



American Cultural History: Selected Topics Thinking Visually about History

COURSE GUIDE

History 546

Fall 2004

Prof. L. Tolbert

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Hours: Mon. and Wed. 1:00-2:00

and by appointment

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 and more. 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.
- Apply specific arguments and methodologies in assigned readings to your own original evaluation of particular images appropriate to the content of each unit.

Required Readings

Books: (available at UNCG Bookstore and on reserve in Jackson Library)

- Ames, Kenneth. *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.
- Deetz, James, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*. New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1996.
- Martin, Ann Smart and J. Ritchie Garrison. *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum. Distributed by University of Tennessee Press, 1997.
- Tichi, Cecelia, *Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Trachtenberg, Alan. *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1989. [TR820.5 .T730 1989] (selections)

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

- Curtis, James C. "Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother, and the Culture of the Great Depression," *Winterthur Portfolio* 21 (Spring 1986): 1-20. [JSTOR]
- Curtis, James C. and Sheila Grannen. "Let Us Now Appraise Famous Photographs: Walker Evans and Documentary Photography," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 1-23. [JSTOR]
- Daniel, Pete et al. *Official Images: New Deal Photography*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1987. [selection]
- Grier, Katherine C. "The Decline of the Memory Palace: The Parlor after 1890." In *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, eds. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.
- Hale, Grace Elizabeth, *Making Whiteness : The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York : Pantheon Books, 1998, pp. 151-197.

Required Readings (continued)

- Hill, Sarah H. "Rivercane," pp. 35-109, and "White Oak," pp. 110-131. In *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Baskets*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997.
- 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. "The Historian and the Icon: Photography and the History of the American People in the 1930s and 1940s." In *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Lovell, Margaretta M. "Reading Eighteenth-Century American Family Portraits: Social Images and Self-Images." In *Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings*. Mary Ann Calo, ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.
- Natanson, Nicholas. *The Black Image in the New Deal : The Politics of FSA Photography*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992. [selections]
- Orvell, Miles. *American Photography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Pfister, Joel, "A Garden in the Machine: Reading a Mid-Nineteenth Century, Two-Cylinder Parlor Stove as Cultural Text." In *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*. Edited by Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000. [pp. 149-166]
- Prown, Jules David. "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" In *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*. Edited by Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000. [pp. 11-28]
- Ulrich, Laurel. "An Indian Basket." 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.
- Vlach, John "American Folk Art: Questions and Quandaries." In *Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings*. Mary Ann Calo, ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.
- Volz, Candace M. "The Modern Look of the Early Twentieth-Century House: A Mirror of Changing Lifestyles." In *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, eds. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.
- Wajda, Shirley Teresa, "The Artistic Portrait Photograph." In *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*, ed. by Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press,

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

Participation	10%
Pre-Industrial object/portrait analysis	20%
Industrial object/photograph analysis	20%
Documentary photograph analysis	25%
Mass produced object analysis	25%

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.
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.

Evaluation (continued)

Object/Image Analyses (90%)

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 5-7 pages for undergraduates and 7-10 pages for graduates; typed and double-spaced; pages should be numbered in the upper right corner. All papers should cite specific examples from assigned readings using footnotes or endnotes accurately formatted according to the Turabian *Manual of Style*.

Paper Topics and due dates:

Pre-Industrial portrait or object:

Undergraduates, due 20 September. Select three different objects used as historical evidence by historians in this unit and evaluate how each historian uses the selected object as evidence. What features or aspects of the object does the historian evaluate? How does the scholar use the object as evidence of ideas or culture?

Graduates, due 24 September. Use specific examples from assigned reading in the unit to evaluate three key historiographical or methodological issues these scholars raise regarding the study of preindustrial American material culture.

Photographic Portrait or Industrial Object analysis:

Undergraduate, 13 October

Graduate, 18 October

Select a photographic portrait or an industrially made object and use appropriate assigned reading to evaluate its content as historical evidence.

