American Cultural History: Selected Topics
Thinking Visually about History

COURSE GUIDE

History 546             Fall 2004
Prof. L. Tolbert         Office Phone: 334-4646
Office: McIver 210       Hours: Mon. and Wed. 1:00-2:00
Email: lctolber@uncg.edu, this is the best way to reach me 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)

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


**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**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Industrial object/portrait analysis</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Industrial object/photograph analysis</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documentary photograph analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mass produced object analysis</td>
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**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:
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:

23 August  Anglo-American Material Culture
Read:

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

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:
6 September    LABOR DAY HOLIDAY

8 September    Using Portraits as Historical Evidence
Read:

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

15 September    Writing Workshop: Object/Portrait Analysis

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

27 September Victorian Objects
Read:

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:

6 October Writing Workshop: Object/Photographic Portrait Analysis
Resources:
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:
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 NearlyAnonymous"
Orvell, Ch. 6. Photography and Society, pp. 105-140.

27 October  Documentary Photographs: Depression Era America
Read:
1 November  
**Documentary Photographs: Race and Depression Era America**

**Read:**

3 November  
**Documentary Photographic Analysis Workshop**

**Resources:**
Civil War photos--http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/cwphome.html
Depression era-- http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html

8 November  
**All Papers due: documentary photograph as evidence.**

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**Unit 3: Mass Culture**

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

**Read:**

15 November  
**Objects and Identity in Mass Society**

**Read:**
17 November  Technology and Material Culture

22 November  Technology and Material Culture

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.