

**History 389/ARTH 399
Modern African American Art**

**“For All The World To See”:
Understanding Race and Collective Memory Through Visual Culture
Fall 2011**



Professor: Dr. Suzanne Smith
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Course Time and Place:
TR 12:00-1:15pm, Enterprise Hall 174

Office Hours:
Tuesdays, 2:00-3:00pm, Wednesdays, 5:00-6:00 pm and by appointment.

Course Description:
This course traces modern African American history (1865-present) through visual and public art. Beginning with emancipation from slavery after the Civil War and concluding with the unveiling of the new memorial to Martin Luther King Jr. on the National Mall, the course explores how race relations in the United States were reflected in visual and artistic forms including: sculpture, public memorials, painting, and photography. Moreover, the class will examine how popular cultural forms including vaudeville, film and advertising had a critical role in constructing ideas about race through the mass distribution of visual images of African Americans. Most significantly, the course examines how visual and public art act as critical agents in the formation of collective memory about race and racial conflict in modern American culture.

Grading and Assignments:
In this course you will be graded in three major areas:
1) **Class participation: (20%)**

2) **Written assignments:**

Response Papers (30%)

Two Field Work Projects (25%),

Due: Project #1, Thursday, October 13

Project #2, Tuesday, November 22

3) **Exams:**

Take-Home Final (25%), Due: Thursday, December 15
by 1:15 p.m.

Assessment:

Class participation: Class participation is crucial to one's overall grade and will be assessed by attendance and *active* participation in class discussions. **Note:** coming to class with a pulse does not fulfill active participation.

Written Assignments:

Each week you are responsible for a short (2-page) weekly response paper. The paper should address your reactions and interpretations of the readings and visual images for that week. The papers are relatively informal in structure, but will usually be guided by a central discussion question. For complete details about these weekly papers, see information included at the end of the syllabus.

Field Work Projects:

As an Art History course, this class requires two field work projects in which you will visit local sites in the D.C. area to analyze public art and museum exhibitions. The first field work project will count as your midterm exam. The second field work project be due in mid-November. Details and instructions about each of these assignments will be handed out in class.

Extra Credit: Periodically throughout the semester, I will offer students opportunities for extra credit. These assignments will usually involve visiting a local exhibit related to course themes. If you visit the exhibit and write a response paper about it, you will receive extra credit. Each extra credit paper is graded like a response paper, but the points are worth 50% less than a regular response paper. Each student is allowed up to three extra credit assignments.

Exams:

Your first field work project will take the place of your midterm exam. You will also have a take-home final exam. In these assignments, you will be responsible for all material covered in course readings, lectures, and any additional materials-- films, etc.

Decorum, Honor Code, and Disability Accommodations:

Please make an effort to arrive in class *on time*. Turn off or silence cell phones before class begins.

A Special Warning about Laptops: Laptops can be used **for note taking ONLY**. Actively surfing the Internet during class time will **negatively** affect your class participation grade. It is also an activity that distracts other students sitting around you. Recent studies have shown that students who use laptops in class earn lower grades than those who do not use laptops. **For all of these reasons, I discourage students from using laptops in class unless it is absolutely necessary.**

All of George Mason University's academic policies and honor code apply to this course. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me. Violators will be brought before the University's Honor Committee for disciplinary action. For details, see the Undergraduate Catalog.

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations are arranged through that office.

NOTE: The last day to ADD classes is Sept. 6 and the last day to DROP classes without the dean's permission is Sept. 30.

Required Reading:

Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*
James Horton and Lois Horton, *Hard Road to Freedom, Vol. 2*
Maurice Berger, *For All The World To See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights*
Langston Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks*
Selected articles and book chapters available on E-Reserves

Class Schedule:

Week 1 (August 29-Sept. 2): **Introduction: Understanding the Relationship between Race and the Visual**

Reading: *For All The World To See*, pp. xi-33
Michael D. Harris, "Constructing and Visualizing Race,"
from *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*
(Available on E-Reserves)

Week 2: (Sept. 5-9)

Race and the Politics of Memory

Reading: Scott Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement and the Politics of Memory," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 80, No. 1, June 1993 (Available on E-reserves)

NOTE: First response paper is due on Thursday, Sept. 8—required of all students.

