

The Historian and the Visual Record / GA.2021
History Department / Program in Archives and Public History
New York University

Spring 2012

Professor Victoria Cain
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Class Meeting: Mondays 4:55-7:35
Room KJCC 607
Office hours: Tuesdays 1:00-3:00

Course Description

Though historians have long depended upon texts, they are increasingly turning to objects and images to enrich their understanding of the past. Visual and material evidence allows historians to recover aspects of the past that go unrecognized by documents. Such evidence enables scholars to verify or question longstanding assumptions in the field and inspires new kinds of questions. Thanks to the digital revolution, historical objects and images are more accessible than ever before. This course will familiarize students with a wide range of images and objects, and will arm them with a variety of approaches they can apply to such sources.

Students will explore aspects of the history of New York City through analysis of this kind of evidence, and will consider the strengths and weaknesses of secondary literatures that rely upon such sources. The class will also discuss techniques for cataloguing and preserving visual and material records, and listen to the perspectives of professionals engaged in such work. Throughout, students will evaluate the potential and perils of these kinds of historical records, and consider how and why scholars have consulted (or ignored) such sources as they study the American past.

Required Texts

Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John Howat, *Art and the Empire City* (New York: Yale University Press, 2000)

Martha Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

Elizabeth Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990)

These texts are available at the NYU bookstore. Additional readings will be available on Blackboard.

Course Requirements

Class Participation and Homework Assignments: This seminar depends upon enthusiastic, well-prepared participation of all students. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings, your independent research and relevant current events. Please bring all notes and readings to class meetings. Attendance is mandatory. Many weeks, students will post a short assignment to the class blog or Blackboard, visit a site, or engage in some other brief project. These assignments will vary considerably, but we will routinely use them as a starting point for class discussion, so please take them seriously. **(33% of final grade)**

Digital Exhibit: Using at least six types of visual sources, create an online exhibit for the New York City Historical Digital Archive that captures the significance of a Broadway-related institution, community, or trend important between 1830 and 1930. Your exhibit should begin with a 1,500 word introductory essay on the topic, and should feature at least 10 images or objects, each of which should be accompanied by a didactic label of 75-150 words. You will need to acquire the necessary rights and permissions for your images and objects, and they must be archived with appropriate metadata that complies with the standards of the Dublin Core. Your exhibit must have a bibliography discussing or linking the exhibit to available archival, visual and material culture resources for the project. A mock-up of this exhibit is due on March 5; the final exhibit is due on April 16. **(33% of final grade)**

Catalogue Essay: Write a catalogue essay focusing upon one category of visual or material media (i.e. lithography, amateur photography, 16mm film, stereographs, maps, or the like) to accompany the class's online exhibits. In addition to engaging with contemporary scholarship on your selected category of media, your essay should refer directly to at least three exhibited images or objects as it explores the development of the medium; its historical functions and meanings; and some discussion of the potential and perils of relying upon this particular form of media as historical evidence. Essays should be approximately 3,500 words and use Chicago style, format and citation guidelines. These are due on May 11. **(33% of final grade)**

Grading Rubric for Assignments

A: Assignment makes a compelling and original argument, and presents a nuanced understanding of the key issues and texts. Demonstrates excellent understanding of secondary sources and creatively forges relationships between different texts. Synthesizes sources' most important ideas, and makes judicious use of examples, references and primary source quotations to develop and support the argument. Clearly organized, with graceful, lucid prose.

A-: Assignment makes a compelling argument, and makes reference to a wide range of references and material. Synthesizes readings, extrapolates key arguments and provides examples, references and primary source quotations to develop and support the argument. Clearly organized and well written.

B+: Assignment directly addresses and answers a question, making use of a range of references and source material. Demonstrates understanding of relevant readings and key issues, and uses both to support the argument. Clearly organized and well written.

B: Assignment sufficiently addresses and answers a question, making use of an adequate range of references and source material. Demonstrates understanding of the key issues and ties them clearly to the examples used.

B-: Shows basic understanding of the literature, focuses on a narrow group of readings in order to address the question. Does not develop a strong argument. Writing style and organization could use improvement.

C: Demonstrates poor understanding of key ideas in the literature. Is unable to clearly synthesize readings or use examples to substantiate points made. Does not clearly answer a question or develop an argument.

D: The frame and requirements of the assignment have not been met.

Due Dates: Assignments have due dates, and this professor does not accept them more than one week late. Any assignment that comes in from one to seven days late will be penalized by a full grade; after one week, without a serious problem documented by a licensed medical professional, you are out of luck. If your assignment is late because of illness or a death in the family, you must contact me within 24 hours of the due date, and we will set a new due date.

