



# Using Photographs as Historical Evidence

## HIS 511A COURSE GUIDE\*

WI, SI, RI

Spring 2015

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Hours: by appointment

*\*Note that this syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Any necessary changes in the syllabus or course schedule will prioritize effectiveness for student learning.*

## Scope and Purpose of the Course

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In this course you will go beyond the use of photographs as mere illustrations to interpret the richer meanings of their visual content in a research paper of your own design. We will study photographs as a distinctive type of primary source evidence that must be critically evaluated in historical context. During the first half of the course we will focus on examples of different kinds of research questions historians ask about photographs. You will put these methods and perspectives into practice by developing a research paper that uses a particular type of photograph as primary source evidence (rather than as simple illustration) to develop your own original interpretation. This course satisfies university writing and speaking intensive requirements and the research intensive requirement for history majors.

# Course Learning Objectives

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By the end of the semester students should be able to:

- Apply multiple strategies for “reading” photographs as historical evidence.
- Explain how specific photographs are cultural artifacts that must be critically evaluated in historical context.
- Explain some of the ways that technological change affected the results and meanings of photographic evidence.
- Analyze the visual content of photographs considering such factors as format, purpose, audience, the role of the photographer, the role of the subject or sitter, the technology of the image, and social or cultural context important for understanding the visual content of the photograph.
- Develop an original research paper (25-30 pages) using photographs as primary source evidence rather than simple illustrations.
- Practice such research skills as defining an interesting and focused topic, creating a meaningful research bibliography, and using primary source evidence to defend and explain a thesis statement.

## Required Readings

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Rampolla, Mary Lynn. *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2007. This will serve as our writing and citation standard.

*Journal Articles and Book Chapters: (available as indicated on ereserves or electronic journal databases.)*

Hales, Peter Bacon, “American Views and the Romance of Modernization.” In Martha A. Sandweiss, ed., *Photography in Nineteenth Century America* (New York and Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1991), 204-257. [ereserves on Bb]

McCandless, Barbara. "The Portrait Studio and the Celebrity: Promoting the Art," in Martha A. Sandweiss, ed., *Photography in Nineteenth Century America* (New York and Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1991), 48-75. [ereserves on Bb]

Mitchell, Mary Niall. "'Rosebloom and Pure White,' or so it Seemed." *American Quarterly* 54:3 (2002): 369-410. [Use the Library Catalog]

Trachtenberg, Alan. “Introduction: Photographs as Symbolic History.” In *The American Image: Photographs from the National Archives, 1860-1960*, pp. ix-xxxii. New York: Pantheon, 1979. [ereserves on Bb]

Seixas, Peter. "Lewis Hine: From Social to Interpretive Photographer." *American Quarterly* Vol. 39, No. 3 (Autumn, 1987): 381-409. [Use the Library Catalog]

Yochelson, Bonnie. "What Are the Photographs of Jacob Riis?" *Culturefront* 3, no. 3 (August 1994): 28-38. [posted to Bb]

**Recommended Reading:** If you need to brush up on the research skills you learned in either HIS 391 or HIS 430, I highly recommend:

Presnell, Jenny L. *The Information-Literate Historian: A Guide to Research for History Students*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

## Evaluation

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Research Development	40%
Research Paper	60%

### **Research Development (40%)**

These assignments are designed to help you practice historical analysis of photographs and develop your research paper in stages. Formats may vary. This category includes two research presentations with peer review.

### **Research Paper (50%)**

You will develop a final research paper using a historically related group of photographs as historical evidence. Your research bibliography should contain a minimum of 12 scholarly books and journal articles and appropriate primary sources in addition to the photographs you are studying. The final paper should be about 25 pages typed and double-spaced, with Turabian-style footnotes and bibliography. We will be developing this assignment throughout the semester. This assignment will be the exclusive focus of the course during the month of April, which is organized as a series of workshops devoted to specific term paper revision issues.

