

CMN 538-CF: Visual Politics of U.S. Public Culture

Spring Semester 2010

Wednesdays 2-5 pm

133 Communication Building, 1207 W. Oregon Ave.

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Course Web Site: <https://courses.las.illinois.edu/course/view.php?name=10SpCMN538CF>
and use one-time enrollment key: vispol

Course Description

Visual images historically have served as tools for negotiating public life. This seminar surveys interdisciplinary scholarship on U.S. visual politics in order to answer the question, “How have power relations and social/political relationships historically been visualized in American culture?” By situating visual images in the historical contexts in which they initially emerged and subsequently circulated, we will explore how prints, photographs, paintings, and other graphic works frame our experiences of public culture, enable us to deliberate about matters of common concern, and tell us something about who we are as citizens. Specific topics include visual rhetorics of the colonial/founding period; the pictorial press; viewership and response; Civil War imagery; presidents and politics; 1930s documentary; and visual cultures of gender, race, and class. We will read case studies of visual politics by scholars in the fields of rhetoric, communication, American studies, history, and art history.

The course is appropriate for master’s and doctoral students interested in rhetoric, visuality, public culture, political communication, media, U.S. history, and/or art history. Students do *not* need previous coursework in rhetoric to take this course.

Assignments (total of 200 points)

- (1) Five 4-5 page response papers. In each paper you will respond to a theme, issue, concept, or question that you identify and synthesize from that week’s readings. A good response paper will offer a clear, coherent argument and adequately develop it with evidence (visual as well as textual) from that week’s readings. At least two of these papers must be turned in by Spring Break—no exceptions. 50 points.
- (2) Discussion Facilitator: You and a partner will help me facilitate class discussion for a selected week. In addition to serving as point people for the actual class discussion, facilitators will be expected to: (1) post to Moodle an annotated bibliography of up to 5 relevant scholarly sources related to that week’s readings; and (2) prepare for the class a PowerPoint presentation containing images relevant to that week’s topic and readings. 40 points.
- (3) Seminar Paper. You will write a 20-30 page critical analysis of an example of U.S. visual politics from the period we have explored (roughly, the founding to 1975). The seminar paper assignment includes an 8-page topic proposal/lit review plus

bibliography due on March 10, a substantive outline/revised literature review and a formal rough draft workshopped in class on April 14 and May 5 respectively, and a final draft of the paper due May 12. Each of these components is required and graded separately for a total of 100 points. (15+15+20+50=100)

- (4) Seminar Participation. You are successfully participating in the seminar when you (a) read carefully; (b) make sure you understand authors' arguments before launching a critique; (c) bring good reading notes and questions to class; (d) engage productively in class—that is, ask questions, raise issues, deliberate with others in the room; (e) listen and respond to others critically yet charitably; (f) avoid behaviors that block productive classroom conversation, such as monopolizing discussion, remaining silent, or offering comments that are merely informational or appreciative rather than substantively analytical. 20 points.

Readings

The following books are required and available at Illini Union Bookstore:

Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (Univ. of California Press, 2002)

Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007)

David Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images* (Univ. of California Press, 2005)

Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. DuBois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Duke University Press, 2004)

We will also read a collection of articles and book chapters available as PDFs on our Moodle site.

Although no previous coursework in rhetoric is necessary, students outside of rhetorical studies may wish to consult one of the following reference works for questions about histories of particular concepts or terms. (If you plan to focus your graduate studies in rhetoric I urge you to purchase the Jasinski text.)

James Jasinski, *Sourcebook on Rhetoric* (Sage, 2001).
Education Library Reference [non-circulating] 808.003 J31s

Thomas Sloan, ed. *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (Oxford, 2000).
English Library Reference [non-circulating] 808.003 En192

Finally, this visual history of American cultural/political ideas may be a useful reference, especially for those seeking bibliographic help or project ideas:

David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas* (Oxford, 2005).
History, Philosophy, Newspaper Library [323.440973 F5221](#)

