including prints, cartoons, photographs, advertisements, paintings, architecture, films, and other public images and / or performances
4. Develop effective written and verbal analyses that synthesize primary and secondary sources
5. Design and complete a research project that contextualizes and applies course material and methodologies

\*These goals will be assessed through written assignments and in-class presentations.

**Required Texts**

Foner, Eric and Joshua Brown. *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*. New York: Vintage, 2005. ISBN: 0375702747

Holloway, David and John Beck, eds. *American Visual Cultures*. New York: Continuum, 2005. ISBN: 0826464858

Johnston, Patricia, ed. *Seeing High and Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. ISBN: 0520241886

Ross, Steven, ed. *Movies in American Society*. New York: Blackwell, 2002. ISBN: 0631219606

**Course Assignments & Evaluations**

Each of the assignments in this course will involve image analysis and demonstrating your knowledge and understanding of the course material and objectives. The final course grade will be comprised of the following components:

- Exam 1 (20%)
- Exam 2 (25%)
- Project Proposal (5%)
- Final Project & Presentation (25%)
- Image posts, discussion & Participation (25%)

Each of the exams will include some image analysis and synthesis of the course material in essay form.

In this course, you will be graded on your active participation to class discussions and the online discussion board. This includes coming to class on-time and prepared (with readings, notes, etc.), ready to ask questions, analyze images, and digest the authors' arguments. Students will also be required to post an image to the online discussion board twice during the semester (a sign-up sheet will circulate the first week). For this assignment, the designated student will research and find one primary-source image related to the week's readings / themes. The student will then post the image, with comment (or a question designed to encourage discussion), to the week's discussion board by Monday at 12pm. Detailed instructions on where to find these images will be given the first week of class. Students may not reproduce an image from lecture

Misericordia University  
Department of History and Government

or from the course readings as part of their post. The remaining students in the class are required to post a response to one of the images before Tuesday's class each week. Failure to regularly participate on a weekly basis, and / or missing more than two class meetings will negatively affect your grade in the course.

The final project will consist of three components—a project proposal, a written report / term paper (10-15pgs) and an in-class presentation. Project proposals are due in week nine and the final projects will be presented and submitted during the final exam period. Detailed instructions for the final project / paper will follow.

Late Policy: Assignments submitted after the due date will incur a grade deduction of one third for each day late (i.e. if the original grade is a B+ and the paper was submitted one day late, it drops to a B), with a maximum penalty of two full letter grades. Make-up exams will not be permitted except in emergent situations, to be determined at my discretion.

Grading Scale for Course Grades:

A = 93-100%	B = 83-86%	C = 73-76%	F = 64% and below
A- = 90-92%	B- = 80-82%	C- = 70-72%	
B+= 87-89%	C+ = 77-79%	D = 65-69%	

### Weekly Schedule

---

**Week 1 (Jan 13-15):**            **Intro to American Visual Culture**

*Reading:* Johnston, p1-5

Anna Pegler-Gordon, "Seeing Images in History," *Perspectives* (Feb 2006), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2006/0602/0602med1.cfm>

Sturken & Cartwright, *Practices of Looking* (2009) chapter 1 **On e-reserve.**

*Topics:*            Why are images important for studying history?  
How to read an image and assess its construction

**Week 2 (Jan 20-22):**            **Colonial America, the Revolution & Its Aftermath**

*Reading:* Johnston, chapter 1 p25-41

Kevin Muller, "Navigation, Vision, and Empire: Eighteenth-Century Engraved Views of Boston in a British Atlantic Context," in *New Views of New England, Studies in Material and Visual Culture, 1680-1830*, ed.

Misericordia University  
Department of History and Government

Martha McNamara and Georgia B. Barnhill (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2012), 47-68. **On e-reserve.**

Lester C. Olson, "Benjamin Franklin's Pictorial Representations of the British Colonies in America," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 18-42. **On e-reserve.**

*Topics:* Social Status, Empire  
Political Engravings and Cartoons  
How images distribute information and incite rebellion

**Week 3 (Jan 27-29): The Antebellum Years Part I: the Market Revolution**

*Reading:* David Henkin, *City Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 69-100. **On e-reserve.**

James W. Cook, Jr., "From the Age of Reason to the Age of Barnum: The Great Automaton Chess-Player and the Emergence of Victorian Cultural Illusionism," *Winterthur Portfolio* 30, no. 4 (1995): 231-257.

*Topics:* Advertising and Public Space  
Early entertainments and Deception

**Week 4 (Feb 3-5): The Antebellum Years Part II: Domestic Conflicts**

*Readings:* Elise Lemire, *Miscegenation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 87-114.

