

The Photograph as Historical Record: 1840-1990 AI 158 Sec 801-804
School for New Learning / DePaul University Course # 159-801
Winter Quarter 2008-2009 Thursdays 6:00p-9:00p
Class Location: TBA

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Syllabus

Can all photographs of the past now be classified as “documents”? What are the meanings associated with this overused word? Most photographs do record the physical look of a world no longer. Why were some seized upon as icons of their day and others ignored? What did they convey to their contemporary audiences? Why are some, the work of obscure independents, now celebrated and collected by archivists and museums? Applying our existing knowledge of history and cultures to the reading of photographs we hope to do more than confirm our existing beliefs. They help us understand our ancestors and how they placed themselves in their societies.

A major goal in this course will be to extend our skills in reading visual information. Reading extends beyond the literal and physical. Are their multiple levels on which some images should be read? How does the composition, the placement of subjects within the photograph impact their effectiveness? Is the image also a metaphor (for us or for its contemporary viewer) a link to a bigger cultural message?

These complicated issues are set within the backdrop of a medium becoming less difficult and more accessible as product and as practice available to all. All forms of photography will be studied; portraiture, news media; projects commissioned by corporations, governments or initiated by individuals, and the personal work of amateurs

Our investigations will also examine the ‘art history’ of documentary photography as some of the finest work was done for artistic intentions (or later valued as such). But primarily, we will examine the medium within broader cultural considerations of society, politics, technology and visual communication.

Methods of Instruction: Slide presentations with class discussion, assignments in ‘reading’ individual photographs, visiting lecturers. Readings will be assigned from original sources and from contemporary critics (to us). Two Field Trips (The Art Institute of Chicago and The Museum of Contemporary Photography) will be scheduled.

Please Note:

All students must be registered and listed on the class roster by the beginning of the second week of the term. Students not on the roster by this time cannot stay in the class under any circumstances. Please contact the SNL Advising Center (snladvising@depaul.edu) or the Office of Financial Aid (finaid@depaul.edu) to work out your particular situation.

Students who need to withdraw from the course must do so by the end of the second week of the quarter. After that point is reached, 100% tuition is charged. It is possible to withdraw from a course or competence through the end of the seventh week of the quarter, but there is no tuition refund after the end of the second week.

In certain circumstances (such as illness, death of family members, natural disasters, etc.), a late withdrawal will be refunded tuition. These circumstances must be documented, and presented to the University through the SNL Exceptions Committee (snlexceptions@depaul.edu). In no case is such a refund allowed more than once during a student’s career at DePaul.

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The Competencies

A-1-E

Can interpret a work of writers or artist within a historical or social context. This is a fundamental skill asked of all students and outlined in the syllabus. Student would elaborate on one aspect in a separate 2 page paper.

A-1-X

Identify of body of photographs made before 1960 not specifically talked about in class. Explain why you would consider these documents. What do they communicate to you personally and how would they be interpreted by others contemporary to their making and to other modern day viewers? These could be images from public archives, found in journals or other publications or personal family photographs made by amateurs. Apply in your analysis some of the criteria used in this class. A two page paper is due.

A-2-D

Can create original photographic works and can discuss the creative process. A body of camera images from film or digital capture should be prepared. These can be individual images, in a series or sequence. They also should be realistic and documentary in nature emulating some of the stylistic approaches exemplified in this course. A one page reflection is also required.

H-1-A

Understands and can apply the principles of effective intercultural communication. Photographs and all visual representations are interpreted differently by different cultures. This Competency would lend itself especially well to the understanding of current world conflicts. Two page paper is due.

S-3-A, S-3-F

Can understand different perspectives on the relationship between technology and society, and describe the scientific principles underlying technological innovations. Photography's technical history interfaces with other technologies and help changed the nature of world societies. Was innovation a response or an instigator of social change? A two-page paper is due.

Except for A2D, an image-making assignment where a student will examine one concept or approach from the class and produce a small body of photographs with an accompanying reflection, competencies can be demonstrated through the regular written assignment, i.e., the two Term Papers and the Image Reading Assignments.

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Background

“Since its inception in 1839 the photograph has faithfully bore witness to human events.” Any statement this broad should invite greater scrutiny. All information, written or visual, requires context. What you bring to it and what you take from it depends upon many things. Photographs can inform words. Words contextualize photographs. Interpretations change with type and timeset of the reader. Was Brady’s Civil War coverage shaped for his Northern audience? How were these images seen differently through the eyes of the defeated? Are we shocked today or do we romantically embrace Brassai’s photographs of the 1930’s nightlife in Paris? Long before the debut of LIFE magazine, we were image-addicted, especially in Western societies. Witness the great painterly traditions of the Renaissance and before. Visual dissemination of news began in earnest with the ‘Illustrated Journals’, the picture magazines of the 1840s. Whenever possible (even when it was not possible), editors would proudly display the phrase “drawn from a photograph” at the bottom of their woodcut illustrations. Photographs were truth. They came from a machine, not easily corrupted by the human hand. Until the arrival of the halftone process, the inexpensive method of reproducing photographs in newsprint, proclaiming an image was from a photograph gave credence to any article. The common belief was that ‘the camera never lies’. Therein lay its potential to teach, persuade and mislead.

