

PHOT 408: PHOTOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN CULTURES NONCREDIT FOR OLDER ADULTS

Foothill College Course Outline of Record

Heading	Value
Effective Term:	Fall 2026
Units:	0
Hours:	4 lecture, 3 laboratory per week (84 total per quarter)
Degree & Credit Status:	Non-Degree-Applicable Non-Credit Course
Foothill GE:	Non-GE
Transferable:	None
Grade Type:	Non-Credit Course (Receives no Grade)
Repeatability:	Unlimited Repeatability
Formerly:	NCAL 416A

Student Learning Outcomes

- A successful student will identify the photographic process, describe the visual elements, and interpret the meaning of a photograph.
- A successful student will synthesize the course material on photography's role in shaping ideas about race, class, gender, sexuality and national identity in America.

Description

This noncredit course is targeted towards older adults. Examination of photography's role in shaping ideas about race, class, gender, sexuality, and national identity in America, from its historical roots to the present. Includes a wide variety of genres, such as commercial photography, portraiture, social documentary, photojournalism, ethnographic and scientific photography, erotica, and fine-art photography. Students will look at images from ethical, cultural, and critical perspectives as they develop visual literacy skills.

Course Objectives

The student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of the historical development of photography in American culture in relation to the political, economic, social, and religious developments of the time.
2. Apply knowledge of photography techniques, historical periods, and genres from American culture to representative examples of photography.
3. Compare and contrast photographs through familiarity with a broad sampling of images, photographers, styles, and genres.
4. Analyze and interpret messages conveyed in a photograph through understanding the language of photography.
5. Determine and assess the role the photographer, the subject, and the viewer have on the photographic image.

6. Discuss, with insight and understanding, the social and personal implications of photography, such as how photographic representation of minority groups in America has either affected or reflected the treatment of these groups by society.
7. Demonstrate self-managed learning in a comprehensive journal, in which they reflect upon, evaluate, and describe their own learning process.

Course Content

1. Reading the visual world
 - a. Revolutions in the field of communications
 - b. Development of a visual culture
 - c. Ways of seeing
 - d. How humans process visual data
 - e. Shortening of human attention span
 - f. Risk of the use of stereotypes to facilitate faster communication
 - g. The importance of visual literacy
 - h. The language of photography
2. Looking at and interpreting photographs
 - a. Learning to look
 - b. Describing photographs (visual elements, subject matter, form, medium, style)
 - c. Analyzing photographs
 - d. Methods of interpreting photographs in photography criticism
3. Issues of representation
 - a. Regime of representation
 - i. Evolution and implications of "whiteness" as the norm in America (rich, white, male, heterosexual, U.S. citizen)
 - ii. Role of the "other" (class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, legal status, religion)
 - b. Power relationships of representation (photographer, subject, and viewer)
 - c. Photographs and the construction of an archetype or stereotype
 - d. Catalysts for the deconstruction of an archetype or stereotype
 - i. Introduction of new and alternative representations (e.g., "New Negro" image)
 - ii. Social and artistic movements
 - iii. Introduction of hand-held 35mm cameras
 - iv. Development of mass-market magazines, such as *Life*, that incorporated photography for their substance
 - v. Great Depression and the creation of federal agencies that used photography for documentation
 - vi. Cultural minorities reframing the view of America
 - e. Effects of representation
 - i. Self-image
 - ii. Outsider perception
 - iii. Treatment in life
 - iv. Poverty
 - v. Harassment
 - vi. Discrimination (housing, jobs, educational opportunities, etc.)
 - vii. Assimilation and isolation
4. Interplay of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, legal status in American history
 - a. Historical and social context of Native American experience
 - b. Historical and social context of African American experience

