

American Studies/English/History 6610
Seminar in the American West
Photography in the American West
Melody Graulich
Office # RBW 211 Hours TTH 10:15-11:45

Who are you who will read these words and study these photographs, and through what cause, by what chance and for what purpose, and by what right do you qualify to, and what will you do about it.

James Agee, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men

Just as the meaning of the past is the prerogative of the present to invent and choose, the meaning of an image does not come intact and whole. Indeed, what empowers an image to represent history is not just what it shows but the struggle for meaning we undergo before it, a struggle analogous to the historian's effort to shape an intelligible and usable past. Representing the past, photographs serve the present's need to understand itself and measure its future. Their history lies finally in the political visions they may help us realize.

Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs: Images as History

I would like to see a visual studies that is denser with theories and strategies, more reflective about its own history, warier of existing visual theories, more attentive to neighboring and distant disciplines, more vigilant about its own sense of visibility, less predictable in its politics and less routine in its choice of subjects.

James Elkins, Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction (65)

Course description: Through histories, literature, theoretical works, and photographs themselves, we will study the representation of the West and its inhabitants through photography. Topics include geological surveys and the building of railroads; American Indians; pioneer photographers; national parks; tourism, Chinatowns; the Mexican Revolution; African Americans; WPA projects (focusing on Dorothea Lange); Japanese American "internment" camps; the Sierra Club; Look and Life magazines. We will devote at least a month to literature, particularly to the role of photographs in memoirs. Requirements include oral presentations, a research project, and a photo memoir.

Course Purpose: Three interconnected goals: to study the history of photography in the American West, 1840-1940; to explore what can be learned about cultural history from photographs; and to learn and apply theories of visual culture studies (issues of representation; the "gaze"; the production, marketing and consumption of images; sociopolitical contexts; aesthetics; and others) to photographs.

Required Books:

Susan Bernardin et. al, Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans (Rutgers)

Lucy Lippard, ed., Partial Recall (New Press)
 Susan Sontag, On Photography (Picador)
 Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others (Picador)
 Laura Wexler, Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism
 (UNC Press)
 Anthony Lee, Picturing Chinatown (UC Berkeley Press)
 Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor, An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion
 James Curtis, Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth: FSA Photography Reconsidered (Temple)
 Ansel Adams, Born Free and Equal (on reserve)
 Yoshiko Uchida, Desert Exile (University of Washington Press)
 Mary Clearman Blew, All But the Waltz (University of Oklahoma Press)
 Leslie Silko, Storyteller (Arcade)
 Norma Cantú, Canicúla (University of N.M. Press)
Medicine River (film of Thomas King novel, rentable at Book Table)
 Reserve materials—list at end of syllabus

Schedule: [Bulleted items are required reading or viewing. Other listed items, often a particular photographer or concept, will be explored in class]

1/11: Secular Icons in a Sacred Space

Certain photographs—emblems of suffering, such as the snapshot of the little boy in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, his hands raised, being herded to the transport to a death camp—can be used like memento mori, as objects of contemplation to deepen one's sense of reality; as secular icons, if you will. But that would seem to demand the equivalent of a sacred or meditative space in which to look at them. Space reserved for being serious is hard to come by in a modern society . . . Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 119

1/13: Is it Art? Is it commerce? Is it authentic? Is it real? What is semiotics?

- John Berger, “Understanding a Photograph” (reserve)
- Walter Benjamin, extract from “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1973) (reserve)
- W. J. T. Mitchell, extract from “Benjamin and the Political Economy of the Photograph” (reserve)
- Roland Barthes, extracts from Camera Lucida (reserve)
- Sarah Kember, “‘The Shadow of the Object’: Photography and Realism” (reserve)
- Louis Owens, “The Syllogistic Mixedblood: How Roland Barthes Saved Me from the *Indians*,” from I Hear the Train
 Michel Foucault
 Marxist approaches
 Punctum and Studium

The Camera will become smaller and smaller, more and more prepared to grasp fleeting, secret images whose shock will bring the mechanism of association in the viewer to a complete halt. At this point captions must begin to function, captions which understand

the photography which turns all the relations of life into literature, and without which all photographic construction must remain bound in coincidences.”

Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography”

With the introduction of the half-tone plate in the 1880s, the entire economy of image production was recast. . . half tone plates at last enabled the economical and limitless reproduction of photographs in books, magazines, and advertisements, and especially newspapers. The problem of printing images immediately alongside words and in response to daily changing events was solved The era of throwaway images had begun. (56)

John Tagg, The Burden of Representation

1/18: “In America, the photographer is not simply a person who records the past but the one who invents it.”

- Sontag, On Photography

1/20: Surveying the West or The Empire of the Lens

Objectiveness was a matter not just of visual arrangement around a curious spectator, but of representation. What reduced the world to a system of objects was the way their careful organization enabled them to evoke some larger meaning, such as History or Empire or Progress.

Timothy Mitchell, “Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order”

- Martha Sandweiss, “Undecisive Moments: The Narrative Tradition in Western Photography” from Sandweiss, ed., Photography in Nineteenth Century America (reserve)
- Martha Sandweiss, “Picture Stories” and “Westward the Course of Empire” from Sandweiss, Print the Legend: Photography and the American West (reserve)

Recommended: Alan Trachtenberg, “Naming the View” from Reading American Photographs (reserve)

A. J. Russell, Charles Savage, and William Henry Jackson

1/25: Major Powell’s Amateur Hour: A Homemade Education

To grow up with the West, or to grow with and through it into national prominence, you had to have the West bred in your bones, you needed it facing you like a dare. You needed a Western education, with all the forming and shaping and the dynamics of special challenge and particular response that such an education implied. . . . A homemade education did something to the people who acquired it. . . (9-10)

With his crowd of eager amateurs and teachers [John Wesley Powell] would take out again into the West until the process of self-teaching would be complete. Some of his assistants would drop out, some would fail to develop, some would be replaced by key

professionals. A few, notably Thompson, Hillers, and Powell himself, could acquire distinguished competence the hard way, in the field.

Wallace Stegner, Beyond the 100th Meridian (127)

“An artist’s business was to produce for the spectator of his pictures the impression produced by nature on himself.”

Thomas Moran

- excerpt from Don D. Fowler, Myself in the Water: The Western Photographs of John K. Hillers
- excerpt from Joel Snyder, American Frontiers: The Photographs of Timothy O’Sullivan, 1867-1874

1/27: The Nation’s Park: Promoting Wyoming

- Chris Magoc, “A ‘Pleasureing-Ground’” and “The Selling of Wonderland” from Magoc, Yellowstone: The Creation and Selling of an American Landscape
The Great Northern Railroad, Frederick Haynes, and the Crow nation

2/1: What We Can Learn from the Indians

George Wharton James

“My question is, how much can we really learn from photographs taken of Native Americans by Euro-Americans? My answer is very little.”

Theresa Harlan, “A Curator’s Perspective”

There is a difference between Jo Mora’s intricate depictions and photographs by voyeurs/vampires like Curtis, Voth, and Vroman.

Leslie Silko, “On Photography”

- Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins, “The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of National Geographic” [The Photography Reader, ed. Liz Wells]
- James C. Farris, excerpt from “The Gaze of Western Humanism” from Navajos and Photograph
- Lucy Lippard, “Introduction” to Partial Recall
Edward Curtis, George Wharton James, Adam Clark Vroman

The notion that a photograph is worth a thousand words is untrue in any language. Native stories create a sense of presence, a tease of memories, and a resistance to pictures of victimry. Yet, the simulations of the indian serve the manifest manners of unbidden dominance. Photographs are specious representations of the other, the treacheries of racialism. Pictures are possessory, neither cultural evidence nor the shadows of lost traditions.

Cameras are the instruments of institutive discoveries and predatory surveillance, photographs are cultural commodities and class representations that reduce a sense of native presence to an aesthetic silence and dominance. Some good people mount their

photographs as the common narratives of cultural remembrance, but the fugitive poses of the indian other, outside the case of technologies and social functions of photographic representations, are simulations of severance, not the pictures or stories of native survivance.

