



American Cultural History: Selected Topics Thinking Visually about History

COURSE GUIDE

**History 546
Fall 2002**

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Hours: Tues and Thurs, 3:15-4:00
and by appointment

I do not mind if you call me at home (856-7207) with questions regarding the course but please do not call after 9:00 p.m.

Scope of the Course

This course is designed as an advanced reading seminar focusing on the critical perspectives and methods of historians who study American cultural history. The course is designed with two basic goals in mind: 1. To introduce you to the interdisciplinary practice of cultural history, and 2. To explore key periods in the development of American culture from the colonial era to the early twentieth century. The central theme of the course this semester is "thinking visually about American history." The historians you will encounter all use some form of visual evidence

in their work, from objects to art to photographs to film and television. As we move through time we will also be exploring a variety of approaches or methods for using visual sources as historical evidence.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester students should be able to demonstrate knowledge and skill development in the following areas.

- ?? Explain distinctive periods in the development of American culture from the eighteenth through the twentieth century.
- ?? Understand and evaluate a variety of methods for using visual (objects, photographs, art, etc.) rather than text-based sources as historical evidence.
- ?? Restate concisely and substantively central arguments of each reading assignment and evaluate major points of agreement or disagreement among particular authors.
- ?? Synthesize and evaluate arguments and methodologies encountered in each unit through three unit papers.
- ?? Graduate students: develop a professional review essay on a related topic in cultural history.
- ?? Undergraduate students: learn how to write an effective book review.

Required Readings

Books: (available at UNCG Bookstore)

Nash, Gary B., et al. *The American People: Creating A Nation and a Society*. New York: Longman, 2003. [Note: this textbook is recommended rather than required.]

Bushman, Richard. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1992. [E162 .B986 1992]

Calloway, Colin. *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. [E45 .C34 1997]

Cohen, Paula Marantz. *Silent Film and the Triumph of the American Myth*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. [PN1995.75 .M37 2001]

Ferguson, Leland. *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. [E445.S7 F37 1992]

Hale, Grace Elizabeth, *Making Whiteness : The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York : Pantheon Books, 1998. [F215 .H18 1998]

Marling, Karal Ann. *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996. [E169.02 .M3534 1994]

Trachtenberg, Alan. *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1989. [TR820.5 .T730 1989]

Journal Articles and Book Chapters: (available in the Reserve Room of Jackson Library, on electronic reserves, and/or electronically on JSTOR or other databases.)

- Conway, Cecelia. "The Ritual of Minstrelsy: Some Were Buffoons, but Others Were Apprentices." In *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995. [ML3556 .C667 1995]
- Denker, Ellen Paul. "Evaluating Exhibitions: History Museums and Material Culture." In *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997: pp. 381-400. [E161A3881997]

Required Readings (continued)

- Jaffee, David. "One of the Primitive Sort: Portrait Makers of the Rural North, 1760-1860." In Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds. *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985. [HN57 .C68 1985]
- Kasson, Joy. "American Indian Performers in the Wild West." In *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000. [pp. 161-219; GV1821.B8 K37 2000]
- Levine, Lawrence W. "William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation." In *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in America Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. [E169.1 .L5374 1993]
- Martin, Ann Smart and J. Ritchie Garrison. "Shaping the Field: The Multidisciplinary Perspectives of Material Culture." In *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997: pp. 1-20. [E161A3881997]
- Thornton, John K. "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 96, no. 4 (Oct. 1991): 1101-1113. [JSTOR]
- Ulrich, Laurel. "An Indian Basket" and "A Bed Rug and a Silk Embroidery." In *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 2001: pp. 41-74; 208-247. [F8 .U47 2001]
- White, Shane. "The Death of James Johnson." *American Quarterly*. Vol. 51, no. 4 (December 1999): 753-795. [see JSTOR]

Attendance Policy

Faithful attendance is essential for your learning in this course. Therefore, beyond the part attendance plays in the overall participation grade, **there will be a 3% reduction of the student's final grade for each absence after the first 2** Beyond even this penalty, a student who seriously neglects attendance and preparation risks failing the course.

