Instructor: Jenna Alexander

Honors 1100

**Unit 3: Historical Analysis**

**Introduction**

People often attempt to read, interpret, and evaluate texts “objectively,” as though the text exists in a vacuum. However, many composition scholars emphasize the importance of *context* in reading and writing. For this essay, you will analyze a photograph from American history by considering the rhetorical situation for that text. Writing an analysis is more than just summarizing *what* the text is about; rather, it requires a close attention to language and *how* the language was used to accomplish certain goals.

**Brainstorming, Research, and Analysis**

Start by choosing a photograph from American history to “read” closely and critically, analyzing the rhetorical strategies that the photographer used to construct the image. Consider the following questions:

* Who took the image and for what purpose? How did the photographer’s background influence the photograph?
* What is the subject matter in the photograph? What patterns emerge within the text?
* Which details stand out to you? Why do these details seem significant?
* Who are the intended audiences for this photograph? How do you know?
* How do you respond to the image? Does the image remind you of anything you’ve seen before?
* When was the image made? What do you know about the historical background?
* How are the symbols within the image arranged? How does that arrangement establish certain relationships between the parts of the text?
* How does the distance between the camera and the subject impact your interpretation?
* How does the perspective of the photographer establish a certain point of view?
* How might this photograph influence public memory of the past? How has this photograph influenced our understanding of historical events?
* Does this photograph exemplify a conceptual representation, a narrative representation, or both?

Then, using your analysis notes, **write a 4-6 page historical analysis** of the photograph. In other words, you’ll formulate an argument about how the image constructs and reflects our understanding of American history. This argument may support, refute, develop and/or challenge the ideas that we’ve discussed in class. Regardless, you should use details and descriptions of the photograph as evidence to make an argument about how images can shape and represent the past.

**Goals**

The goals of this assignment are (one) to analyze a historical image rhetorically and (two) to become conversant with several theoretical issues that concern composition scholars and teachers.

**The Writing Calendar**

Wednesday, October 19: Choose a photograph from American history to analyze.

Monday, October 24: Conferences (first draft due at your conference)

Wednesday, October 26: Second draft due (bring two copies)

Monday, October 31: Portfolio 3 due (along with the final draft of the Historical Analysis paper)

Rubric/Requirements

(Subject to change as announced.)

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| **Structure/Organization:**   * Follow prompt, use approved topic * Clear, focused purpose * Well-written thesis, represents essay in entirety * Brief historical background about the photograph to help the reader(s) understand the context * Introduction is attention-getting * Introduces the sources by providing relevant background information (photographer, publication information, etc.) * Clear organization that emphasizes content and strategies for development * Each paragraph clearly fits with purpose of essay * Utilizes effective transitions between main ideas and paragraphs (flows well) * Resolution/conclusion |
| **Development/Detail:**   * Analysis is clear and fully explained * Analysis demonstrates depth of thought, going beyond surface meaning for each example * Each main point (paragraph) analyzes specific detail from text and connects to thesis * Gives clear descriptions and details from the text as evidence * Essay demonstrates a certain level of maturity, professionalism and appropriateness * Makes significant revisions from draft to draft, not just sentence-level changes |
| **Polish:**   * Grammar * Active verbs, present tense * Clarity * Sentence structure and variety * Punctuation—commas, colons, dashes and semi-colons * Mechanics |