The Great American Picture Book

English 110B (Spring 2019)
TuFri 12:30-1:50, Lown 202
Professor Tharaud
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Office: Rabb 138; Office Hours: Th 11-1 and by appt

Course description: As contemporary consumers and citizens, we are constantly bombarded by words and images crafted to make us think, feel, and act in certain ways. From television ads and social media feeds to graphic novels and films, what W.J.T. Mitchell calls “imagetexts” are among the most alluring and powerful products of modern mass culture. This course places this condition in historical and theoretical perspective by exploring a fascinating phenomenon in U.S. culture: the production of spectacular multimedia works that combine words and images to give readers a sense of contact with the “real thing,” whether the abundance of New World nature, the urban underworld of the modern city, or “vanishing” Native American cultures. In a series of case studies, we will examine publishing landmarks including John James Audubon's *Birds of America* (1827-38), Jacob Riis’ *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), Edward S. Curtis’ *The North American Indian* (1907-30), and James Agee and Walker Evans’ *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), before ending with a contemporary graphic narrative. Innovative feats of technology and marketing as well as literary and artistic virtuosity, these texts—some of which have only recently been made widely available through online archives—will be accompanied by critical readings that showcase a range of theoretical approaches to the relationship of text and image. The course format will mainly consist of seminar-style discussions guided partly by student presentations. Requirements include weekly response posts, two brief in-class presentations, a formal essay, and a final project in which students curate and analyze an imagetext of their choice.

Required Texts: The following texts are available at the Brandeis University Bookstore. If you buy them from another vendor, please get these editions. Other course readings will be available on the course page on Latte (www.brandeis.edu/latte/). They are marked “[L]” on the reading schedule.

James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Mariner, 2001)
Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (Mariner, 2007)
Reading Schedule

I. Pictures on the Wing: Matter and Image

Jan. 15 (Tu)   Welcome and introduction


Jan. 22 (Tu)   Brandeis Monday – No class

Jan. 25 (Fr)   Audubon, *Birds of America* and *Ornithological Biography*: “Pileated Woodpecker” (vol. 2, Plate 111, pp. 74-79); “Pewit [Pewee] Flycatcher” (vol. 2, Plate 120, pp. 122-130); and choose 2 additional species

Erwin Panofsky, “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art” (1939) [L]

II. Marketing the Sacred: Aura in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Jan. 29 (Tu)   The Book of Genesis, in Harper and Brothers, *Illuminated Bible* (1843-46), online at [Internet Archive] [L]


Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) [L]

David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (1998), Introduction (pp. 1-12) and chap. 4, “Reading the Face of Jesus” (pp. 124-35) [L]

III. Absorbing Fictions: Literary Illustration, Realism, and Race

Feb. 5 (Tu)    Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), chaps. 1-8 (pp. 17-73), online at [Internet Archive] [L]


Feb. 8 (Fr)    Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, chaps. 9-16 (pp. 74-131)

Feb. 12 (Tu) Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Folks from Dixie* (1898): “Jimsella” (pp. 113-121), “Aunt Mandy’s Investment” (pp. 159-167 and frontispiece), and “Nelse Hatton’s Vengeance” (pp. 187-202), online at Internet Archive [L]
Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (1987), chap. 1: “Realism, Writing, and Disfiguration in Thomas Eakins’s *The Gross Clinic*” (pp. 3-89) [L]


Feb. 18-22 Midterm Recess – No class

IV. Picturing Poverty in the Progressive Era


Mar. 1 (Fr) Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, chaps. 6-11
Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message” (1961) [L]

Mar. 5 (Tu) Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, chaps. 12-17
Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image” (1964) [L]

Mar. 8 (Fr) Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, chaps. 18-25 (finish)
Gregory S. Jackson, “Cultivating Spiritual Sight: Jacob Riis’ Virtual-Tour Narrative and the Visual Modernization of Protestant Homiletics” (2003) [L]

V. The Art and Argument of Social Documentary

Mar. 12 (Tu) James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), Preface and “Verses” through “Near a Church” (pp. ix-42)

Mar. 15 (Fr) Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Part One (pp. 44-98)

Recommended: Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, Part Four: “Let Us Now Praise Famous Men” (pp. 261-314) [L]

Mar. 26 (Tu)  Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, “Clothing” through “Work 2: Cotton” (pp. 227-307)

Mar. 29 (Fr)  Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Part Four (pp. 318-393) (finish)

VI. Shadow Catchers and Storytellers: Representing Indigeneity

Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia” (1989) [L]

April 5 (Fr)  Curtis, *The North American Indian* (choose additional tribe(s) totaling 40-50 pp) 


April 12 (Fr)  Silko, *Shadowcatcher* (1981), pp. 49-102

VII. Graphic Narrative and the Witness of Trauma

Apr. 16 (Tu)  Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), chaps. 1-2 (pp. 1-54)
Robert C. Harvey, “Comedy at the Juncture of Word and Image: The Emergence of the Modern Magazine Gag Cartoon Reveals the Vital Blend” (2001) [L]

Apr. 19-26  Passover and Spring Recess – No class
Apr. 30 (Tu)  Bechdel, *Fun Home*, chaps. 3-5 (pp. 55-150)

May 2 (Th)  (Brandeis Friday)
Bechdel, *Fun Home*, chaps. 6-7 (finish)
Course conclusion

**Course Policies and Assignments**

**Prerequisites:** None

**Four-Credit Course (three hours of class-time per week):** Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

**Learning goals:**

- To develop a set of strategies for analyzing multimedia works applicable to aesthetic texts such as graphic novels as well as the everyday objects of media culture (newspapers, billboards, political campaign ads, etc.)
- To improve students’ ability to read, comprehend, and apply dense works of literary/critical theory
- To practice thinking in a broad, interdisciplinary way about American cultural production, recognizing these texts as expressions of an entire cultural and media ecology rather than as a narrowly defined literary sphere
- To hone students’ academic writing skills, including their ability to write a literary analysis
- To build students’ oral communication skills by discussing literary and visual texts in a classroom setting
- To gain a greater appreciation of and enjoyment from multimedia art works—including works on this syllabus and beyond it