[To paraphrase an NRA bumper sticker, “Cameras do not lie, people lie with cameras.”]

Much later it would be realized that the camera, like the brush of the artist, must sometimes lie to tell the truth. In the latter half of the 19th century, photo imagery as commodity became a staple to every corner booksellers. The public’s hunger for visual information was insatiable. They bought original prints by the millions. Large and Elegant limited-edition portfolios with text and photographs described current events and far-away places, retold religious stories, punctuated history and catalogued the visages of the day’s celebrities. The public saw them in libraries, schools, at church and other organized functions and were highly collectable to the wealthy. For the general public, these same images and many more could be purchased in smaller sizes as Carte-de-Visites and three-dimensional stereo “views”. These graced the parlors of the middle classes. Most popular were travel images from the exotic Orient or those describing the bustle of urban life in the world metropolises. They were the works of professionals from the small and the enterprising to the larger publishing houses. All served their market well.

By the early 20th century, technical innovation enabled two trends of very different sorts. Personal image making was now available to all but the poorest with the introduction of Roll film and Kodak camera. Works by amateurs tell us a different and more private history. For mass communication, the new and inexpensive halftone processes enabled small presses to join word and pictures in new formats never imagined (and temporarily stalling Big Publishing’s steady march toward consolidation). Increasingly governments engaged in propagation of imagery to inform and justify.

Questions to Consider

- (1) What conditions (economic, cultural, and political) enabled the creation of the work
- (2) How were these photographs delivered to public?
- (3) How were the photographs interpreted in their own time?
- (4) How do we read these photographs today?

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- (5) What was the photographer's level of involvement?
 - a. To Record-an dispassionate representation of subject or event.
 - b. To Illustrate-a controlled use of timing & composition to strengthen physical description.
 - c. To Interpret-beyond physical description, photographer assumes role of teacher.
 - d. To Editorialize-photographer 'beats the drum' -for him(her)self or someone else.

- (6) What stylistic devices did the photographer use? How did it effect interpretation?

Style is shaped by aesthetic and technical conventions of their day. Many photographers worked within those conventions. Others chose to extend them. Many photographers we will study achieved multiple agenda (or as future critics would so interpret)... recording fact while making images that address other concerns. How did this change the 'look' of the photograph?

- (7) What ethical considerations are raised in doing documentary photography? Who really 'owns' an image (a visual DNA of the subject)? Who has the right to present a particular subject to the public?

There is one required textbook for the course. Robert Hirsch; Seizing the Light: a History of Photography. Other readings will be issued as a photocopied throughout the quarter. Some materials will be placed on reserve at the loop library in the DePaul Center. Approximately 20 to 40 pages of text will be assigned weekly from the class texts and other reading materials. (Many of these pages contain large pictures.) These readings are expected to inform you contributions to class discussions.

Student Requirements:

Five Image Reading Assignments (known in the course as IRAs) will be posted on BlackBoard *assignments* throughout the course. These are exercises in interpreting photographs. Students will select several images for study and submit initial written observations. Later in the week, background information on each of the images, will be supplied via the BlackBoard. Students then would revisit their selected images and with the benefit of context (a bit of web research) submit their final interpretation. Guidelines for critiquing specific to each IRA will be issued. In total, these five Image Reading Assignments will contribute 24% to your quarter's grade.

Two term papers will also be required of each student. The first, the Midterm Paper, should address contemporary (with the period) and modern readings of the work and issues. This can be accomplished directly or through biography by analyzing the work of an important documentary photographer or a photojournalist (not limited to those photographers covered in class). Alternately, the work of several photographers can be examined is a 'compare and contrast' format.

A list of suggested topics will be provided. The second, the Final Paper, should broadly discuss a stylistic, social, aesthetic or ethical concern within documentary photography. Cite and use as examples several photographs from the major image makers we have studied to support your thesis.

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These term papers should be 4 to 6 pages in length submitted both a hard copy and electronically (BlackBoard's DropBox). Optional with the Midterm but required for the Final: Include example images with must be referenced in the text (scans from books or from websources). Due dates are posted in the calendar, below. For help in finding resources, see instructor. The Mid-quarter Paper weighs in at 36% of the quarter grade. The Final Paper contributes 40%.