Gerald Vizenor, “Fugitive Poses”

2/3: Alternative Archives

What can we see in the photographic representations of the racial other that is not dominance?

Gerald Vizenor, “Fugitive Poses”

- Bernardin et al., Trading Gazes

I will reserve the term “look” to connote a process, a relation, while using the word “gaze” for a one-way subjective vision. In regard to process, I have in mind something similar to Toni Morrison’s account of writers, including herself, working in “a highly and historically racialized society”: “For them, as for me,” Morrison says, “imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the other. It is, for the purposes of the work, becoming (Morrison 1992, 4). Looking will connote curiosity about the Other, a wanting to know (which can of course still be oppressive but does not have to be), while the gaze I take to involve extreme anxiety—an attempt in a sense not to know, to deny, in fact. (xvi-xvii)

E. Ann Kaplan, Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze

2/8: Breaking Convention?

- Bernardin et al., Trading Gazes

2/10: Photography is an affirmation of opposites. The negative contains the positive. Victor Masayesva

- Selections from Lucy Lippard, ed. Partial Recall

2/15: School Days: Before and After

- Laura Wexler, “Introduction” and “Tender Violence: Domestic Photographs, Domestic Fictions, and Educational Reform” from Tender Violence
- John Tagg, excerpt from The Burden of Representation (reserve)
- Zitkala-Ša, stories from American Indian Stories (reserve)

Images of before/after from Mitchell

Foucault

2/17: School Pictures: What’s Black and White and Re[a]d?

- Wexler, “Black and White and Color: The Hampton Album”

Judith Fryer Davidov, Women's Camera Work: Self/Body/Other in American Visual Culture [I'll provide a handout of key passages]

2/22: Monday schedule

2/24: The Orient at Home

- Anthony Lee, Picturing Chinatown (1-100)
- Sui Sin Far (Edith Maude Eaton). "In Los Angeles' Chinatown." "Betrothals in Chinatown." "Chinatown Needs a School." "Chinatown Boys and Girls." "Leung Ki Chu and His Wife." "Chinese in Business Here." "Chinese Laundry Checking." *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings*. Ed. Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks.
- Sui Sin Far (Edith Maude Eaton). "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian."

3/1: Representing a Racialized Space

- Lee, Picturing Chinatown (101-191)

We would argue that photography has played an important role in identifying people who are not like "us," who become the bearers of all those qualities which "we" find unfamiliar and unacceptable—from the violent and disorderly to the exotic and quaint.

Patricia Holland, Jo Spence and Simon Watney, eds. Photography/Politics: Two

3/3: A Marriage of Image and Text

- Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor, An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion
- Lewis Hine, "Social Photography" (reserve)
- W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Photographic Essay: Four Case Studies," from Mitchell, Picture Theory

3/8: FSA Exposures

- James Curtis, "Introducing Americans to America': Roy Stryker and the Creation of the FSA Photographic Project," "The Contemplation of Things As They Are": Dorothea Lange and Migrant Mother," and "Flight from Reality: Arthur Rothstein and the Dust Bowl" from Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth: FSA Photography Reconsidered
- Maurice Berger, "FSA: The Illiterate Eye." In How Art Becomes History

3/10: "The Historical Section is accumulating a file of pictures which may endure to help the people of tomorrow understand the people of today."

Russell Lee

More FSA discussion

Russell Lee
Marion Post Wolcott

3/15-17: SPRING BREAK

3/22: They All Look Alike: Picturing Loyal Americans

- Ansel Adams, Born Free and Equal (reserve)
Toyo Miyatake

3/24: Performing Japanese/American

- Yoshiko Uchida, Desert Exile
The War Relocation Authority Archives

Family pictures depend on such a narrative of adoption that transforms rectangular pieces of cardboard into telling details connecting lives and stories across continents and generations. This book is an attempt to trace the process of that transformation, the process of reading family photographs. (xii)

Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory

3/29: The Traces of History

- Uchida, Desert Exile
- Graulich, “Photographs and cameras were not allowed in the camps’: Photographic Documentation and Distortion in Japanese American Internment Narratives” from True West, ed. Handley and Lewis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004): 222-253.

