Writing 3020-037: The Documentary: Rhetorics of Witnessing and Representing
Spring 2007
Monday and Wednesday, 3:00-4:15 p.m.
Muenzinger E114

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Office Hours: M, W 1:30-3:00 p.m., and by appointment

Course Description
How do we become (reliable) witnesses of a social problem or phenomenon? And, as ethnographer John Van Maanen has asked, “How do we get from observations to representations?” These questions will serve as catalysts for an exploration of documentaries in various forms (film, photography, poetry, prose, collage, etc.) and will lead us to generate our own theories of seeing and witnessing. Several of our texts will be collections of photographs accompanied by prose. These works record American experiences—particularly the lives and livelihoods of the rural poor—in 1930s America. We will discuss these texts in class, devoting most of our time to the moving yet puzzling documentary Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, a work whose very title challenges its readers. Inspired by these texts, we will keep semester-long, mixed-media journals that will accompany our own collaborative documentary projects (written essays, photographic essays, short films, etc.). We will also write two essays—one analytical, the other persuasive—that will tackle the course’s central questions. Naturally, our readings, discussions, and field work will inform these essays. There will also be a heavy emphasis on peer-review workshops and revision: we will devote two workshops to each paper and will also spend class time working on the collaborative projects. In addition to these workshops, students will have two conferences with me (individual and group) to discuss papers and projects. Finally, because a commitment to community involvement underpins the course, the semester will conclude with a public presentation of our work. Early in the semester, we will decide as a class when and where to hold the forum. All students must participate in this forum.

Please note: This is a service-learning course, so it will require that you do extra work outside of class. We have received a small grant ($1,000) that will help to fund the group projects.

Required Texts
Lorentz, Pare. The River. 1937. (We will watch this film in class.)
Caldwell, Erskine, and Margaret Bourke-White. You Have Seen Their Faces. 1937.
Rukeyser, Muriel. The Book of the Dead. 1938. (On e-reserve.)
Wright, Richard. 12 Million Black Voices. 1941.

Also required: a notebook that you will bring to every class meeting and a folder or ring-binder in which to keep your journal
Recommended: a good dictionary and a writing handbook

Assignments—more detailed guidelines to be distributed

Journal  30%
During the first two weeks of the course, each student will choose a social or political issue that affects the Boulder community, will find a community organization with which to work, and will commit to keeping a semester-long, mixed-media journal documenting his or her observations and analyses regarding this issue. The journal will be composed of weekly entries of 1-2 typed pages each. Some entries will be responses to our readings, others will be analyses of images, and others will document field work (narrating experiences, conducting interviews, recording difficulties, etc.). The final entry will be a reflective piece about the journal-writing experience and its role in helping the student develop theories of seeing, witnessing, and representing. I will collect the journals twice during the semester and offer written feedback on each student’s ideas.

Two 5-page essays  40%
These papers, more formal than the journal entries, will provide opportunities for you to clarify your ideas concerning some of the course’s central questions and themes. For example, you might ask yourself what it takes to be a reliable witness and then analyze one of the texts alongside your experience as a documentarist.

Collaborative Project and Presentation  30%
Students with similar interests will form small groups (the ideal number for each group is three). Each member will, of course, play a distinct part and do equal work. Each group will present its work publicly. Some details about this assignment will be worked out in class meetings.

Course Policies
Attendance and Participation
Attendance and participation are crucial to your success, so you should use your absences wisely and come prepared to each class. You may miss up to two classes during the semester. These two absences may be used for illness, religious observances, or any other reason you deem necessary. After the second absence, I will lower your grade by 5% for each additional absence. **If you miss more than five class meetings, you will fail the course. In addition, coming to class tardy three times will equal one absence.** The syllabus will tell you what you need to know about readings and due dates, but if you miss a class, you are responsible for contacting a classmate to get the particulars. Please do not e-mail me and ask me to tell you what you missed. Grades of Incomplete (I.F.) are given only under exceptional circumstances.