*Students may submit one re-write of their Mid-Quarter Paper to raise their initial grade.
One re-write of two IRA submissions will also be accepted.*

Two Class Field Trips are scheduled during the quarter. Destinations: the Print Study Room of the Art Institute of Chicago (date TBA) and the Presentation Area of the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College (date TBA). Here we will view original prints of many images studied in class. Attendance to one of these two trips is required.

Attending both field trips and writing a 2 page reflection on the experience can substitute for doing one of the Image Reading Assignments.

A Calendar and Weekly Topics

Week One 1/8

Introduction and course overview. Outline of the technical history of photography

Read: Chapter 1, pps. 3-17 and Chapter 2, pps. 25-48 in Hirsch, Seizing the Light: A History of Photography. From photocopy: Sontag, In Plato's Cave, the first essay in her collection On Photography, 1977.

A written outline and reflection of the Sontag essay (2-3 pages of non-academic writing) due to BlackBoard's Digital DropBox by Monday 1/12.

Week Two 1/15

Facial and body language. Found in early portraiture, scientific categorizations and early social documents. Changing attitudes toward recording the human visage, 1842-1880. Images by: Hill and Adamson, Cameron; Southworth and Hawes; Brady, Sarony; Disderi, Nadar. Rejlander and Darwin.

Processes and Innovations: Daguerreotype, Calotype; Ambrotype, Tintype, Wet-plate Collodian, Albumen Printing Paper.

Read: Chapter 3, pps. 3-17 and Chapter 4, pps. 49-70 in Hirsch, Seizing the Light: A History of Photography.

(*calendar – continued*)

Image Reading Assignment (IRA) One posted to BlackBoard *Assignments*.

Guidelines and Images launched Thurs. 1/15; Your First Observations due to DropBox on Sun. 1/18.
Background Information launched Mon. 1/19; Your Final Critiques due to DropBox on Sat. 1/24.

Week Three 1/22

Visual documents as commodity and mass communication, 1850-1890. Documenting Architecture, Landscapes, Far Away Places, City Life, War and all manner of news. Images by: Fenton, Howlett, Frith, Thomson; LeSecq, Marvel; Gardner, O’Sullivan, Jackson.
Processes and Innovations: Mass marketing of photographic prints. Carte-de-visite, Albums of ‘Views’, Stereo Views. Celebrities, travel, and stories in pictures. *New Formats*: Photography in Woodcuts, in Woodburytypes, Carbon Prints and in Original Silver Prints. Magic Lantern ‘slide shows’. Solar ‘Cameras’ (enlarged prints made with the sun’s ray), portable cameras with bellows for on-site work.

Suggested topics for the **Midterm Paper**, issued. Choose your topic and post a 35-65 word abstract to the Digital DropBox by Friday, 2/2. The Midterm Paper is due on MONDAY 2/16.

Read: Chapter 5, pps. 97-114 and Chapter 7, pps. 135-164 in Hirsch, Seizing the Light: A History of Photography.

Image Reading Assignment (IRA) Two posted to BlackBoard *Assignments*.

Guidelines and Images launched Thurs. 1/22; Your First Observations due to DropBox on Sun. 1/25.
Background Information launched Mon. 1/26; Your Final Critiques due to DropBox on Sat. 1/31.

Week Four 1/29

Questioning and romanticizing contemporary societies and vanishing cultures. Urbanization and the Social Order, 1850-1930. Images by: Mayhew, Dr. Barnardo, Thomson, Annan; Riis, Hine; Emerson, Johnson, Vroman, Curtis, Ullman.

Processes and Innovations: Gelatin Dry Plate (The first modern ‘film’. Photographers no longer had to develop their negatives ‘on-site’. Roll film on celluloid introduced which made ‘point and shoot’ cameras possible and brings picture taking to the masses. (Example: the original ‘Kodak’ Camera, 1888.) Flash Powder and Gelatin Printing Paper introduced. The perfected half-tone process allows inexpensive publication of photos in magazines and newspapers.

Read: *from* Chapter 12, pps. 267-276 in Hirsch, Seizing the Light: A History of Photography.

Selections from Jacob Riis; How the Other Half Lives; Essay by Thilo Koenig, “The Other Half”, from A New History of Photography; Michel Frizot, edit., (*from photocopy handouts*).

Post to DropBox: Your Midterm Paper Abstract, 35-65 words by Monday 2/2.

(*calendar – continued*)

Image Reading Assignment (IRA) Three posted to BlackBoard *Assignments*.

Guidelines and Images launched Thurs. 2/5; Your First Observations due to DropBox on Sun. 2/8.

Background Information launched Mon. 2/9; Your Final Critiques due to DropBox on Sat. 2/14.

Week Five 2/5

Photojournalism as Documents I.

The Picture Magazines, Munich Illustrated Press, LIFE, LOOK; Birth of the Magnum Photo Agency. Modern photojournalism is defined and re-defined. 1920-1960. Read To be announced.

