

American Studies 439	John Ibson
American Photographs	Office: UH 419
Fall 2011	Office Hours: TR 10:15-11:15, 1:00-2:00, and by appointment
Tuesday & Thursday 11:30-12:45	email: jibson@fullerton.edu
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Required Reading:

Elsbeth H. Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884-1929* (2005)
 Anna Pegler-Gordon, *In Sight of America: Photography and the Development of U.S. Immigration Policy* (2009)
 Robert Hariman John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (2007)
 Kiku Adatto, *Picture Perfect: Life in the Age of the Photo Op* (2008)
 Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life* (1987)

John Ibson, "Picturing Boys: Found Photographs and the Transformation of Boyhood in 1950s America" (2007)

The five books are available at the Little Professor Book Center, 725 N. Placentia Avenue, Fullerton, just east of campus. The article will be passed out in class.

I expect you to read these five books books, as well as my article, in their entirety, in the order specified on the Course Outline. No additional reading will be required in this course, but you may find it useful to do a bit of background reading for the two essays due near the end of the semester.

Course Requirements:

It is essential that you attend class regularly and that you complete reading by the day that it is assigned. This class will require your active involvement—as listeners and, I hope, as speakers too—in our frequent discussions.

Early in October, as we are completing assignments in the book by Anna Pegler-Gordon, I will announce a topic on which you must write **an essay** of about 2,000 words, if you are an undergraduate, or about 2,500 words, if you are a graduate student. I'll discuss the topic with you in class. My criteria in evaluating your work will be: understanding, originality, evidence, clarity, and organization. The essay should rely on all course

material through our coverage of Pegler-Gordon; it will be due exactly two weeks after our last discussion of reading from that book.

On Thursday, **November 17**, you must submit **two interpretive essays** of around 1,000 words each in which you analyze the cultural significance of two photographs of your own choosing: one a vernacular or everyday photograph, the other a photograph by a well-known professional photographer. A clear photocopy of each photograph must accompany your essays. I'll discuss this assignment in class from time to time throughout the semester; I encourage you to see me in my office about the project as often as you like. As noted above, you may find it necessary to do a bit of additional reading to strengthen your analysis, but this is not a research paper; additional reading is not absolutely required. As noted below, we'll devote three class sessions to discussions of your projects; I have in mind free-flowing discussions, not formal, project-by-project reports.

The **final exam** will be an essay of around 2,500 words, if you are an undergraduate, or around 3,000 words, if you are a graduate student. In this essay, about which I'll be more precise later, you are to assess the usefulness of photography as cultural evidence, basing your essay on a comprehensive review of what we have considered throughout the semester. The essay will be due on **Thursday, December 15**, at 2:00 pm.

I will extend a deadline for any assignment without penalty only for a compelling reason for which I might require documentation.

Working with the Office of Disabled Student Services, I'll make any necessary arrangements for the particular needs of students with disabilities.

Grading:

The midterm essay will count 30% toward your grade for written work, as will the two interpretive essays (taken together). The final exam will count 40%. Once I've computed your grade for written work, I may then raise or lower that grade up to a full letter grade, based on the quality of your class participation, to determine your grade in the course.

I use the university's plus/minus grading system.

Depending on its severity, academic dishonesty will result in a penalty ranging from a failing grade on a particular assignment to an F in the course.

COURSE OUTLINE

Like all American studies courses, this one is at heart an examination of American culture: to paraphrase Clifford Geertz, the beliefs, symbols, and values in terms of which Americans define the world around them and express their feelings and make judgments about what they encounter. From its invention in 1839, photography has had dramatic cultural consequences, has had an increasingly important impact on the ways in which we literally and figuratively see the world, on the ways that power is distributed in our society, on the very ways in which we remember the past, and on the ways in which we record and even shape our involvements with others. The class will examine the relationship between still photography and American culture over the span of well over a century and a half, from the dawn of photography to the present day. We will observe some important ways in which photographs have expressed as well as affected American culture.

Tu 8/23 Who We Are and Why We're Here

I. PICTURE-TAKING AS A CULTURAL RITUAL: PHOTOGRAPHY AS CULTURAL EXPRESSION

1. Class Activity: Examining and Explaining Our Favorite

Th 8/25 Photos

Tu 8/30

Th 9/1

2. From Daguerreotype to Digital: American Photography

Tu 9/6 in Historical Overview (lecture)

Th 9/8

II. THE POLITICS OF PHOTOGRAPHY: PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGERY IN THE SERVICE OF CORPORATE CAPITALISM

read: Brown, *The Corporate Eye*

1. The Look of a "Good" Worker

Tu 9/13 Introduction, pp. 1-22; Chapter 1, "The Physiognomy of American Labor: Photography and Employee Rationalization," pp. 23-64.

Th 9/15 Chapter 2, "Industrial Choreography: Photography and the Standardization of Motion," pp. 65-118.