The photographs are not illustrative. They and the text are coequal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative.

Agee, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men

3/31: Junctions

- Mary Clearman Blew, All But the Waltz

Family photography can operate at . . . [a] junction between personal memory and social history, between public myth and personal unconscious. Our memory is never fully ‘ours,’ nor are the pictures ever unmediated representations of our past. Looking at them we both construct a fantastic past and set out on a detective trail to find other versions of a “real” one.

Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography

I would like to suggest that photographs locate themselves precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life. Since looking operates through projection and since the photographic image is the positive development of a negative, the plenitude that constitutes the fulfillment of desire, photographs can more easily show us what we wish our family to be, and therefore what, most frequently, it is not. (8)

Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory

4/5: “A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you, the less you know.”

Diane Arbus

- Blew, All But the Waltz

4/7: Part of the Story

- Leslie Silko, Storyteller
- Silko, “The Indian with the Camera”

The events of one’s life take place, take place. How often have I used this expression and how often have I stopped to think what it means? Events do indeed take place; they have meaning in relation to the things around them.”

N. Scott Momaday, The Names

4/12: The Indian with the Camera

- Silko, Storyteller
 - Medicine River [film version of Thomas King novel, viewed outside of class]
- Lee Marmon

4/14: Collages

- Norma Cantú, Canicúla

When the psychohistory of a people is marked by ongoing loss, when entire histories are denied, hidden, erased, documentation may become an obsession. The camera must have seemed a magical instrument to many of the displaced and marginalized groups trying to create new destinies in the Americas. More than any other image-making tool, it offered African Americans disempowered in white culture a way to empower ourselves through representation. For black folks, the camera provided a means to document a reality that could, if necessary, be packed, stored, moved from place to place.

bell hooks, “In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life”

4/19: Blurring the Borders

- Cantú, Canicúla

Recommended: Timothy Dow Adams, "I am a Camera" from Light Writing & Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography

4/21: "Who caused what the picture shows? Who is responsible?"

In a modern life—a life in which there is a superfluity of things to which we are invited to pay attention—it seems normal to turn away from images that simply make us feel bad. Sontag (116)

- Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others

4/26: "Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us"

- Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others

Requirements

Participation

A successful graduate seminar depends upon the participation of everyone to create collaborative learning. I will expect everyone to contribute to class discussion, with comments based on a close reading of the day's assignment. Always bring a marked-up copy of the reading to class.

Oral Reports

Depending on the number of students in the class, you will probably do three or four oral presentations:

- A 15 minute presentation on the work of a photographer not focused on in class. You can choose from the * photographers on the appended list of well known western photographers or consult me about another possibility. While biographical information might be pertinent, your report should be primarily analytical rather than simply informational. In other words, you need a thesis!
- A close analysis of a single photograph or a pair of photographs, probably ten minutes.
- A discussion of a single contemporary photograph (1995-2005), to be presented in conjunction with our reading of Sontag's Regarding the Pain of Others
- A series of questions to provoke class discussion about one of the photographs from the four memoirs (by Uchida, Blew, Silko, and Cantu). You will lead the discussion.

Written work:

- You will research and write a 15-20 page seminar paper on a topic relevant to the course. An abstract and a bibliography are due on April 14th. A "best as I can

do” version of your essay is due on April 26th. Between the 26th and 29th, you will read and comment on some of your classmates’ essays. A final version of your essay is due on Tuesday, May 3rd.

- You will also write a short memoir incorporating photographs. We will discuss together when these should be due and how we can share them with each other.