Attendance: Following university policy, students will be allowed only two absences (for legitimate religious and family/medical emergencies) before formal grade reduction. Students must notify me in advance of any anticipated absences.

E-mail: Please feel free to e-mail questions to me about the basic procedures of this class or questions about readings. Kindly type “VR” in the subject line when e-mailing me.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism—employing ideas or phrases that are not your own without explicitly and sufficiently crediting their creator—will not be tolerated. If you plagiarize, the Program Chair and the University will be notified of your actions, and appropriate steps will be taken. I urge you to err on the side of caution: take careful notes, cite your sources carefully and consistently, and do not leave assignments to the last minute. For this and other University policies, see the Graduate School of Arts and Science Policies and Procedures Manual.

University Statement for Students with Disabilities: New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. It is the University’s policy that no qualified student with a disability be excluded from participating in any University program or activity, denied the benefits of any University program or activity, or otherwise subjected to discrimination with regard to any University program or activity. The Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) determines qualified disability status and assists students in obtaining appropriate accommodations and services. Any student who needs a reasonable accommodation based on a qualified disability is required to register with the CSD for assistance.

Recommendations: If you would like to request a recommendation from me, please contact me a month in advance of the application’s due date. If I agree to write you a reference letter, please supply me with a description of the position or award for which you need a recommendation; a stamped, addressed envelope or relevant email link; a resume; the best piece of writing you have submitted to me over the course of the term; your grades in my course and a paragraph explaining what you contributed to the course; a few paragraphs about why you want to be considered for this position / award and why you are an excellent candidate for it. Finally, please send me a reminder email a week before the recommendation is due.

Week One (1/23): Course Overview

Week Two (1/30): Meanings and Methods

- Michael L. Wilson, "Visual Culture: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?" in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York, 2004): 26-33.
- James W. Cook, "Seeing the Visual in U.S. History," *Journal of American History* 95:2 (September 2008): 432-41.
- Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," *On Photography*, (New York: Picador, 2001 [orig. 1977]), pp. 3-26.
- E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 9. (1974), pp. 153-173.
- Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (Spring 1982): 1-19.
- Charles Montgomery, "Some Remarks on the Science and Principles of Connoisseurship," in *The Walpole Society Notebook 1961*. Walpole Society, 1962, 56-69.

Week Three (2/6): Portraiture in Colonial America and the Early Republic

- Justin Paton, *How to Look at a Painting*. (Wellington: Awa Press, 2005) pp. 107-112.
- Margaretta M. Lovell, "Mrs. Sargent, Mr. Copley, and the Empirical Eye," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 1-39.
- Richard Bushman, "Bodies and Minds," in *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) pp. 61-99.
- [Catherine E. Kelly. "Face Value: George Washington and Portrait Prints." *Common-place*, vol. 7, no. 3.](#)

Assignment: Drawing on what you have learned from course reading and discussion, visit the Met's recently-opened American Wing, and write a page-long reflection on one of the following works: John Singleton Copley's "Daniel Crommelin Verplanck," Gilbert Stuart's "Matilda Stoughton de Jaudenes," Joshua Johnson's "Edward and Sarah Rutter," or Charles Balthazar J. F. Saint-Mémin's "Osage Warrior."

Week Four (2/13): Print Culture in Antebellum New York (Meet in Fales Library, 4th Floor of Bobst)

- Georgia Barnhill, "Transformations in Pictorial Printing," *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 422-40.
- Dell Upton, "Inventing the Metropolis: Civilization and Urbanity in Antebellum New York," *Art and the Empire City* (New York: Yale University Press, 2000), 3-45.
- Elliot Bostwick Davis, "The Currency of Culture: Prints in New York City," *Art and the Empire City*, 189-226.
- [Wendy Wick Reaves. "Reading Portrait Prints." *Common-place*, vol. 7, no. 3](#)
- [New York Public Library, "Moving Uptown: Nineteenth-Century Views of Manhattan," 1998](#)
- [George G. Foster, *New York in Slices* \(New York, 1850\), pp. cover-13, and scroll through to view illustrations.](#)

Guest Speaker: Marvin Foreman, Director of Fales Library and Special Collections at NYU

Week Five (2/27): Stitches in Time: Quilts, Bed Rugs and Other Stories

- Robert Shaw, *American Quilts: The Democratic Art, 1780-2007* (New York: Sterling, 2009) pp. 19-56.
- Linda Eaton, "The bedspread gets along finely: making quilts in early America," in *Quilts in a Material World* (2007), 58-83.
- Lauren Thacher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Random House, 2001), 3-8, 208-247.