Resources:

Severa, Joan L. *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840-1900*. Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1995.

Seale, William. *The Tasteful Interlude: American Interiors Through the Camera's Eye, 1860-1917*. New York: Praeger, 1975.

Library of Congress American Memory website:

Daguerreotype collection--<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/daghtml/daghome.html>

Evaluation (continued)

Documentary photograph analysis:

All papers due 8 November

Select an appropriate documentary photograph or series from the Civil War, the Progressive, or the Depression eras and use the assigned reading to evaluate its content as historical evidence.

Resources:

Civil War photos--<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/cwphome.html>

Depression era-- <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html>

Progressive era-- *America & Lewis Hine : photographs 1904-1940 : [exhibition]* / foreword by Walter Rosenblum ; biographical notes by Naomi Rosenblum ; essay by Alan Trachtenberg ; design by Marvin Israel. New York : Aperture, inc., c1977.

Mass-produced object as evidence:

All papers due 6 December

What are the most important similarities and differences between using a mass-produced object vs. a pre-industrial object as historical evidence? Use specific examples from appropriate assigned readings to evaluate this question.

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.

Course Schedule

16 August Introductions

Unit 1: Pre-Industrial Culture

18 August Using Objects as Historical Evidence: Indian Baskets

Read:

Sarah H. Hill. "Rivercane," pp. 35-109, and "White Oak," pp. 110-131. In Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Baskets. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997.

Ulrich, Laurel. "An Indian Basket." 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.

23 August Anglo-American Material Culture

Read:

Deetz, James, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*. New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1996.

Kulik, "American Difference Revisited: The Case of the American Axe" In *American Material Culture*, pp. 21-36.

25 August Anglo-American Material Culture: Vernacular vs. Genteel

Read:

Crowley, "Inventing Comfort: The Piazza." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 277-316.

Baumgarten, "Leather Stockings and Hunting Shirts." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 251-276.

30 August African-American Material Culture

Read:

Deetz, James, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*. New York:

1 September Ethnicity and Material Culture

Read:

Cusick, "Archaeological Perspectives on Material Culture and Ethnicity." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 317-358.

McCarthy, "Material Culture and the Performance of Sociocultural Identity: Community, Ethnicity, and Agency in the Burial Practices at the First African Baptist Church Cemeteries, Philadelphia, 1810-41." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 359-400.

6 September LABOR DAY HOLIDAY

8 September Using Portraits as Historical Evidence

Read:

Lovell, Margaretta M. "Reading Eighteenth-Century American Family Portraits: Social Images and Self-Images." In Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings. Mary Ann Calo, ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.

Verplanck, Anne, "The Social Meanings of Portrait Miniatures in Philadelphia, 1760-1820." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 195-224.

13 September What's "Folk" about Folk Art?

Read:

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]

Vlach, John "American Folk Art: Questions and Quandaries." In Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings. Mary Ann Calo, ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.

15 September Writing Workshop: Object/Portrait Analysis

20 September Graduate Methodology Seminar in Material Culture #1
[Optional class for undergraduates]

Read:

Martin and Garrison, "Shaping the Field." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 1-20.

Herman, "The Bricoleur Revisited." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 37-64.

Carson, "Material Culture History: The Scholarship Nobody Knows." In *American Material Culture*. 401-428.

Undergraduate Paper due 20 September: Pre-Industrial object or portrait as evidence

Graduate Paper due 24 September.

Unit 2: Industrial Culture

22 September Victorian Objects

Read:

Kenneth Ames, Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

Pfister, Joel, "A Garden in the Machine: Reading a Mid-Nineteenth Century, Two-Cylinder Parlor Stove as Cultural Text." In *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*. Edited by Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000. [pp. 149-166]

27 September Victorian Objects

Read:

Kenneth Ames, Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

Corn, "Textualizing Technics: Owner's Manuals and the Reading of Objects." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 169-194.

