

## AI 194 SEEING OUR SOCIETY: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION OF CONTEMPORARY

### LIFE

**DePaul University / School for New Learning**

3166 South River Road / Des Plaines / 847.296.5348 **O'HARE** campus / **WINTER 2007** quarter

### FACULTY

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

J.M. Coetze wrote that "*real history is the unpredictable, the relentless unforeseen*" while photographic history is the condensate of what could be observed, made evidential and preserved. From its invention in 1839, photographs have verified the transforming social and aesthetic expressions of every culture that practiced the medium. This course will examine the distinguished imagery that is the crystallization of the new thinking about science, aesthetics, industrialization, war, sexuality, immigration, poverty, political, ethnic or gender injustice since that time.

Documentary photography emerged in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a means of defining, directing, and/or transforming social opinion. From that time forward, photographs have been commissioned with the intention of building consensus for profound social change. Public and private agencies alike have used photographs to make the larger society aware of new thinking about problems such as immigration, poverty, war, political, ethnic or gender injustice.

This course will examine the photographic images spawned by various social issues and movements that have affected American social thinking and guided social activism from the Civil War forward.

**PLEASE NOTE** that no prior knowledge of the history of photography or of 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century American history is expected nor is a working knowledge of any art-making discipline assumed. Because no formal knowledge about picture-taking is required, I will ask each class member to create their final project via photographs made with one or another **POLAROID** instant cameras. The camera systems are inexpensive yet capable of producing rather beautiful images. The limitations of the Polaroid process are evident (size and non-reproducibility) when compared to 35mm cameras (extensive lens choices and negatives allowing multiple and many-sized reproductions) and digital systems (infinitely variable software and expansive optical hardware). But the Polaroid systems, ranging in price from \$40 to \$80, offer each class member, independent of experience, the opportunity to demonstrate the power of their ideas and concepts without the undermining concern about technique and technical understanding. With Polaroid materials, each class member will be more rather than less equally skilled to every other member of the class.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I am a photographer and an enthusiastic teacher of photography and the place of the photograph in history. My work has been exhibited in museums and galleries worldwide for almost thirty years. Since 1992, I have been teaching at DePaul's School for New Learning; since 1987 at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and, since 1999 at Columbia College Chicago. In the SNL, I teach photography and the medium's relationship to culture and civilization while, at the other institutions, I teach the history of photography or specialized black & white darkroom technique courses. Over the years, I have also worked as curator and art purchase consultant, reviewer, critic, lecturer, historian and interviewer. I have a B.Sc. in Nuclear Engineering from North Carolina State University. While working at Argonne National Laboratory, I started doctoral work in high temperature thermodynamics at Northwestern University. Before completing that work, I changed direction and earned a M.Sc. Photography degree from the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Further information about publications,

exhibitions and gallery representation is available at my website [alan-cohen.com](http://alan-cohen.com).

### CLASS SCHEDULE

9:00 pm ~ 4:00 pm

EVERY OTHER **SATURDAY** B

CLASS 1 : JANUARY 13<sup>TH</sup>

CLASS 2 : JANUARY 27<sup>TH</sup>

CLASS 3 : FEBRUARY 10<sup>TH</sup>

CLASS 4 : FEBRUARY 24<sup>TH</sup>

CLASS 5 : MARCH 10<sup>TH</sup>

### 4 CREDIT HOURS

### LEARNING STRATEGIES

In every class session, we will explore one or more social issues via reading, lecture, discussion and photographs. The class will consider some of the beliefs that have shaped American social action and the role of documentary photography as a unifying instrument of social change.

### TEXT

**THE PHOTOBOOK: A HISTORY – VOLUME 1** by Gerry Badger and Martin Parr. (Phaidon Press, December 2004, list price \$75 / average price **\$45, ISBN 0714842850**). A marvelous book that lavishly illustrates how pictures should look to be shared. Further, as viewed from the invention of the medium in 1839 until today, this book confirms the expressive power of pictures and the cultural equation that links social change to the social document. See the addall.com book search engine website for comparative details.

### HELPFUL BUT OPTIONAL **SUBJECTIVE REALITIES: WORKS**

**FROM THE REFCO COLLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY** by Adam Brooks, editor. (Refco Group, ember 2003, list price \$45 / remainder price **\$15, ISBN 2003091484**). This book is the catalogue of a Chicago photographic art collection, an index of 1990s visual corporate culture, that no longer exists because Refco, once a powerful financial advisory business, itself no longer exists. Bankrupt via a financial scandal, Refco built this museum-level collection for display on its office walls and then was forced to sell it at auction to raise money to satisfy institutional obligations. This small edition book is bright, very interesting, well written and currently on sale at salebooks.com, the online site of Daedalus Books, for one-third of its list price. Buy it before it disappears.

### EVALUATION AND GRADING

The completion of each competence requires an essay supported by documentary photographs. The supporting documentary photographs may be made by the student or appropriated from the work of others. The concept, content, and structure — the absolute specifics — of each paper **AND THEIR RELATED PICTURES** will be discussed in class. Please don't worry in advance about any of the course specifics and never doubt your ability to produce informed and meaningful photographs by the end of the quarter.

CLASS 1 : JANUARY 13<sup>TH</sup>

INTRODUCTION

ISSUES FROM SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL WELFARE

READINGS: pages 13-19, 35-41, 48, 50, 53, 57, 117-145, 208-209, 217

**CLASS 2 : JANUARY 27<sup>TH</sup>**  
**THE CLIMATE OF WARS**

READINGS: pages 43-45, 147-185, 194-196, 198-201, 229

**CLASS 3 : FEBRUARY 10<sup>TH</sup>**  
**THE FAMILY: IDENTITY, THEATER AND FABLE**

READINGS: pages 78-79, 103-109

**CLASS 4 : FEBRUARY 24<sup>TH</sup>**  
**TRAVEL AND LANDSCAPE**

READINGS: pages 23-32, 42, 46, 51-52, 54, 61-68, 74, 76-77, 207, 211

**CLASS 5 : MARCH 10<sup>TH</sup>**  
**STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

**PRIMARY COMPETENCIES OFFERED**

**E1 E2**

*Both competences are written by student/faculty. The prerequisite is Research Seminar. The E1 / E2 competences (a) identify a phenomenon, problem, or event of personal significance; (b) identify at least two approaches to the creation of knowledge that could appropriately be applied to (a); (c) evaluate the limitations and possibilities of these approaches to the creation of knowledge; (d) articulate a perspective in relation to this phenomenon, problem or event that integrates aspects of these approaches.*