**Course Requirements:**

1. **Attendance:** Regular and prompt class attendance is mandatory. If you need to miss class because of sickness, religious observance, or an emergency, please contact me in advance if possible. You will be responsible for posting a response to the readings for the session you missed on the discussion board on Latte within a week. Students who come to class without that day’s assigned readings will be marked absent. Each unexcused absence will lower your attendance grade by a letter grade. Missing more than four classes will result in failing the class.
2. **Active class participation:** Participating fully in this class requires completing the readings and participating in class discussion. Reading assigned material carefully and in its entirety before class is essential for your success in this class. This is a literature class, and the readings are substantial: you can expect to read between 50 and 100 pages per class period. **Please be sure to buy the exact editions listed on the syllabus so we can all refer to the same page numbers:** please bring assigned texts to class (i.e., either bring the book or your computer or tablet). Most of our class time will be spent in detailed discussion of these texts as well as the images presented in class, so your participation grade includes contributing to class discussion. Every student is expected to speak at least once per class. I may call on you even if you haven’t raised your hand.

3. **Response posts:** These brief weekly written responses will be posted to the course discussion board on Latte (http://latte.brandeis.edu) and account for 10% of your final grade. They are intended to ensure you are keeping up with the reading, to jump-start your own thinking about a text, and to improve the quality of our in-class discussions. Responses do not need to be as polished as formal essays, but they should reflect thoughtful engagement with the day’s text and make a claim about it; they should include one or more direct quotes from the text. Either way, these posts should engage substantively with some feature of the text that interests you. This might mean unpacking a particular character, word, image, or idea that seems crucial to understanding the text, or identifying a key problem or tension that plays out there. You can also express personal reactions to a text and explore aspects of it that excite, frustrate, or confuse you. There is no word-count requirement, but each post should be at least a solid paragraph. Students with last names starting with A-L will be assigned to respond to Tuesday’s readings, and those beginning with M through Z will respond to Friday’s readings. Please post your response by 9 a.m. on the day the reading is to be discussed in class. (If no class is held on your day that week, post a response for the next regularly scheduled class.) Posts are not required for the first week and you are allowed to skip three other weeks over the course of the semester, so you should have a total of 10 posts by the end of the term. These responses are not evaluated for a letter grade: you get full credit as long as you turn it in on time, write a full paragraph, and engage substantively with the text.

4. **In-class presentations:** Each student will be responsible for presenting twice during the semester. These 5-10 minute presentations will help guide our class discussions by presenting a particular passage and/or image from the text on the classroom projection system, relating it to the critical text assigned for that day (as well as any other secondary/theoretical texts you find relevant), and posing a few questions to kick off our discussion.

5. **Erasure Poem assignment:** This two-step assignment asks students to first produce their own “erasure poem,” a distinctive genre that involves removing words (and in some cases adding them) to an existing illustrated text to create a new poetic imagetext. Students will then be asked to analyze one of their classmates’ erasure poems in a 5-6 page paper.
6. **Final project**: Students will be asked to curate and analyze an imagetext not included on the syllabus. Possibilities might include an abolitionist periodical, a painting that illustrates a literary text, a children’s book or other illustrated literary work, a comic strip, or a piece from an illustrated magazine—any work that combines images and text but is not a film and was not (at least originally) digital. Each project should make available the imagetext you’ll be working with, whether by providing an image in your paper, a link to a website where it can be accessed, the physical text itself, etc. The final product can be presented in standard paper form (e.g., a Word document or PDF format) or on a digital platform (e.g., a Blog, Prezi presentation, etc.). In either format, the text authored by the student should be equivalent to a 7-8 pp. paper.

**Grading breakdown:**

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<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-class participation</td>
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<td>Response posts</td>
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<td>Oral presentations</td>
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<td>Erasure poem assignment</td>
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<td>Final project</td>
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**Formatting guidelines**: All papers should be in 11- or 12-point type, double-spaced, using Times New Roman or another standard, readable font, and not in italics. Margins should be 1 inch all around. Please include your name and page numbers. Any citations should use Chicago style (see the “Quick Guide” at [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html)).

**Late policy**: Assignments will be docked a half-grade for each day they are late (e.g., from A to A-) unless you make arrangements with me ahead of time.

**Academic Integrity**: You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. This includes avoiding plagiarism, which is the use of someone else’s ideas or words in your writing without acknowledging the source. Please consult Brandeis’ Rights and Responsibilities page ([http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srsc/rightsresponsibilities/index.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srsc/rightsresponsibilities/index.html)) for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Cases of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. When in doubt, see me or consult the LTS Academic Integrity Support page ([https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html](https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html)), including this guide to Citing Your Sources.

**Writing Center**: Students who want additional help with their writing are encouraged to visit the campus Writing Center ([http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/](http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/); Goldfarb Main Library, Room 107; 781-736-4885; writingcenter@brandeis.edu).
Electronic devices: Computers and tablets are allowed during class for taking notes and for specific activities. Browsing the Internet, checking email or Facebook, etc. is not allowed during class; if I find you doing those things I will bar you from bringing your device to future classes. Cell phone and smartphone use during class is prohibited.

Communications: Any changes to the syllabus or class schedule, including accommodations for snow days, will be communicated via the class email list and posted on Latte. Please plan to check your university email account and Latte daily to keep informed.

Disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.