- c. Historical and social context of Chicano/Latino American experience
- d. Historical and social context of European immigrant experience
- e. Historical and social context of Asian American experience
- 5. Photography in contemporary American society
 - a. Widespread preoccupation with issues of cross-cultural adjustment, displacement, and loss within contemporary photography
 - b. Effects of the media and the influence of the photography industry on visual culture and society
- 6. Defining photography as a powerful medium of representation
 - a. Precursors to photography
 - b. The origin of photography
 - c. The invention of photography
 - d. Innovations that made Daguerreotype a practical portrait medium
 - e. Private vs. public portrait
 - f. Regional practitioners
- 7. The role of the camera in settler colonization
 - a. Historical and social context of settler colonization
 - b. Photographic inventions and territorial expansion
 - c. Establishing a theory of race
 - d. Slavery and the rise of scientific racism
 - e. Visualizing a racial hierarchy with the lens of science
 - f. Abolitionists use of photography to end slavery
 - g. Coercive assimilation and Native American boarding schools
 - h. Edward S. Curtis and styling the North American Indian
- 8. Exhibiting the savage
 - a. Exhibiting the savage as a viable commercial enterprise in Europe and United States
 - b. Depicting a world of progress through visualizing differences at World Fairs exhibits
 - c. Representations of the "native" and the making of European identities
 - d. The Exhibit of American Negroes at the 1900 World's Fair in Paris
 - e. The Philippine Exhibit at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis
 - f. Ota Benga: the pygmy in the zoo
- 9. Social control at home
 - a. Conservation of the white middle-class American family
 - b. Sir Francis Galton and the development of Eugenics
 - c. The American Eugenics Movement and public policy involving the "unfit"
 - d. Alphonse Bertillon and the development of anthropometry in law enforcement
 - e. Francis Galton's influence on contemporary photographers
- 10. Camera and the immigrant
 - a. Chinese laborers and the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment
 - b. The Chinese immigration experience
 - c. Visual documentation and the early development of U.S. immigration restrictions
 - d. Japanese and Korean Picture Brides
 - e. Ellis Island immigration center and the photography of Augustus Sherman
 - f. Social change during the progressive era: Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine
- 11. Staging orientalism in picture postcard of San Francisco Chinatown
 - a. Arnold Genthe and Isaiah West Taber documenting SF Chinatown and establishing artistic conventions on how Chinatown would be portrayed
 - b. Rise of SF Chinatown as a travel destination
 - c. Postcard eras
 - d. Golden Age of picture postcards
 - e. Photographers and publishers
 - f. Stereotype methods
 - g. Widespread postcard distribution
 - h. Racially charged handwritten messages
 - i. Correlation to increase in violence attacks on Chinese Americans
- 12. Looking like the enemy
 - a. WWII and the racism of anti-Japanese propaganda
 - b. U.S. Government's photographic documentation of wartime evacuation, detention, and internment of the Japanese
 - c. Photographs of Dorothea Lange, Ansel Adams, Toyo Miyatake
 - d. Redress movement
 - e. Parallels between the post-September 11 treatment of Arab Americans and Muslims in this country with treatment of Japanese Americans after the start of World War II
- 13. Reframing America
 - a. Artistic contributions European photographers made to American photography between the 1930s and 1960s
 - b. The Image of Freedom Exhibition
 - c. Edward Steichen and The Family of Man
 - d. Robert Frank and The Americans
- 14. Lynching photographs
 - a. The spectacle of lynching
 - b. Consumption of lynching photography
- 15. Civil Rights Movement
 - a. Photography ignites the Civil Right Movement
 - b. Gordon Parks: African American life in the mid-late 20th century
 - c. Documenting integration of the Little Rock Nine
 - d. Ernest C. Withers: An Informed Observer
 - e. The impact of images by Charles Moore, Danny Lyon, and Moneta Sleet Jr.

Lab Content

Lab activities are provided for students to practice visual literacy skills (observe, describe, analyze and interpret) and apply theoretical knowledge regarding each topic area's photographs using the language of photography (elements of art and principles of design), technique, genre, and important photographers. Activities consist of online laboratory worksheets correlated with viewing examples. Examples for Part 1/Topic 4 (Anthropology and Settler Colonialism) and Part 1/Topic 5 (Exhibiting the Savage) illustrate the quantity and quality of photography examples provided.

Representative viewing examples for Part 1/Topic 4 (Anthropology and Settler Colonialism):

1. Renty, frontal and profile, 1850 (Joseph T. Zealy)
2. Delia, frontal and profile, 1850 (Joseph T. Zealy)
3. Portrait of Frederick Douglass, 1844/52 (Samuel J. Miller)
4. Portrait of Frederick Douglass, 1895 (C.M. Battey)
5. Portrait of Sojourner Truth, 1863 (Photographer unknown)

6. Portrait of Sojourner Truth, 1863 (Photographer unknown)
7. Peter (formerly identified as "Gordon"), 1863 (Mathew Brady Studio, after McPherson & Oliver)
8. Illustration in Harper's Weekly, July 4, 1863
9. Tom Torino, before and after, 1882 (John N. Choate)
10. In the Badlands, c. 1905 (Edward S. Curtis)
11. In a Piegan Lodge, original and retouched, 1911 (Edward S. Curtis)
12. The Vanishing Race, 1904 (Edward S. Curtis)

Representative viewing examples for Part 1/Topic 5 (Exhibiting the Savage):