Well known western photographers 1845-1945

Timothy O’Sullivan

* Carleton Watkins

A.J. Russell

* Elmer & Burt Underwood

* Gertrude Käsebier

* Ben Wittick

Sumner Matteson

* Edward Weston

* Russell Lee

* Wright Morris

* Horace Poolaw

* William Henry Jackson

* Eadweard Muybridge

Charles Savage

Edward Curtis

* Adam Clark Vroman

* George Wharton James

Arnold Genthe

Dorothea Lange

* Toyo Miyatake

* Ansel Adams

* Beatrice Wrenstead

John K. Hillers

* E. O. Beaman

Frank Jay Haynes

* John Choate

* Frederick Monsen

* Charles Lummis

* Solomon Butcher

Arthur Rothstein

* Laura Gilpin

Lee Marmon

* Montana woman

Reserve Readings:

[Most of these are on electronic reserve in the library]

Liz Wells, ed. The Photography Reader (London: Routledge, 2003):

- Walter Benjamin, extract from “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1973) (42-52)
- W. T. Mitchell, “Benjamin and the Political Economy of the Photograph” from Iconology (1986) (53-58)
- Roland Barthes, extracts from Camera Lucida (19-30)
- Sarah Kember, “‘The Shadow of the Object’: Photography and Realism” (202-217)
- John Tagg, “Evidence, Truth and Order: Photographic Records and the Growth of the State” (257-260)
- Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins, “The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of National Geographic” (354-375)

Berger, John. “Understanding a Photograph,” from Classic Essays on Photography, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, CT: Leete’s Island Books, 1980): 291-294.

Owens, Louis. “The Syllogistic Mixedblood: How Roland Barthes Saved Me from the *Indians*,” from I Hear the Train (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001): 90-104 (Notes 257)

Farris, James C. excerpt from “The Gaze of Western Humanism” from Navajos and Photography (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press): 11-17

Sandweiss, Martha. “Undecisive Moments: The Narrative Tradition in Western Photography.” In Sandweiss, ed., Photography in Nineteenth Century America (NY: Abrams, 1991): 98-129.

Sandweiss, Martha. “Picture Stories” and “Westward the Course of Empire.” In Print the Legend: Photography and the American West (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002): 1-14 (Notes 345) and 155-206 (Notes 368-375).

Trachtenberg, Alan. “Naming the View” from Reading American Photographs (NY: Hill and Wang, 1989): 119-163 (Notes 302-311).

Fowler, Don D. Myself in the Water: The Western Photographs of John K. Hillers (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1989): 14-43.

Magoc, Chris. “A ‘Pleasureing-Ground’” and “The Selling of Wonderland.” In Yellowstone: The Creation and Selling of an American Landscape (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999): 1-52 (Notes 193-204).

Zitkala-Ša (Gertrude Bonnin). Excerpts from American Indian Stories. 1921. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985): 7-80.

Far, Sui Sin. (Edith Maude Eaton). "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian." The Heath Anthology of American Literature. Vol. 2. Third ed. Ed. Paul Lauter, et al. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 834-43.

Far, Sui Sin (Edith Maude Eaton). "In Los Angeles' Chinatown." "Betrothals in Chinatown." "Chinatown Needs a School." "Chinatown Boys and Girls." "Leung Ki Chu and His Wife." "Chinese in Business Here." "Chinese Laundry Checking." Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings. Ed. Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks. (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995): 198-211.

Hine, Lewis. "Social Photograph" from Classic Essays on Photography, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980): 109-113.

Mitchell, W.J.T. "The Photographic Essay." In Picture Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 281-322.

Berger, Maurice. "FSA: The Illiterate Eye." How Art Becomes History (NY: Icon, 1992): 1-22.

Adams, Ansel. Born Free and Equal [not on electronic reserve—borrow a copy from Melody]

Graulich, "'Photographs and cameras were not allowed in the camps': Photographic Documentation and Distortion in Japanese American Internment Narratives" from True West, ed. Handley and Lewis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004): 222-253.

Silko, Leslie. "The Indian with the Camera" and "On Photography" from Yellow Woman and the Beauty of the Spirit

Adams, Timothy Dow. "I am a Camera." In Light Writing & Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000): 1-21 (Notes 244-46).