Week 3: (Sept. 12-16)

Exposing Slavery

Reading: *Hard Road to Freedom*, Chp. 1
Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves, Chps. 1-2

- Week 4: (Sept. 19-23) **Emancipation and Reconstruction**
Reading: *Hard Road To Freedom*, Chp. 2
Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves, Chps. 3-4
- Week 5: (Sept. 26-30) **“Slave in a Box”: The Rise and Marketing of Jim Crow**
Reading: M.M. Manning, “The Old South, the Absent Mistress, and the Slave in A Box,” from *The Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Available on E-Reserves)
****Class Field Trip:** Friday, Sept. 30**
- Week 6: (Oct. 3-6) **Remembering Common and Uncommon Soldiers**
Reading: *Hard Road To Freedom*, Chp. 3
Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves, Chps. 5-Epilogue
Field Work Project #1: The African American Civil War Memorial and Museum
NOTE: No class on Thursday, October 6; **No response paper due this week.**
- Week 7: (Oct. 10-14) **Field Work Reports**
NOTE: No class on Tuesday (Columbus Day Holiday)
Field Work Project #1: Due in class, Thursday, October 13; **No response paper due.**
- Week 8: (Oct. 17-21) **“Midnight Ramble”: Race and the Film Industry**
Reading: *For All The World To See*, pp. 33-63
Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence, “Within Whose Gates?: The Symbolic and Political Complexity of Racial Discourse,” from *Writing Himself Into History: Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audiences* (Available on E-Reserves)
- Week 9: (Oct. 24-28) **Harlem Renaissance and the “New Negro”**
Reading: *Hard Road To Freedom*, Chp. 4
Langston Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks*
- Week 10: (Oct. 31-Nov. 4) **The Great Depression and the Great Migration**
Reading: *Hard Road to Freedom*, Chp. 5
Jutta Lorensen, “Between Image and Word, Color and Time: Jacob Lawrence’s The Migration Series” *African American Review*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Fall 2006): 571-586; **and** Henry Louis Gates Jr., “An Interview with Jacob Lawrence,” *MoMa (The Museum of Modern Art)* No. 19 (Spring 1995): 14-17 (Available on E-Reserves)

- Week 11: (Nov. 7-11) **The Cold War and the Dawn of the Civil Rights Era**
Reading: Adam Green, Chapter 4, "Selling the Race," from *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955*; **and** Maren Strange, "'Photographs Taken in Everyday Life': *Ebony's* Photojournalistic Discourse" from *The Negro Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (Available on E-reserves)
- Week 12: (Nov. 14-18) **The Black Revolution**
Reading: *Hard Road to Freedom*, Chp. 6
For All The World To See, pp. 100-137
Courtney Baker, "Emmett Till, Justice and the Task of Recognition," *The Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (June 2006), pp. 110-123; **and** Jason Chambers, "Civil Rights and the Advertising Industry," from *Madison Avenue and the Color Line: African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (Available on E-Reserves)
- Week 13: (Nov. 21-25) **The Fire Next Time: Black Power**
Reading: *Hard Road to Freedom*, Chp. 7
For All The World To See, pp. 140-179
Leigh Radford, "Restaging Revolution: Black Power, *Vibe* Magazine, and Photographic Memory," from *The Civil Rights Movement in American History*
NOTE: Field Work Project #2 is due in class on Tuesday, November 22. No class on Thursday, Nov. 24-Enjoy Thanksgiving! No response paper required this week.
- Week 14: (Nov. 28-Dec. 2) **Color Adjustment: Race and Television**
Reading: *Hard Road to Freedom*, Chp. 8
Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Primetime and the Struggle for Black Power*, Chapter 1, "Reading the Roots of Resistance: Television of the Black Revolution," and Chapter 5, "Respect Yourself!: Black Women and Power in *Julia* and *Good Times*," (Available via GMU's Library Catalog e-Library)
- Week 15: (Dec. 5-9) **Race and Remembrance in the 21st Century**
Reading: *Hard Road to Freedom*, Chp. 9
Erika Doss, "Anger: Contesting American Identity in Contemporary Memorial Culture," from *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Available on E-Reserves)

Take-Home Final Exam--Due: Thursday, Dec. 15 by 1:15 p.m. **Late exams or e-mail attachments** will NOT be accepted under any circumstances.

