

AMERICAN VISUAL CULTURE
ARTH-28300
Spring 2012

Nancy Break
O.H.: T 1:30-2:30; W 2-4 p.m.
and by appointment

Gannett 114
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Course Statement

Are there substantial connections between early American life and our own world? Are we becoming critically alienated from our considerable cultural and artistic heritage? Through your participation in this class, you will have an opportunity to examine these and many other questions, and to explore visual culture in the United States from colonial times through the mid-twentieth century.

Robert Hughes, our textbook author and a naturalized American citizen, has asked, "What can we say about Americans from the things and images they have made?" *American Visual Culture* will examine relationships between the American people, their history, and their surroundings, relating the images and objects made by and for Americans to the society that produced them. The organization of this course is thematic as well as (largely) chronological, considering topics such as democracy, progress, materialism, patriotism, propaganda, and popular culture. In addition to exploring traditional art historical media (painting, sculpture, architecture, and graphic arts) we will also consider vernacular building and objects, clothing, advertising, film, photography, and television in order to create a fuller picture of American life and culture over three centuries. Since this is a first course in American art and culture, you will need to understand how American objects both reflect and affect their own time. You will also be required to brush up on your US *history*.

Do your best to avoid "presentism": the unconscious assumption or tendency to presume that things *were* as they are today. The art, architecture, and other works we discuss can and should be seen as an expression of how their makers thought and felt about the American experience as *they lived it*.

Textbook

Hughes, Robert. *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America*. Copies are available at the College Bookstore. A copy of this book is also on Reserve.

Course Work Required

Participation in discussions and presentations are required. Individual **written** assignments will include: a midterm test, two term papers (approximately 5 pages each) and a final examination given during exam week. There is also a cultural events requirement (see below**). Ask questions about any of these assignments whenever you wish. (Hint: sooner is better than later!)

In accordance with the College's attendance policy, you will be allowed up to three absences without penalty during the semester. Additional absences could result in grade reductions or dismissal from class.

****Cultural events requirement:** To encourage shared cultural and intellectual engagement outside of the classroom, students enrolled in an art history course are required to attend three cultural or departmental events during this semester and write a one-page response to each. (A list of suggested events is maintained on the Art History Department website). One of these is due by the end of Week 7. The same events may be used for multiple art history classes, but they all must occur this semester. While the cultural events assignments are not formally graded, they are required and will be taken into consideration when the final grade is calculated.

Concerning Plagiarism

Plagiarism of any kind is strictly prohibited; ignorance of this issue does not constitute a valid excuse for violation. See me or consult the Ithaca College *Student Handbook* if you have questions. You will also receive a handout later in the semester on this topic.

Concerning Electronic Equipment

Using electronic equipment (e.g., cell phones, laptop computers, tape recorders) in the classroom is strictly prohibited without the express consent of the instructor. Make sure all such equipment is turned off before entering the classroom.

Additional Books on Reserve for ARTH-28300

Craven, Wayne. *American Art: History and Culture*.

Frankenstein, Alfred. *The Reality of Appearance*.

Jenkins, Virginia. *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession*.

McCoubrey, John. *American Art, 1700 to 1960*.

Mendes and de la Haye, *Fashion Since 1900*.

Miller, Angela. *The Empire of the Eye*.

Novak, Barbara. *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*.

Parry, E.C. *The Image of the Indian and the Black Man*.

Pierson, W., and Jordy. *American Buildings and their Architects*.

Quimby, Ian. *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*.

Ringelberg, Kirstin. *Redefining Gender in American Impressionist Studio Paintings*.

Sears, John. *Sacred Places*.

Stilgoe, John. *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb*.

Whitney Museum. *200 Years of American Sculpture*.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns*.

Wilmerding, John. *American Art*.