

Misericordia University
Department of History and Government

HIS 462: Seminar in American Visual Culture

Course Credits: 3

Semester: Fall 2017 (#01) *Service Learning

Prerequisites: Completion of the History / Political Science Core

Dr. Jennifer M. Black, History Dept.

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.

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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

Teaching / Learning Strategies:

These goals will be assessed through written assignments, classroom discussion, service-learning experiences, and in-class presentations.

Required Texts

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

*Additional readings as required in the syllabus, and posted on Blackboard.

Evaluation Methods & Student Assignments

This service-learning course requires 12 service hours. Participation in the service project is required. The remaining 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:

- Service Project Hours / Work (10%)
- SP Blog Posts (20%)
- SP Reflection Paper (5%)
- Project Proposal (5%)
- Final Project & Presentation (30%)
- Image posts, discussion & Participation (30%)

Service Project: There will be several components to the service project in this course. Each student will be required to complete 9 hours working directly with Maureen Cech, the University Archivist, to process and catalog outstanding photo collections, and / or composing finding aid materials or other collection summaries as needed. A related component of the service project will be a series of blog posts, on the course website, which analyze discreet objects or images from the collection (3hrs). Students must complete at least 4 blog posts over the course of the semester, about 150-300 words each. Detailed instructions will be posted to the Blackboard.

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Finally, students will complete a reflection paper (1-2p) on the service-learning experience at the end of the semester. Questions for the reflection paper will be posted to the Blackboard.

To complete the required 9hrs of service, students should attend three of the following service dates (all will take place in the McGowan room):

Saturday, 9/16/17, 10-5pm
Tuesday, 9/26/17, 6pm-9pm
Tuesday, 10/10/17, 6pm-9pm
Friday, 10/20/17, 2pm-5pm

Image Posts / Participation: 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 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.

Final Project: For the final project in this course, students will curate a small digital exhibit using items found during the service work and supplemented with additional online repositories. The exhibit will include at least six images unified by a central theme (2-3 images from the university collections, 3-4 from outside sources), with individual analyses and a section introduction. It is anticipated that students will work in pairs or threes on the final project. A project proposal will be 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.

Grading Scale for Course Grades:

<u>Superior:</u>	<u>Very Good:</u>	<u>Satisfactory:</u>	<u>Poor:</u>
A = 93-100%	B+= 87-89%	C+ = 77-79%	D = 65-69%
A- = 90-92%	B = 83-86%	C = 73-76%	F = 64% & below
	B- = 80-82%	C- = 70-72%	

Course Policies

Each week we will spend part of our time discussing the assigned readings, and the remainder of our time engaging in extensive image analysis, which will strongly inform both the writing assignments and the final project. Therefore, readings should be completed before our first class

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meeting each week, and regular attendance is mandatory (you will be allowed two absences without penalty). Please bring all readings for the week to class, for reference during class discussion (including resources posted on Blackboard). You are encouraged to question and think critically about the material presented and use class as a place for exchanging those thoughts and questions with other students.

Material created for the course service project will be shared with the wider community through an online, digital medium. Students' blog posts will be subject to a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](#). **By remaining in this course, you hereby agree to produce and share your final project under the terms of this license.** Students' final projects, as a component of the service project featuring the University Archives, will remain the intellectual property of Misericordia University. The full terms / conditions of this arrangement will be shared before work on the service project begins. If you have any questions or concerns, it is your responsibility to address these to the instructor before the end of the drop / add period.

If you have specific questions or concerns about the assignments or your performance in the class, please come to see me as soon as possible. Addressing these issues early in the semester is key to your success in this class and, more generally, as a student. I am happy to meet with students either in office hours or by appointment to discuss course assignments, paper drafts (within a reasonable time-frame), questions, concerns, writing mechanics, general history, or anything else you'd like to discuss.