Evaluation

All Students: Participation	10%
All Students: Unit Papers	60%
Undergraduates: Book Review	30%
Graduate Students: Review Essay	30%

Participation (10%)

This assessment will be based on three criteria:

1. Consistent attendance--This is a seminar, not a traditional lecture course. We will be critically evaluating the content of the readings and practicing the application of analytical skills during each class period. You will not be able to make up for your absences by copying someone else's notes. For this reason, consistent attendance is essential to your learning in this course. See above for an explanation of the course attendance policy which has an impact on your overall grade in the course beyond its importance for evaluating your participation.

Evaluation (continued)

2. Thorough preparation for class--readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time. Late assignments will be penalized by a 3% reduction in the final grade for every day the assignment is late. Assignments later than one week will not be accepted for credit.
3. Regular contributions to class discussions—the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers. Discussions will take place during every class meeting in both small group exercises and as a whole class. In order to create a good climate for everyone to participate, please follow these discussion guidelines:
 - ?? Be ready to share and explain your opinions. Feel free to disagree with others, but be specific in your own assertions and back them up with evidence.
 - ?? Listen carefully and respond to other members of the group. Be willing to change your mind when someone demonstrates an error in your logic and use of facts.
 - ?? Do not hesitate to ask for clarification of any point or term you do not understand.
 - ?? Make your point succinctly, avoid repetition, and stick to the subject.

Unit Papers (60%)

Goals of this assignment—synthesis and application:

- ?? To think carefully about each author's research strategy, methods of interpretation, and argument.
- ?? To help you begin to draw comparisons between and among authors over the course of the semester.
- ?? To apply knowledge acquired in each unit to an original, problem-solving context.

Instructions: All unit papers should be about 7 pages typed and double-spaced; pages should be numbered in the upper right corner. All papers should cite specific examples from assigned readings using footnotes/endnotes accurately formatted according to the Turabian *Manual of Style*.

Paper Topics: Papers for Units 1 and 2 will focus on evaluating visual primary source evidence. The paper for Unit 3 will focus on evaluating particular scholars' methodologies.

Unit 1: Develop a proposal for a museum exhibit using a minimum of **five** objects studied in this unit to explain key developments in colonial American culture. Exhibits should provide a broad overview rather than an in-depth look at a specific subject. Due 30 September.

Unit 2: Select a photograph or a nineteenth-century portrait and use arguments and methodologies presented in the unit to evaluate your selected image. Due 11 November.

Unit 3: Which author in Unit 3 uses visual evidence most effectively? Explain your reasoning by using specific examples from the assigned readings. Due 9 December.

Evaluation criteria: Papers will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- ?? critical evaluation of specific arguments (which may include particular methods of interpretation)
- ?? effective evaluation of specific examples from assigned readings
- ?? meaningful synthesis of multiple authors' work (that is, the paper goes beyond rote summary of separate readings to effectively compare and contrast appropriate points across readings)

Evaluation (continued)

- ?? grace and beauty of prose
- ?? originality of insights
- ?? accurate formatting of footnotes/endnotes

Late penalty: Late assignments will be penalized by a 3% reduction in the final grade for every day the assignment is late. Assignments later than one week will not be accepted for credit.

Undergraduates: Book Review (30%)

Select a book related to the course theme, read it, and write an effective book review (5-7 pages) in which you evaluate the content of the book. Specific instructions about how to produce an effective book review will be provided in workshops during the semester.

Due dates:

Book approved by 7 October.

Draft due 28 September.

Final review due 25 November.

Graduate Students: Review Essay (30%)

Using comparable review essays published in professional journals such as *American Quarterly* or *Winterthur Portfolio* as your model, select three books on a related topic and develop a review essay (about 15 pages) in which you evaluate the content of each book and the ways in which their arguments and/or methodologies relate to each other. Specific instructions about how to produce an effective review essay will be provided in workshops during the semester.

Due dates:

Bibliography approved by 7 October.

Draft due 28 September.

Final review essay due 25 November.