Research skills this assignment will teach you include the following:

- Constructing an interesting and clearly focused research topic
- Using photographs as primary source evidence
- Developing a meaningful research bibliography
- Synthesizing scholarly arguments
- Creating an original thesis or argument
- Applying scholarly citation methods
- Effective strategies for revising and improving your written analysis of evidence and thesis development

# Course Policies

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## Participation and Attendance Policy

1. Consistent attendance— Attendance is mandatory. 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. I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. You must attend at least one hour of the class period to be counted for full attendance for the class. If the University is closed for snow you will not, of course, be counted absent. If it snows and the University is open, class will be held as scheduled and attendance counts. In the event that I am unable to attend class due to unforeseen circumstances I will distribute an email message and post an announcement to Bb at least two hours (if possible) before class is scheduled to begin. Documentation for absences will not be collected except in cases where an extended absence may be necessary (for example, hospitalization). **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 class preparation risks failing the course. If you are experiencing a personal crisis that requires you to miss more than 2 classes, please let me know *at that time* (not afterwards).
2. Thorough preparation for class—readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time, including ungraded Discussion Board postings. **Failure to submit Discussion Board postings by the deadline will result in 2 points subtracted from your Research Development average for each skipped Discussion Board assignment.** Postings must be complete and must fully address the question for credit.
3. Regular contributions to class discussions—participation is not formally graded as a specific percentage of the final grade but the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers. Peer review will be integral to development of your archive project.

## Academic Integrity

UNCG considers academic dishonesty to be a serious offense. Dishonest behavior in any form, including cheating, plagiarism, deception of effort, and unauthorized assistance, may result in such sanctions as a failing grade on an assignment or failure in the course depending on the nature of the offense. Students must follow the guidelines of the University Policy on Academic Integrity:

<http://sa.uncg.edu/handbook/academic-integrity-policy/>

## Electronic Communication

Students are responsible for checking Blackboard and UNCG email on a regular basis. Students are encouraged to utilize email and other forms of digital communication when interacting with the instructor (lctolber@uncg.edu). When using email, students are to be professional and courteous. Students should also remember email is an asynchronous form of communication. Thus, while a prompt response may be desired, it may not always be possible (especially late at night and on

weekends). Students should allow at least 24 hours (48 hours on weekends) for a response. That said, the instructor answers emails in the timeliest fashion possible.

### **Late Assignment Penalty**

Meeting deadlines is an essential element of professional behavior. Please note that *unless arrangements have been made well in advance of due dates*, assignments will be penalized by a **3% reduction in the final assignment grade for every day the assignment is late**. Assignments later than one week will not be accepted for credit without an extremely impressive explanation. Using effective quantitative reasoning, your grade average can recover from an F on an individual assignment more successfully than it can recover from a "0". It is better to turn in an incomplete assignment on time than to turn in nothing at all.

## Course Schedule

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14 January Introductions

### Interpreting Photographs: Key Questions

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- Technology: What difference does technology make for interpreting photographic images?
- Social Process of Creation: Why was the photograph created? What was the process of creation? What role did the sitter/subject play in creating the photograph? What if you don't know who the photographer was? What if you don't know who the sitter was? Is the source useless as historical evidence?
- Social Process of Uses: How do the uses of a photograph influence interpretation?
- User/Audience: Was the photograph created for a private or public audience? Was it commercialized or sold in multiple copies? Captions? How did the meaning of the photograph change based on presentation format/context of viewing? (ie. Gallery, newspaper, personal family album, souvenir collection)
- Photograph as Object: What difference does format or genre make? Portrait, social documentary, albums/collected images; stereograph?
- What difference does historical context make? What different kinds of context matter for understanding your photo?

21 January Portrait of Sojourner Truth/Developing Research Questions

Read:

Elizabeth Hutchinson, Barnard College, Analysis of the Portrait of Sojourner Truth, 1864,

[http://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/item.php?item\\_id=176](http://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/item.php?item_id=176)

Mitchell, Mary Niall. "'Rosebloom and Pure White,' or so it Seemed." *American Quarterly* 54:3 (2002): 369-410. [Use the Library Catalog]

**Research Development Assignment:** Write a one-page, single-spaced analysis of the Sojourner Truth photograph using the assigned reading. There should be at least two footnotes from the Mitchell article in your analysis. You may wish to use the key questions identified in the box above to guide your analysis. **Post to Bb by 3:00 on 21 January to avoid a late penalty.**

**28 January Civil War Photo Analysis Workshop:** What Difference Does Technology Make for Historical Analysis of Photographs?

Read:

Does the Camera Ever Lie? <http://www.loc.gov/collections/static/civil-war-glass-negatives/articles-and-essays/does-the-camera-ever-lie/> Read the introduction and both "The Case of Confused Identity" and "The Case of the Moved Body"

**4 February Library Workshop I: Civil War Case Study [meet in the Library]**  
3:30-4:45 finding scholarly books and journal articles in Citi Lab  
5:00-6:20 in University Archives

Students should pick a Civil War photo from the Library of Congress database <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/cwp/> as the subject of their research for the first half of this workshop. During the workshop you will create a bibliography identifying at least one scholarly journal article and one scholarly book that would be useful for addressing two different research questions about the photo.

