This is an upper-division political theory course. It is going to be open ended and I presuppose that students have not only smarts and intellectual curiosity, but a relatively high tolerance for indeterminacy or ambiguity. What I want to teach you is how to think like a political theorist. That means we will be less concerned with what this or that author says than with how we can use insights derived from various authors to think and argue about photography and its uses. In large measure this is uncharted territory. But political theory is in many ways about vision and imagination and representation and the limits of all three.

“Theorists have given us pictures of political life in miniature, pictures in which what is extraneous to the theorist's purpose has been deleted. The necessity for doing this lies in the fact that political theorists, like the rest of mankind, are prevented from "seeing" all political things at first hand. The impossibility of direct observation compels the theorist to epitomize a society by abstracting certain phenomena and providing interconnections where none can be seen. Imagination is the theorist's means for understanding a world he can never "know" in an intimate way.”

~ Sheldon Wolin Politics & Vision

If you are interested in some of what I think about this broad domain you can have a look at the blog I’ve been keeping for a couple of years. The blog is (Notes On) Politics, Theory & Photography; the URL is http://politicstheoryphotography.blogspot.com/.

Having said all that, you can expect the class to be quite time consuming. There is a lot of required reading and it is not especially easy. I hope to run the class as a seminar. That means I will expect you to participate actively and regularly in class ~ which means keeping up with the reading. We also will look at a lot of pictures and I will recruit you in tracking them down in books and on-line. I also anticipate scheduling a series of additional sessions, usually in the early evening, so that we can watch some documentaries about specific photographers. While these will not be required, I expect you to attend barring some completely persuasive excuse. Class attendance, by contrast, is not optional. I expect you to show up and I expect you to have something to say!

Grades: Your grade will reflect two things: (1) You will be responsible for becoming the class “expert” on two different photographers. The method for matching you to the photographers will be pretty random ~ the point is to get you to perhaps deal with material that you would prefer to avoid. At some point in the term you will be responsible for giving a short presentation (accompanied by examples of their work) on each of your subjects. (2) A final research paper (or, by agreement with me project) of roughly 20-25 pages. The topic is up to you, but you should discuss it with me before embarking on research. I am happy to talk with you and provide advice about your papers as the term proceeds.
**Required Readings:**

**A First Cut: Photography and its Conventions**

* John Stromberg. “A Genealogy of Orthodox Documentary” in *Reinhart, et. al. Beautiful Suffering*

* James Johnson. 2007. “What to do with Invidious Distinctions?” *Art Signal* (Barcelona) - Issue 0.

**Photography & Some of Its Uses**


**A Handful of Critics**


**Photography as Technology: Thinking With Rather than About Photographs**

Photographs of Pain: What Are They For? What Do We Do With Them?

* Susan Sontag *Regarding the Pain of Others.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
Susie Linfield. “Memuna, Almost Smiling” [http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=383](http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=383)

Prison ~ Cruelty, Humiliation, Surveillance


Photography & *Whose Experience?*

## Class Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Instructor(s)</th>
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<td><strong>September</strong></td>
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<td>Trachtenberg through Johnson</td>
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<td>October</td>
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<td>Berger - Linfield</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Maynard &amp; Rorty</td>
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<td>November</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reinhart - Johnson</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Foucault</td>
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*NO CLASS*:
- 12
- 18
- 20
- 27
- 2

*Happy Thanksgiving*:
- 22

*Final Papers Due*:
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