

northwestern university
DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

Quarter/Year

Winter 2018

Course Number

ART-HIST 365-2

Day/Time

MW 11:00-12:20

Instructor

Reitz

Course Title

American Art II: 1861-1968



This course examines the art of the United States from the Civil War through the Civil Rights era. Foregrounding questions of American exceptionalism and exclusionism, we will study the art-making that defined a century of profound economic, social, and cultural change. Framed between the secession of the Confederacy and the height of the “Americanization” of the Vietnam War, the course explores the consolidation and contestation of national identity and belonging in artistic practices ranging from emancipation monuments, Plains ledger drawings, and Farm Security Administration photographs to abstract expressionist paintings, iconic protest posters, and land art. Throughout the quarter, we will consider the intersection of visual representation and political representation as a primary axis for understanding the art and popular culture of the period. Special attention will be paid to artists’ responses to topics such as the erasure of Indigenous histories, the entrenchment of racism and sexism in the visual field, and new technologies that dramatically altered everyday life. We will also trace the evolving

cultural policies and programs of the U.S. government, as well as the impact of mass production and new media like photography on artistic innovations in printmaking, painting, and sculpture. Students will undertake two research trips in the Chicago area to study relevant artworks and architectural sites, and the city will feature prominently in our discussions, as it was home to the first skyscraper (1885), the World’s Columbian Exposition (1893), and era-defining works like the Organization of Black American Culture’s *Wall of Respect* (1967).

Pictured: Gordon Parks, *American Gothic*, Washington, D.C., 1942 © The Gordon Parks Foundation

Required Textbooks

Angela Miller, Janet Berlo, Bryan Wolf, and Jennifer Roberts, *American Encounters: Art, History, and Cultural Identity* (2007). ISBN: 0130300047. Additional readings provided.

Assessments

Meaningful participation in class discussion; two short writing assignments; midterm paper; final paper