Archives staff will do a workshop for the second half of class, 5:00-6:20 focused on photo technology and photos as objects with opportunities for students to see a variety of technologies—daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, stereographs, albums. This workshop is also an opportunity to show students possible research topics using Manuscript and Archive collections.

**Research Development Assignment: Library Workshop results due by 5:00 p.m. on Feb. 6.**

Submit the Civil War photograph that was the focus of your research for the Library Workshop and two research questions that take different research approaches for analyzing the photo with annotated bibliographies for each question.

**11 February Social Process of Creation: Role of the Photographer/ Sitter/Audience**

Read:

McCandless, Barbara. "The Portrait Studio and the Celebrity: Promoting the Art," in Martha A. Sandweiss, ed., *Photography in Nineteenth Century America* (New York and Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1991), 48-75. [ereserves on Bb]

**Research Development Assignment: Preliminary Research Proposal with secondary source bibliography due by 8:00 a.m. on 16 February.**



**18 February Proposal Workshop**  
**Photographs as Symbolic History**

Read:

Trachtenberg, Alan. "Introduction: Photographs as Symbolic History." In *The American Image: Photographs from the National Archives, 1860-1960*, pp. ix-xxxii. New York: Pantheon, 1979. [ereserves on Bb]

**25 February Library Workshop II: Finding Primary Sources Appropriate to Your Research Topic**  
Meet in the Library Citi Lab

**4 March What Difference does Genre Make?**

Read:

Hales, Peter Bacon, "American Views and the Romance of Modernization." In Martha A. Sandweiss, ed., *Photography in Nineteenth Century America* (New York and Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1991), 204-257. [ereserves on Bb]

**Research Development Assignment:** Analyze one of the photographs you are studying in historical context with citations to appropriate scholarship. Apply ideas from at least two of the assigned readings. You must also include at least one citation to scholarship you have identified through your own research. About 2 pages, single-spaced. **Post to Bb by 5:00 p.m. on March 6 to avoid a late penalty.**

**11 March \*\*\*\*\*Spring Break\*\*\*\*\***

**18 March Distinguishing the Purposes and Uses of Photographs**  
**Role of the Archivist: Considering the Photograph as Object**

Read:

Seixas, Peter. "Lewis Hine: From Social to Interpretive Photographer." *American Quarterly* Vol. 39, No. 3 (Autumn, 1987): 381-409. [Use the Library Catalog]

Yochelson, Bonnie. "What Are the Photographs of Jacob Riis?" *Culturefront* 3, no. 3 (August 1994): 28-38. [posted to Bb]

**Research Development Assignment:** Revised Research Proposal with Annotated Bibliography including primary and secondary resources. **Post to Bb by 5:00 p.m. on March 20 to avoid a late penalty.**

# Developing Your Own Interpretation: The Research Paper

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- Context and Authority: evaluating the context in which a source was created— who, what, why, how, and when; questioning the creator’s motives, biases, and reliability as a source.
- Extracting Information and Evidence from the records: understanding differences in information and evidence; inferring evidence and drawing conclusions; defining historical significance.
- Following the Leads: uncovering the clues in documents that lead to other sources; creative thinking for moving to the next phase of research.
- Differences between primary and secondary sources; varieties of primary and secondary source materials
- Delineating the project’s scope; defining topic; and outlining sources needed for project
- Search strategies: listing terms, continuous refinement of topic and search strategies, using online catalogs and search engines.
- Using finding aids: navigating the description and arrangement of a collection.
- Historiography: Assessing historians’ agreements and disagreements about what the evidence means.
- Critical Evaluation of Sources: individual and collective analysis of records and the development of a thesis.
- Synthesis: drawing of ideas, information and evidence around a thesis
- Effective Quoting and Paraphrasing
- Citation: Efficient methods of tracking sources during research; proper methods of citation; scholarly and ethical responsibilities, avoiding plagiarism.
- Beyond reporting findings: writing as integral to discovery and the research process in history

**25 March Photo Analysis Presentations: Historical Significance**

**Research Development Assignment: Thesis statement due by 8:00 a.m. on March 31.**

**1 April Thesis Workshop**

**Paper Draft due by 8:00 a.m. on April 7. Failure to submit a draft by the deadline will result in a 5% reduction in the final paper grade. Drafts must be complete for full credit.**

**8 April Photo Analysis Presentations: Evaluating Authority**

**15 April Writing Workshop: Draft Revision/Peer Review**

**22 April Writing Workshop: Draft Revision/Peer Review**

**27 April Final Paper due**