Course Schedule

19 August Introductions

Unit 1. Colonial America/Objects as Evidence

26 August Cultural Interactions on colonial frontiers

Calloway, Colin. *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
See also *The American People*, Chapter 1.

2 September (Labor Day) holiday, classes dismissed.

9 September African cultures in America

Ferguson, Leland. *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.
Thornton, John K. "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 96, Issue 4 (Oct. 1991): 1101-1113. [see JSTOR]
See also *The American People*, "Africa on the Eve of Contact," p. 3; and Chapter 3.

16 September Using objects to reconstruct women's lives

Ulrich, Laurel. "An Indian Basket" and "A Bed Rug and a Silk Embroidery." In *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 2001: pp. 41-74; 208-247. [F8 .U47 2001]
Martin, Ann Smart and J. Ritchie Garrison. "Shaping the Field: The Multidisciplinary Perspectives of Material Culture." In *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997: pp. 1-20. [E161A3881997]
Denker, Ellen Paul. "Evaluating Exhibitions: History Museums and Material Culture." In *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997: pp. 381-400. [E161A3881997]
See also *The American People*, "Recovering the Past" and "Technology Changes the American People" sections in Part 1.

23 September Gentility and the transformation of American culture

Bushman, Richard. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1992. [Read entire "Gentility" section.]
See also *The American People*, Chapter 4.

30 September Review workshop # 1: preparation of drafts

Unit 1 papers due: Develop a proposal for a museum exhibit using a minimum of **five** objects studied in this unit to explain key developments in colonial American culture. Exhibits should provide a broad overview rather than an in-depth look at a specific subject.

Unit 2. Nineteenth-Century United States/Visual Evidence

7 October Redefining the "folk" in the United States

Bushman, Richard. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1992. [Read entire "Respectability" section.]

Jaffee, David. "One of the Primitive Sort: Portrait Makers of the Rural North, 1760-1860." In Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds. *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

See also *The American People*, Chapter 10.

Graduate Students: Last date for review essay bibliography approval.

Undergraduates: Last date for approval of books for book review.

14 October (classes dismissed for FALL BREAK)

21 October Folk vs. popular: nineteenth-century American theater as a case study

Levine, Lawrence W. "William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation." In *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in America Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. [E169.1 .L5374 1993]

Conway, Cecelia. "The Ritual of Minstrelsy: Some Were Buffoons, but Others Were Apprentices." In *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995. [ML3556 .C667 1995]

White, Shane. "The Death of James Johnson." *American Quarterly*. Vol. 51, no. 4 (December 1999): 753-795. [see JSTOR]

28 October Photographs as historical evidence

Trachtenberg, Alan. *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1989. [Read chapters 1-3]

Kasson, Joy. "American Indian Performers in the Wild West." In *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000. [pp. 161-219; GV1821.B8 K37 2000]

See also *The American People*, "Recovering the Past: Photography," p. 456; and chapters 15 and 20.

Book Review and Review Essay drafts due.

Unit 3. Twentieth Century United States/Still and Moving Images as Evidence

4 November Photographs as historical evidence

Trachtenberg, Alan. *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1989.

See also *The American People*, "Recovering the Past: Documentary Photographs," p. 622; and chapters 18-24.

11 November Review essay workshop #2: evaluation and revision of drafts

Unit 2 papers due: photo or portrait analysis

18 November Race, consumerism, and the making of the New South

Hale, Grace Elizabeth, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*.

New York : Pantheon Books, 1998.

See also *The American People*, Chapter 17.

25 November Silent film as historical evidence

Cohen, Paula Marantz. *Silent Film and the Triumph of the American Myth*. New York: Oxford

University Press, 2001.

See also *The American People*, Chapters 21-24.

Final book reviews and review essays due.

2 December Television, among other things

Marling, Karal Ann. *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*. Cambridge:

Harvard University Press, 1996.

See also *The American People*, Chapter 26-27.

9 December Course evaluations, among other things

Unit 3 paper due: Which author in Unit 3 uses visual evidence most effectively?