2. Softening the Image: The Look of the Workplace

Tu 9/20 Chapter 3, Engineering the Subjective: Louis W. Hine's Work Portraits and Corporate Paternalism in the 1920s," pp. 119-158.

3. Enticing Pictures: Photography and Consumer Culture

Th 9/22 Chapter 4, "Rationalizing Consumption: Photography and Commercial Illustration," pp. 159-216; Conclusion, pp. 217-220.

III. PICTURING NEWCOMERS: PHOTOGRAPHY AND RACIAL IDENTIFICATION

read: Pegler-Gordon, *In Sight of America*

1. Picturing the Asian "Other" at Angel Island

Tu 9/27 Introduction, pp. 1-21; Chapter 1, "First Impressions: Chinese Exclusion and the Introduction of Immigration Documentation, 1875-1909," pp. 22-66.

Th 9/29 Chapter 2, "Photographic Paper Sons: Resisting Immigration Identity Documentation, 1893-1943," pp. 67-103.

2. The European "Other" at Ellis Island

Tu 10/4 Chapter 3, "Ellis Island as an Observation Station: Spectacle and Inspection, 1892-1924," pp. 104-122; Chapter 4, "Ellis island as a Photo Studio: The Honorific Ethnographic Image, 1904-1926," pp. 123-173.

3. Borderline Imagery: Picturing the Mexican "Other"

Th 10/6 Chapter 5, "The Imaginary Line: Passing and Passports on the Mexico-U.S. Border, 1906-17," pp. 174-191; Chapter 6, "The Dividing Line: Documentation on the Mexican-U.S. Border, 1917-34," pp. 192-220; Conclusion, pp. 221-230.

Midterm Exam Essay Topic Announced: Due in Two Weeks

IV. PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEMORY: THE POWER OF ICONIC IMAGERY

read: Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*

1. Images That Last: What Gets Remembered

Tu 10/11 Chapter 1, Introduction, pp. 1-24; Chapter 2, “Public Culture, Icons, and Iconoclasts,” pp. 25-48; Chapter 3, “The Borders of the Genre: Migrant Mother and the Times Square Kiss,” pp. 49-92.

2. Imagery and Community: Icons of Belonging

Th 10/13 Chapter 4, “Performing Civic Identity: Flag Raising at Iwo Jima and Ground Zero,” pp. 93-136.

3. Images of Discord

Tu 10/18 Chapter 5, “Dissent and Emotional Management: Kent State,” pp. 137-170; Chapter 6, “Trauma and Public Memory: Accidental Napalm,” pp. 171-207.

4. Situating Ourselves; Iconic Imagery in Global Context

Th 10/20 Chapter 7, “Liberal Representation and Global Order: Tiananmen Square,” pp. 208-242

******Midterm Exam Essay Due 10/20******

5. Fateful Reminders

Tu 10/25 Chapter 8, “Ritualizing Modernity’s Gamble: The Hindenberg and Challenger Explosions,” pp. 243-286; Chapter 9, “Conclusion: Visual Democracy,” pp. 287-305.

V. EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK: THE UBIQUITOUS IMAGE IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE

read: Adatto, *Picture Perfect*

1. Gone Digital: The Role of Photographs in the Era of Facebook

Th 10/27 Class discussion: No reading assigned.

2. Seeing Is Believing: Assessing the Power of Photographs in Contemporary Life

Tu 11/1 Introduction: The Age of the Photo-Op, pp. 1-40; Chapter 1, "Picture Perfect," pp. 41-66.

Th 11/3 Chapter 2, "Photo-Op Politics," pp. 67-105; Chapter 3, "Contesting Control of the Picture," pp. 106-140.

Tu 11/8 Chapter 4, "Exposed Images," pp. 141-186; Chapter 5, "Mythic Pictures and Movie Heroes," pp. 187-242.

Th 11/10 Chapter 6, "The Person and the Pose," pp. 243-262.

VI. THE SNAPSHOT AS CULTURAL EVIDENCE

reading: Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life*

1. Picturing Ourselves: The Snapshot and Everyday Reality

Tu 11/15 Chapter One, "Kodak Culture and Home Mode Communication," pp. 4-16; Chapter Two, "Social Organization, Kodak Culture, and Amateur Photography," pp. 17-48; Chapter Four, "Snapshot Communication: Exploring the Decisive Half Minute," pp. 70-99.

Th 11/17 Chapter Five, "Tourist Photography: Camera Recreation," pp. 100-118; Chapter Six, "Interpreting Home Mode Imagery: Conventions for Reconstructing a Reality," pp. 119-130; Chapter Seven, "Functional Interpretations," pp. 131-142.

******Interpretive Essays Due 11/17******

Fall Recess

IV. CONCLUSIONS: HOW MUCH *IS* A PICTURE WORTH?

Tu 11/29 Discussion of Class Projects

Th 12/1 Discussion of Class Projects

Tu 12/6 Discussion of Class Projects

Th 12/8 Conclusions and Course Evaluations

Th 12/15 **FINAL EXAMINATION ESSAY DUE AT 2:00 PM**