Classroom Etiquette:

In this course we will often discuss potentially controversial issues having to do with race, gender, sexuality, class, and politics. Our investigation of primary sources and images in this course may lead to such controversy. We each need to strive to maintain a tolerant and respectful environment in class. Open disrespect of another classmate will not be tolerated. Likewise, disruptions (coming in late, engaging in side conversation, use of cell phones, web surfing, texting, etc.) are detrimental to the class as a whole and will not be tolerated. Please make an effort to arrive to class on time—students who consistently arrive late will lose participation points. I reserve the right to ask any student who is disruptive or disrespectful to leave the classroom.

Weekly Schedule

**Hyperlinked articles are also linked through blackboard*

Week 1 (Aug 28 - 30): 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>]

Topics: Intro to the course & Service Learning Project
Why are images important for studying history?
How to read an image and assess its construction

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Week 2 (Sept 5 - 7): University Archives & Photo Collection: Service Project

Reading: Bonnie Swoger, "What is metadata?" <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/information-culture/what-is-metadata-a-christmas-themed-exploration/>

Jennifer Riley, Understanding Metadata, p.1-7
http://www.niso.org/apps/group_public/download.php/17446/Understanding%20Metadata.pdf

Topics: Cataloguing & Metadata
Working with Omeka and Wordpress
Photographing / Digitizing, and Photoshop

Week 3 (Sept 12 - 14): 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. Martha McNamara and Georgia B. Barnhill (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2012), 47-68. **On Blackboard.**

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

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

Week 4 (Sept 19 - 21): The Antebellum Years Part I: the Market Revolution

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

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.
(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4618515>)

Topics: Advertising and Public Space
Early entertainments and Deception

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Week 5 (Sept 26 - 28): 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)
(<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 6 (Oct 3 - 5): The Civil War & Reconstruction

Readings: Joshua Brown, *Forever Free*, visual essays only (**on Blackboard**)

Johnston, chapter 5, p103-123

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

Topics: Soliders’ photographs and albums
Civil War prints, news reportage & illustrated weeklies
Racial Caricatures, rise of the “Lost Cause”

Week 7 (Oct 10): Westward Expansion

Readings: Johnston, chapters 6 p124-141

Holloway & Beck, p21-31

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

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

****NO CLASS 10/12/17, Fall Break**

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Week 8 (Oct 17 - 19): 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 Blackboard.**

Ross, p14-41

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

*Reflection Paper due by 5pm to Blackboard on 10/20/17

*All service work should be completed by 10/20/17

Week 9 (Oct 24 - 26): Turn-of-the Century Conflict

Readings: Ross, p42-63

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

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

*Project Proposal Due in class 10/24/17

Week 10 (Oct 31 – Nov 2): WWI and The “Roaring” Twenties

Readings: Ross, p64-96, and 184-190

Holloway & Beck, p56-62

[Without Sanctuary, Online Exhibit](http://withoutsanctuary.org/main.html) of Lynching postcards
(<http://withoutsanctuary.org/main.html>)

SCREEN: *Male vs. Female* (1919)

Topics: Racial & Gender Tensions in the Interwar Years

*WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE: Nov 6th—Last day to withdraw without academic penalty

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Week 11 (Nov 7 - 9): The New Deal and WWII

Readings: Horkheimer & Adorno, "The Culture Industry," from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 120-167. **On Blackboard.**

Holloway & Beck, p83-115

SCREEN: *Modern Times* (1936)

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

Week 12 (Nov 14 - 16): Postwar Culture Part I

Readings: Holloway & Beck, p125-132

Rawlinson, *American Visual Culture*, p47-72. **On Blackboard.**

SCREEN: *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961)
Mad Men Pilot episode (2007)

Topics: Postwar Consumerism
Gender and Domestic Containment

Week 13 (Nov 21): Project Workshop

**Research project workshop, 11/21/17

**NO CLASS 11/23/17, Thanksgiving break

Week 14 (Nov 28 - 30): Postwar Culture Part II: Civil Rights & Social Reform

Readings: Ross, chapter 9 p249-278

Holloway & Beck, p166-173, 209-215

SCREEN: *Harvest of Shame* (1960)

Topics: News Reportage: Speeches and Marches
Gender on Television

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Week 15 (Dec 5 - 7): 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

Week 16 (Dec 11 - 15): Presentations

*Student presentations during final exam period, TBA