Images by: F. Mann, Eisenstaedt, Bourke-White, Weegee, Capa, W. E. Smith, Parks.

Processes and Innovations: Hand-held view cameras (Speed Graphic type, “press cameras”), 35mm Camera; Flash Bulbs ‘stop action’ and more sensitive films with brighter and sharper lenses make inside ‘candid’ photo (without flash) possible. Greater use of the ‘High Impact’ shot and the invention of the Photo-Essay. Story-telling and news in pictures, often sensational and highly editorialized. No Image Reading Assignment (IRA) this week.

Week Six 2/12

Amateurs and small time professionals create personal records of daily life. Images by: Lartique, Anonymous ‘snap shooters’, 1890-present.

Read: Excerpt from Lesy’s, Wisconsin Death Trip and intro essay to Allen, Without Sanctuary,
(*from photocopy handout*)

MIDTERM PAPERS DUE to BlackBoard’s DropBox by MONDAY 2/16.

No Image Reading Assignment (IRA) this week.

Week Six 2/19

Photojournalism as Documents II. Photojournalism of a Different Sort: the Photo-essay and the Documentary Theme Book, 1935-1985. Images by: Brassai, Brandt, Davidson, Lyons, Clark, Krims, Link, Rogovin. Innovations: Longer, sometimes sequenced photo-stories published with little or no text; varies from literal storytelling sometimes using cinematic techniques.

Suggested topics for the Final Paper, issued. Choose your topic and a post a 35-65 word Abstract to DropBox by Wednesday, 3/4. The Final Paper draft due on 3/16. Final version on 3/25.

Read: Chapter 13, pps. 299-314 and Chapter 14, pps. 315-337 in Hirsch, Seizing the Light. Other readings (*from photocopy handout*) to be announced.

Midterm Papers returned by email with grade, comments and suggestions for re-write. Re-writes are due in the ninth week of the quarter.

(calendar – continued)

Image Reading Assignment (IRA) Four posted to BlackBoard *Assignments*.

Guidelines and Images launched Thurs. 2/19; Your First Observations due to DropBox on Sun. 2/22.

Background Information launched Mon. 2/23; Your Final Critiques due to DropBox on Sat. 2/28.

Week Seven 2/26

Large and Extended Documentary Projects.

Part one. Projects using more than one photographer: Farm Securities Administration Photographic Project, 1936-1942. New York's Photo League's Harlem Document and other projects, 1932-1951.

Images by: Lange, W. Evans, Post-Wolcott, Rothstein; Levitt; Grossman, W. Rosenblum, Siskind.

Part two: Projects by Individuals, 1890-1990. Images by: Atget, Sander, Van der Zee, Disfarmer.

Read: from Chapter 12, pps. 277-298 in Hirsch, Seizing the Light: A History of Photography.

Other Readings (from photocopy handout) to be announced.

Image Reading Assignment (IRA) Five posted to BlackBoard *Assignments*.

Guidelines and Images launched Thurs. 2/26; Your First Observations due to DropBox on Sun. 3/1.

Background Information launched Mon. 3/2; Your Final Critiques due to DropBox on Sat. 3/7.

Week Eight 3/5

Documentary Photography as Art.

Elevation of Documentary Photography's two home-grown compositional styles 'snapshot' and 'frontality', Comments upon things unseen and develop a new symbolism and metaphor. Documentary (as a style and purpose) becomes the professed goal of many 20th century art photographers and their imagery was embraced by the literary and art establishment, 1907-1990.

Images by: Strand, W. Evans, Cartier-Bresson, Frank, Arbus, Winogrand and Friedlander.

Read: Chapter 11, pps. 517; 520-543 in Hirsch, Seizing the Light.

Post your 35-65 word **Final Paper Abstract** to DropBox by Wednesday, 3/4.

Week Nine 3/12

Post 1970 and Later Trends.

Documentary as Post-Modernist Expression. 1970-2003

Images by: Lyons, Owens, Sternfield, Graham, Nixon; Krims, Weams.

Read: from Chapter 17, pps. 402-417 in Hirsch, Seizing the Light.

Others Selections (from photocopy handouts).

Last week to submit RE-WRITES of the Midterm Papers.

Draft of your Final is due to the Dropbox by Monday 3/16.

(*calendar – continued*)

Week Ten 3/19

Class Presentations of Final Term Papers

An Extended Session...to 10:00 pm. (I'll bring the coffee and sweets.)

Reading your Final Paper and with Digitally Projected Examples Images

The 10 minute reading of your Final Paper is an integral part of your grade on this paper. It must have a visual component. Gather images to project from book scans, slide scans or websources. See me for suggestions.

Post a copy of your '*Finalized*' Final Paper with Images included to the DropBox by Wednesday, 3/25.