1. Chang and Eng, conjoined twins, seated, ca. 1860
2. William Henry Johnson, ca. 1860-1870 (Mathew Brady Studio)
3. Summit Avenue Ensemble, Atlanta, Georgia, 1899 or 1900 (Thomas E. Askew)
4. African American girl, half-length portrait, with right hand to cheek, with illustrated book on table, 1899 or 1900 (Thomas E. Askew)
5. Four young men posed on outdoor steps, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn., ca. 1899 (Thomas E. Askew)
6. Students at work on house built largely by them, 1899 or 1900 (Frances Benjamin Johnston)
7. Louis Firetail (Sioux, Crow Creek), wearing tribal clothing, in American history class, Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia, 1899 or 1900 (Frances Benjamin Johnston)
8. Hampton Institute, Va. -a graduate (dining) at home, 1899 (Frances Benjamin Johnston)
9. The Missing Link #1 and #2, ca. 1904 (Gerhard sisters)
10. Mrs. Wilkins teaching an Igorot boy the cakewalk at the 1904 World's Fair, 1904 (Jessie Tarbox Beals)
11. Igorots Killing a Dog, 1904 (Jessie Tarbox Beals)
12. Bagabo Chief, 1904 (Gerhard sisters)
13. Ota Benga at the Bronx Zoo, 1906

Special Facilities and/or Equipment

1. Classroom with computer and audio/video equipment.
2. Access to comprehensive digital photography library for representative viewing examples.
3. When taught via Foothill Global Access: ongoing access to computer with email software and capabilities, email address.

Method(s) of Evaluation

Methods of Evaluation may include but are not limited to the following:

The student will demonstrate detailed knowledge of the historical development of photography in the United States in relation to the political, economic, social, religious developments, and values of the time in module/chapter-level quizzes and a comprehensive examination. The student will demonstrate ability to apply knowledge of photography techniques, historical periods, and genres to representative examples of photography in module/chapter laboratory worksheets and quizzes. The student will demonstrate ability to compare and contrast photographic representations of different cultural/ethnic groups in module/chapter-level quizzes and a comprehensive examination. The student will demonstrate ability to apply visual literacy skills to representative examples of photography in module/chapter laboratory worksheets and quizzes.

The student will demonstrate ability to discuss, with insight and understanding, the social and personal implications of photographic representation in society through participation in on-campus and/or online discussions and in brief essays posted in a comprehensive journal (see below).

The student will demonstrate self-managed learning in a comprehensive journal, in which they reflect upon, evaluate, and describe their own learning process by writing two reflections on each module/chapter-level topic area: a pre-reflection that includes what the student already knows about the topic and a post-reflection in which students summarize what they learned and want to remember, clarify, or pursue in more depth.

Method(s) of Instruction

Methods of Instruction may include but are not limited to the following:

The student will listen to (on-campus) or read (online) lecture information. The student will view representative examples of photographs that illustrate concepts related to the historical/social context, stylistic categories, visual characteristics, and important photographers for the varied topic areas.

The student will participate in discussion (on-campus and/or online). The student will complete laboratory worksheets that provide additional information, as well as ask application questions correlated with viewing examples.

The student will learn from feedback on quizzes, examinations, discussion postings, and comprehensive journal writing delivered via email or Canvas.

Representative Text(s) and Other Materials

Herman, Ronald E.. Multicultural Photography, 2nd ed. (ISBN: 9781792451409). 2020.

Although this text is older than five years, it remains seminal in this area of study.

Types and/or Examples of Required Reading, Writing, and Outside of Class Assignments

1. Reading assignments: One textbook chapter for each of the topics (e.g., Part 1, Chapter 1: Reading the Visual World; Chapter 4: Anthropology and Settler Colonialism; Chapter 5: Exhibiting the Savage; Chapter 8: Looking Like the Enemy).
2. Writing assignments: Comprehensive journal, in which students first reflect upon what they already know about the topic, and then after they have completed all the learning activities associated with that topic, summarize what they have learned, what they need to clarify, and what they wish to pursue in more depth. Participation in formal threaded discussion, that includes written responses to prompts for each topic.
 - a. Example for Anthropology and Settler Colonialism: Edward Curtis has been accused of dressing up Native American people in regalia and outfits they no longer wore, presenting false and stereotyped images of a vanishing race. Do you think this is an accurate assessment? Why or why not? How do you feel about the continued appropriation of the headdress in non-native communities (for example, Victoria's Secret and Chanel runway

shows, Halloween costumes, and Pharrell's cover on [Elle UK](#)?
How does this make you feel?

- b. Example for Exhibiting the Savage: Photographic imagery has been used to construct negative stereotypes of African Americans. What role does photography play today in shaping the narrative of how people of color are perceived? Do you think it is important that you have some control over, or contribute to how you are visually represented? Why or why not?
3. Discussion postings are assessed on the following criteria:
 - a. Appropriateness: Did the student "answer" the question and address all components of the question?
 - b. Thoughtfulness and accuracy: Does the posting include correct information and demonstrate that the student is thinking about and understanding the material?
 - c. Organization: Does the student's posting form a coherent paragraph with main statements, support statements, conclusion, and so forth?
 - d. "ESWE" (edited standard written English): Does the student's posting contain correct grammar and spelling?

Discipline(s)

Photography