29 September Photographic Portraits

Read:

Trachtenberg, "Illustrious Americans"

Orvell, Ch1. Introduction, pp. 13-18.

Ch. 2 Presenting the Self pp. 19-38.

4 October Photographic Portraits

Read:

Wajda, Shirley Teresa, "The Artistic Portrait Photograph." In *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*, ed. by Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

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]

6 October Writing Workshop: Object/Photographic Portrait Analysis

Resources:

Severa, Joan L. *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840-1900*. Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1995.

Seale, William. *The Tasteful Interlude: American Interiors Through the Camera's Eye, 1860-1917*. New York: Praeger, 1975.

Library of Congress American Memory website:

Daguerreotype collection--<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/daghtml/daghome.html>

11 October **FALL BREAK**

13 October **Graduate Methodology Seminar in Material Culture #2.**
[Optional class for undergraduates]

Read:

Grier, "Material Culture as Rhetoric." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 65-104.
Eversmann et al. "Material Culture as Text." In *American Material Culture*, pp. 135-168.

Undergraduate Paper due: Photographic portrait or industrial object as evidence.

Graduate Paper due: 18 October

18 October **Documentary Photographs: Civil War**

Read:

Trachtenberg, *Albums of War*
Orvell, Ch. 4. Seeing and Believing, pp. 61-80.

20 October **Documentary Photographs: Urban-Industrial Society**

Read:

Trachtenberg, Ch. 4, *Camera Work/Social Work*
Orvell, Ch. 4. Seeing and Believing, pp. 61-80.

25 October **Documentary Photographs: Depression Era America**

Read:

Trachtenberg, Ch. 5, "A Book Nearly Anonymous"
Orvell, Ch. 6. Photography and Society, pp. 105-140.
Curtis, James C. and Sheila Grannen. "Let Us Now Appraise Famous Photographs: Walker Evans and Documentary Photography," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 1-23.

27 October **Documentary Photographs: Depression Era America**

Read:

Levine, Lawrence W. "The Historian and the Icon: Photography and the History of the American People in the 1930s and 1940s." In *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
Curtis, James C. "Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother, and the Culture of the Great Depression," *Winterthur Portfolio* 21 (Spring 1986): 1-20.

1 November Documentary Photographs: Race and Depression Era America

Read:

Read:

Hale, Grace. *Making Whiteness*, pp. 151-197.

Natanson, Nicholas. "the Photo Series: Ben Shahn's Southern Meditations." In *The Black Image in the New Deal : The Politics of FSA Photography*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992, pp. 85-112.

3 November Documentary Photographic Analysis Workshop

Resources:

Civil War photos--<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/cwphome.html>

Progressive era-- *America & Lewis Hine : photographs 1904-1940 : [exhibition]* / foreword by Walter Rosenblum ; biographical notes by Naomi Rosenblum ; essay by Alan Trachtenberg ; design by Marvin Israel. New York : Aperture, inc., c1977.

Depression era-- <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html>

8 November All Papers due: documentary photograph as evidence.

Unit 3: Mass Culture

**10 November From Victorian to Modern:
Redefining American Middle Class Homes**

Read:

Volz, Candace M. "The Modern Look of the Early Twentieth-Century House: A Mirror of Changing Lifestyles." In *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, eds. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.

Grier, Katherine C. "The Decline of the Memory Palace: The Parlor after 1890." In *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, eds. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.

15 November Objects and Identity in Mass Society

Read:

Washburn, "Getting Ready: Doll Play and Real Life in American Culture, 1900-1980." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 105-134.

Clarke, "Tupperware: Product as Social Relation." In *American Material Culture*. pp. 225-250.

17 November Technology and Material Culture

Read:

Tichi, Cecelia, *Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

22 November Technology and Material Culture

Read:

Tichi, Cecelia, *Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

24 November THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

29 November Object Analysis Workshop

1 December Object Analysis Workshop

6 December Course Evaluations

All Papers due: Mass-produced object as evidence.