Response Paper Assignment

I. Goal of the Assignment:

Each week you are responsible for a weekly response paper. The **goal** of the assignment is for you to communicate in short writing exercises (**approximately 2 typed and double-spaced pages**) what you learned that week about African-American visual culture. The paper should address your reactions and interpretations of the assigned texts and lectures for that week. Each week there will also be a suggested discussion question to help guide your writing. Please **NOTE**: these papers are not journal entries. In other words, papers should *not* trail off into personal musings without discussing the texts directly.

II. Assignment Schedule

The papers are due in hard copy **each week in class on Thursday. NO late papers or e-mail attachments** will be accepted for a grade. Each Thursday we will devote class time to discussion of the class texts and the issues raised by your response papers.

"Free" Week

Everyone in class is given one "**free**" week, of your choosing, in which you do not have to do a response paper (with the exception of the first response paper, which everyone must do). Use your "free" week wisely--for instance when you have several midterms. Let me know in class that you are exercising your "free" week. If you don't take your "free" week, your extra paper will be viewed as extra credit. If you give yourself more than one "free" week, it will be deducted from your grade. Response papers are also not required on the weeks that field work projects are due. **Please NOTE**: a "free" week only means that you don't have to write a paper. You should still complete the week's reading assignment and come to class prepared to discuss the work.

III. Grading System for Response Papers

Response papers are graded on a check system ("V"), which corresponds to points. "V+" = 10pts. (A), "V+/V" = 9pts. (A-/B+), "V" = 8.5pts (B), "V/V-" = 8pts. (B-/C+), and "V-" = 7.5pts. (C). Please note that if you complete the assignment, under most circumstances, the worst grade you could earn is a "V-." **Please ALSO note** that the instructor reserves the right to assign the grade of "0" if the paper submitted does not reflect **clear effort by the student to complete the assignment thoughtfully and thoroughly**. Response paper grades are **critical** to your overall grade in this course. If you do not turn in these papers consistently, it will be difficult to earn a high passing grade in the course.

****Response Paper Do's and Don'ts****

DO have an opinion

You should use these papers to show me what you learned and what you think about what you learned. If you disagree with an author's argument, write about it. If you think a book and/or film really opened your eyes to a new way of thinking about an idea or subject, express how the work(s) did this for you. Be specific as possible in these discussions. Offer a quote or two from the book that was provocative to you.

DON'T simply summarize the text

Do not spend the entire paper summarizing the text(s) that you read for that week. Your paper should be *analysis* of the material not a recap. To avoid summary, start your paper with a specific question that the material raised for you. Then, spend the rest of the paper exploring that question with specific examples or quotes from the text(s). Another way to avoid summary is to focus on a specific course theme and explore how that week's material exemplifies the theme.

DO draw connections from previous work

If you see connections from previous texts to the assignment for the current week, make connections between the readings. Learning is cumulative—one idea builds from another. Use the response papers to make these connections for yourself.

DON'T forget to proofread your work

These papers are relatively informal in structure, but that does not mean that they shouldn't be carefully proofread. Sloppy work *never* helps your grade. Take five extra minutes before you turn in your paper to check for typos and grammatical errors. READ your paper aloud to yourself to check for awkward phrasing. The ear catches problems that the eye does not see.

DO get to the point

These writing exercises are short (approximately 2-typed double spaced pages) for a reason. Learning how to make a point in a concise manner is an important skill to develop. It is easy in writing to wander off the subject or add needless information that clouds your objective. For this reason, you should not clutter these papers with any needless commentary. You do not need to have an elaborate introduction or recount what the assignment was. Begin your analysis with the first sentence. Jump in and don't waste any time telling the reader what you are most interested in discussing. Two pages ends quickly, so use these paper assignments to become a more effective and efficient writer.