Virtual Exhibit on *The Greek Slave*:  
<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sentimnt/grslvhp.html>

"White into Black," from *Picturing US History*  
[http://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/lessons\\_burnsbrown.php](http://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/lessons_burnsbrown.php)

*Topics:* Sentimental material culture, the parlor, gender & domesticity  
Slavery debates in photography, sculpture, and print  
Effective image analysis through a digital medium

**Week 5 (Feb 10-12): The Civil War & Reconstruction**

*Readings:* Joshua Brown, *Forever Free*, visual essays only  
Johnston, p66-83, 103-123 (chapters 3 & 5)

Brian F. Le Beau, "The Mind of the North in Pictures," *Common-Place* 9, no. 2 (Jan. 2009): <http://www.common-place.org/vol-09/no-02/lebeau/>

Misericordia University  
Department of History and Government

*Topics:* Soliders' photographs and albums  
Civil War prints, news reportage & illustrated weeklies  
Racial Caricatures, rise of the "Lost Cause"

**Week 6 (Feb 17-19):** **Westward Expansion**

*Readings:* Johnston, chapters 6 & 7 p124-159  
Holloway & Beck, p21-31

Vivien Green Fryd, "Two Sculptures for the Capitol: Horatio Greenough's "Rescue" and Luigi Persico's "Discovery of America," *American Art Journal* 19, no. 2 (1987): 16-39. Stable URL:  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1594479>

*Topics:* Landscape Painting and Manifest Destiny  
Native Americans and Visions of the Frontier

\*Mid-Term 1 in-class 2/19/15

**Week 7 (Feb 24-26):** **The Gilded Age and Progressive Era**

*Readings:* Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 24-63. **On e-reserve.**

Johnston, chapter 8 p160-176  
Ross, p14-41

*Topics:* World's Fairs, the Centennial  
Advertising & Commercial Culture  
The Electric City: Coney Island  
Early Films

\*\*Library workshop in class, 2/26

**(Mar 3-5): NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK**

**Week 9 (Mar 10-12):** **Turn-of-the Century Conflict**

*Readings:* Ross, p42-63

Misericordia University  
Department of History and Government

Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America 1890-1950* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1-46. **On E-reserve.**

Patterson, Martha. "Survival of the best fitted': Selling the American new woman as Gibson Girl, 1895-1910." *Atq* 9, no. 2 (June 1995): 73. **On E-reserve.**

*Topics:* Photography: Documentary or Otherwise?  
Social Problems, Immigration, & Industry

\*Project Proposal Due in class 3/12/15

**Week 10 (Mar 17-19): WWI and The "Roaring" Twenties**

*Readings:* Ross, p64-96, and 184-190  
Holloway & Beck, p56-72

*Without Sanctuary*, Online Exhibit of Lynching postcards  
<http://withoutsanctuary.org/main.html>

SCREEN: *movie TBA*

*Topics:* The Emergence of Mass Culture and Modern Advertising  
Racial Tensions in the Interwar Years

**Week 11 (Mar 24-26): The New Deal and WWII**

*Readings:* Ross, chapter 5 p128-161  
Johnston, chapter 14 p266-279  
Holloway & Beck, p83-115

SCREEN: *Modern Times* (1936)

*Topics:* Diego Rivera, WPA Artists, and Photographers  
Labor Politics  
Wartime Propaganda

\*WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE: March 30<sup>th</sup> —Last day to withdraw without academic penalty

**Week 12 (Mar 31): Postwar Culture Part I**

*Readings:* Holloway & Beck, p125-132  
Rawlinson, *American Visual Culture*, p47-72. **On e-reserve.**

Misericordia University  
Department of History and Government

Horkheimer & Adorno, “The Culture Industry,” from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 120-167.

SCREEN: *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961)

*Topics:* Postwar Consumerism  
Gender and Domestic Containment

\*Mid-Term 2 (Take Home) Due 3/31/15

\*NO CLASS April 2—Easter Recess

**Week 13 (Apr 7-9):** **Postwar Culture Part II: Civil Rights & Feminism**

*Readings:* Ross, chapter 9 p249-278  
Holloway & Beck, p166-173, 209-215

SCREEN: News clips, *Mary Tyler Moore*, *Mad Men* Pilot episode (2007)

*Topics:* News Reportage: Speeches and Marches  
Gender on Television

**Week 14 (Apr 14):** **Counter Cultures and Vietnam**

*Readings:* Ross, chapter 10 p280-311  
Holloway & Beck, p199-208, 257-264

SCREEN: Clips from *Green Berets* (1968), *Apocalypse Now* (1979)

*Topics:* “Hippies”, Veterans, and Critiquing the Cold War  
Photography’s role in fueling the Anti-war movement  
War photography as a genre

\*\*Research project workshop, 4/16

**Week 15 (Apr 21-23):** **The 1980s**

*Readings:* Ross, chapter 11 p313-342

SCREEN: *Fatal Attraction* (1987)

*Topics:* Reagan’s Return to Conservatism  
Working-Class Politics and the Backlash against Feminism  
The role of the News in shaping collective consciousness—Berliners tearing down the wall

Misericordia University  
Department of History and Government

**Week 16 (Apr 28):** Student Presentations

\*Final Projects & Presentations Due on Final Exam Date (TBA)