Guest Speaker: Stacy Hollander, Senior Curator, American Folk Art Museum

Week Six (3/5): Photographing Mid-Century New York

- Jeff Rosenheim, "A Palace for the Sun": Early Photography in New York City," *Art and the Empire City*, pp. 227-241.
- "New-York Daguerreotypes," *Putnam's Monthly* 1, 2 (February 1853), 121-136.
- Peter Bacon Hales, *Silver Cities: The Photography of American Urbanization, 1839-1915* (2nd ed., Albuquerque, 2005), 68-96.
- Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History: Mathew Brady to Walker Evans*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1989, pp. 21-70.

Assignment Due: Mock-up of Online Exhibit

March 12: SPRING BREAK

Week Seven (3/19): Spaces of Consumption: Furniture and Other Tasteful Decorations

- Bryan Le Beau, "Art in the Parlor: Consumer Culture and Currier and Ives," *Journal of American Culture* 30 (March 2007): 18-37.
- Amelia Peck, "The Products of Empire: Shopping for Home Decorations in New York City," *Art and the Empire City*, 259-286.
- Kenneth Ames, "First Impressions," *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992) 7-43.
- Katherine Grier, "Imagining the Parlor," in *Culture and Comfort: Parlor-making and Middle-class Identity, 1850-1930* (Rochester, 1988), 19-79.

Assignment: Drawing on the methods we have thus far reviewed and the context provided by this week's reading, visit the Met's American Wing or the New York Historical Society and write a one-page historical analysis of a piece of parlor furniture in their collections.

Week Eight (3/26): Domestic Amusements: Stereoscopes, Scrapbooks, and Educational Ephemera

- [Katharine Martinez, "The Dickinsons of Amherst Collect: Pictures and their meanings in a Victorian home," *Common-Place*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2007.](#)
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell. "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph." *The Atlantic Monthly* 3 (June 1859): 738-48.
- [David Jaffee, "Anthony's Broadway on a Rainy Day," vol. 10, no. 4.](#)
- [Ellen Gruber Garvey, "Imitation is the Sincerest Form of Appropriation: Scrapbooks and extra-illustration." *Common-place*, vol. 7, no. 3.](#)
- Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York, 1996) 16-50.

Week Nine (4/2): The Popular Press in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

- Neil Harris, "Iconography and Intellectual History: The Halftone Effect," in *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago, 1990), 304-17.
- Michael L. Carlebach, *American Photojournalism Comes of Age* (Washington, D.C., 1997), 11-55.
- Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (California, 2002), 131-69.
- [Nicholson Baker, "Deadline: The Author's Desperate Bid to Save America's Past," *The New Yorker*, July 24, 2000.](#)

Week Ten (4/9): Cartoons and Cartooning (meet in Tamiment Library—10th Floor of Bobst)

- [Thomas Milton Kemnitz, "The Cartoon as a Historical Source," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4:1 \(Summer 1973\): 81-93.](#)
- Martha Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936* (Chicago, 2002), pp. 20-61, 67-71, 125-293.
- John Tchen, "Visualizing Ah Sin," *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore, 1998), 196-224.

Guest Speaker: Michael Nash, Head of the Tamiment Library (10th Floor of Bobst)

Week Eleven (4/16): Touring the City: Guidebooks, Postcards, and Illustrated Lectures

- Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, 1111-1154.
- [Julian Ralph, "The Postal-Card Craze," *Cosmopolitan*, v. 32, pp. 421-426.](#)
- Kent Lydecker, "Constructed Image: Picture Postcards of New York City," in *New York in Postcards, 1880-1980: the Andreas Adam Collection*, ed. Thomas Kramer (Zurich: Verlag Scheidegger & Speiss, 2010) pp. 16-31.
- Rebecca Zurier, "Seeing New York: The Turn-of-the-Century Culture of Looking," *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley, 2006), 45-103.

Assignment Due: Online Exhibit

Week Twelve (4/23): Building the Moment: Architecture

- Jay Cantor, "A Monument of Trade: A.T. Stewart and the Millionaire's Mansion in New York," *Winterthur Portfolio* 10 (1975): 165-97.
- Elizabeth Cromley, *Alone Together; A History of New York's Early Apartments*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, 11- 61, 128-211.
- Gail Fenske, *The Skyscraper and the City: The Woolworth Building and the Making of Modern New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) pp. 271-309.
- [Historic American Buildings Survey](#)

Guest Speaker: David Favalaro, Director of Curatorial Affairs, Lower East Side Tenement Museum

Week Thirteen (4/30): Shop Windows, Advertising, and the Visual Culture of Consumption in the Early Twentieth Century

- William Leach, *Land of Desire* (New York: Vintage, 1994) pp. 15-111.
- Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) pp. 1-22, 117-163.

Week Fourteen (5/7): Presentations and Wrap-Up

Assignment: Final Papers Due