All assignments are due at the beginning of class. I will not accept late work unless you’ve made arrangements with me beforehand. Furthermore, I will not accept work that is over one week late. For each day that an assignment is late, you will lose five points from that assignment’s grade. Also, because attendance and workshop participation are extremely important in this class, you will lose five points from an assignment’s final grade if you do not come to class and bring a draft on workshop days. **I will not accept e-mailed drafts. If you want to discuss a paper before it is due, please come to my office hours.**
Administrative Drop Policy
Any student who misses the first three days of class will be administratively dropped from the course in order to make room for waitlisted students.

Religious Observances
Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required attendance. You can read university policy details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies.

Classroom Behavior
Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat students with understanding, dignity, and respect, to guide classroom discussion, and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which students express opinions. Disruptive students hinder the educational process. Examples of disruptive behavior include talking while the instructor or other students are talking, and receiving cell phone calls during class. During this class, you must turn off cell phones and other electronic devices. If your cell phone rings or if you check your messages during class, I will ask you to leave the classroom, and you will be counted absent for that class. For additional information on classroom behavior, refer to http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html.

Honor Code
All University of Colorado at Boulder students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include cheating, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from me and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Additional information can be found at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html and http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/.

A Few Words Concerning Plagiarism
Plagiarism is defined as the use of another’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgment. Examples of plagiarism include failing to use quotation marks when directly quoting from a source; failing to document distinctive ideas from a source; fabricating or inventing a source; turning in someone else’s work as your own; and copying information from computer-based sources, i.e., the Internet. In this class, if you hand in a piece of writing that is plagiarized in part or in full, you will receive a failing grade on that assignment and the F will be factored into your final course grade. If plagiarism is a recurring problem, you may fail the course.
Discrimination and Sexual Harassment
The University of Colorado at Boulder policies on Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff, and faculty. Any student, staff, or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at (303) 492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at (303) 492-5550. Information can be found at http://www.colorado.edu/odh.

Students with Disabilities
Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact their office at (303) 492-8671, visit them in Willard, or find more information at http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit a letter to me from Disability Services by the second week of classes so that your needs may be addressed.

The Writing Center
The Program for Writing and Rhetoric’s Writing Center is staffed by trained consultants and is located in Norlin Library, E156. You may make a 60-minute appointment for help during any stage of the writing process. I encourage you to visit the Writing Center when working on major assignments.

A Few Words Regarding Format
The essays you write must be typed in a 12-point, sans serif font, such as Times New Roman, and double-spaced. Margins must be set at one inch on all sides. Final drafts must be spell-checked, proofread carefully, and stapled. Any supplementary assignments must also be typed. If you do not own your own computer, you may type your assignments at one of the university’s many computing clusters. Please be sure that print-outs of your work are readable and are one-sided, especially when you make multiple copies for class workshops. You will need to save or make extra copies of all your work.

I will distribute detailed guidelines for each writing assignment. Each reading and writing assignment is due on the day it is listed on the daily schedule. Note, however, that due dates and reading assignments are subject to change. If I post readings on e-reserve through Norlin Library, you will be responsible for accessing, printing, and bringing these to class. Workshops will be conducted in a variety of ways. I will tell you beforehand what you need to know, including how many copies of drafts to bring and which texts and materials you will need.
4/11  *Famous Men*
Assignment: Journal

4/16  **Workshop Paper 2; Famous Men**
Assignment: Continue reading and reflecting upon *Famous Men*

4/18  **Paper 2 due; Famous Men**
Assignment: Prepare for conferences; journal

4/23  **Conferences**

4/25  **Conferences**
Assignment: Begin preparing for presentation of projects

4/30  Discussion; work on projects

5/2   Discussion; work on projects

**Our final exam is scheduled for 10:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 10. We will use this time to reflect upon our public forum and to hand in the journals.**