Administrative Miscellany

- (1) Use Chicago Manual of Style (14th or 15th edition) for all class writing. No fonts smaller than 11-point, please. For CMS help see <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/home.html>
- (2) This course offers many opportunities for you to work on the quality of your writing. My feedback on your written work will address not only on its ideas but also the quality of its organization, clarity, and mechanics. Be aware that I will refuse to accept work that does not conform to minimum standards of grammar, spelling, mechanics, and citation for graduate-level writing.
- (3) All written work should be turned in on paper and in person unless we have mutually agreed otherwise.
- (4) Students who are found to have violated the University's academic integrity policies should expect to fail the course.
- (5) Barring serious family or medical emergencies, I will give no incompletes for this course.
- (6) If you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, feel free to contact me to discuss your specific needs.
- (7) Laptops are absolutely welcome in class for notetaking, referring to articles, viewing images, and performing other activities directly related to class discussion. However, I reserve the right to declare "screens down" at any time during class, for any reason.
- (8) Please turn off your cellphones or set them on silent mode when you come to class. And, of course, no sending or reading text messages during class; you are most certainly a danger to yourself and others if you try to text and think graduate-level thoughts at the same time!
- (9) Many of our course readings are PDF files posted to our Moodle site. Print out articles or bring electronic versions so that you have them available to you in class.

Schedule of Readings/Assignments

(all readings/links on Moodle except books listed above)

Jan. 20 Course Introduction: Visual Politics, Public Culture

Chapters 1-2 Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers*
 Blumenthal, "From Norman Rockwell to Abu Ghraib"
http://www.salon.com/opinion/blumenthal/2007/04/26/torture_policy/index.html
 Horner, "The Illustrated President"
<http://www.harpers.org/archive/2008/01/hbc-90002237>
 George W. Bush video tour of Oval Office

Optional reading on history of visual studies in field of communication/rhetoric:
 Olson, Finnegan, and Hope, introduction to *Visual Rhetoric: A Reader*

Jan. 27 Picturing the Colonies and Early Republic

Olson, *Emblems of American Community* (preface, introduction, ch. 1)
 Olson, "Pictorial Representations of British America Resisting Rape"
 Ward, *Charles Willson Peale: Art and Selfhood in the Early Republic* (preface, 3, 4)

Feb. 3 Visions of National Identity: Citizens and Slaves

Ward, *Charles Willson Peale*, cont. (5, 6, 8)

Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery* (2-3)

Feb. 10 Pictorial Reporting: Print Culture & the Civil War

Brown, *Beyond the Lines* (through ch. 4)

Morris, Unknown Soldier (<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/29/whose-father-was-he-part-one>)

Feb. 17 Pictorial Reporting and Spectacle

Brown, *Beyond the Lines* (ch. 5 - end)

Leja, "Mumler's Fraudulent Photographs"

Feb. 24 Looking for Lincoln

Finnegan, "Recognizing Lincoln: Portrait Photography...National Identity"

Trachtenberg, "Lincoln's Smile"

Nicolay, "Lincoln's Personal Appearance"

Bartlett, "The Physiognomy of Lincoln"

Mar. 3 Laughter and Art in Late 19th Century Public Culture

Guest: Jennifer Greenhill, Art History, readings TBA (see Moodle)

Mar. 10 Early 20th Century and the Color Line

Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*

Appel, "Lynching Photographs and the Politics of Public Shaming"

Due: Topic Proposal/Lit. Review/Bibliography

Mar. 17 The Documentary Decade

Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* (ch. 1, 4, epilogue)

Raeburn, *A Staggering Revolution: Cultural History of 30s Photography* (ch. 7, 10, 11)

***At least 2 response papers should have been turned in by this class period**

Mar. 24 SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS)Mar. 31 Visualizing Post-War Political Leadership

Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images* (through ch. 5)

Apr. 7 Trauma, Disaster, and National Mourning

Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy* (ch. 6-end)

Apr. 14 Visualizing the Cold War: Rhetorics of the Interface

Guests: Ned O’Gorman (Communication) & Kevin Hamilton (Art & Design), readings TBA (see Moodle). For more information about their collaborative project, see <http://complexfields.org/archive/projects/mobility>

Apr. 21 Seminar Paper Workshop #1: Outline/Lit. Review

Post materials to Moodle for CF/peer group to review by Tues., 4/20 at noon

Apr. 28 Iconic Photographs and Norms of Public Culture

Hariman & Lucaites, *No Caption Needed* (all but ch. 7-8)

May 5 Seminar Paper Workshop #2: Rough Drafts

Post completed rough draft to Moodle for CF/peer group review by Mon., 5/3 at noon

May 12 Final Seminar Paper due in my office by noon (338 Comm. Bldg.)