



Clothing and Identity in Early America: Black Women and AmerIndian Men

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Intro

“Its a persona Black!” “There's a.. Well...a colored?” “She’s a... well, a um, mixed?” All phrases my students used last year to describe a person in an image from the 19th century. They know there are words they are *not* supposed to use to describe people of color, but they don’t know what words they *should* use I teach high school Social Studies and my students immediately describe people in images by their “race.” Images make history more vivid. The more lifelike the image is, the more likely students are to engage with it, and the more likely they are to assume it is a depiction of fact. But we need to learn *how* to talk constructively and with civility about the people we encounter. Images of people from the past can tell us a lot about the realities they lived in, but it is better if we use the correct tools to analyze these sources —much as we would any historical document.

If my students are anything like yours, they engage with visual information all the time. They are constantly on Instagram, SnapChat, Tik Tok, and a variety of other online photo messaging apps that undoubtedly will become popular in the next few years. They are experts at using cropping, staging, filters, angles, and captions to shape the way their images are viewed by their intended audience. Shockingly, however, they are fairly un-critical of the images we look at in Social Studies. This unit is an attempt to apply the visual analysis skills students use daily in their personal social lives to examine people in history. In an effort to make history “come alive,” this unit examines images from the past, the people in them, the clothes they wear, and what those images must have meant at the time to their intended audience(s).

Rationale:

There are three major goals of this unit. First, helping students to find the words to describe what they see in historical sources. Second, enabling all students to see BIPOC people as active participants in history. And third, learning how to critically analyze visual sources from the past.

I teach a class that is a combination of US History and Ethnic Studies. We examine US history from the “lens” of different groups throughout the year. In the first semester we examine the mythology around the founding of the United States and the perspectives of American Indians and African Americans. One of the Ethnic Studies goals in this class is to give students the vocabulary to talk about historically marginalized groups in a conscientious and sensitive manner. Another goal is to be sure students do not think of people in these groups as passive victims.

Students who are learning English as a second language often struggle with finding the correct terms to describe a person or situation with the appropriate level of sensitivity. By describing and analyzing images from the past that include people of color in ways that are contrary to common stereotypes this unit does the double work of disrupting racist narratives about the past, while developing the vocabulary for students to speak positively about non-white populations.

This unit is a presentation of historical images. American Indians and African descended people do not “speak” loudly in most textbook histories of the Colonial and Antebellum periods. Thus, I seek to amplify the voices of these marginalized groups and center them as much as possible. One problem with this goal is that there are relatively few written documents with firsthand insight into their perspectives. Visual images are a way around this limitation while also serving to humanize people who are often “invisible” in the mythology of American history.

The goal of the unit is to teach students the skills they need to critically analyze visual information from the past. We need to be as critical of visual sources as we are of written sources. Especially since the advent of photography in the nineteenth century, images have often been taken at “face value,” with an assumption that whatever is depicted is exactly true. Images (paintings, engravings, drawings, etc) made in the time period they represent tempt us into using them as unexamined primary source material. This uncritical use of sources fails to account for the conventions of representation at the time, the ideological position of the artist and, crucially, the extent to which the person(s) depicted controlled their own image/manner in which they were depicted. There was often a complex mixture of forces involved. Even influential people may not have controlled the clothing they wore, the pose, the setting, and the format of their image. Additionally the language of fashion, and its contemporary associations are difficult to interpret without the historical context.

Geographically this unit spans Canada to the Caribbean and all of them were created east of the Rocky Mountains. This is partly because of the sources that are available. It is difficult to cover the broadest perspectives, and places while maintaining focus on the places that would become the United States. Information from Spanish and French colonies is included as context in the colonial period, and the chronological scope is limited by the start of the U.S. Civil War.

Content Objectives

The unit examines two separate non-white populations. American Indians from a variety of nations and tribes across eastern North America and African descended women from across North America and the Caribbean. Comparisons and contrasts between these populations can help us understand the nature of the visual sources as well as provide a unique insight into Colonial and Antebellum US society. Nuance and a close attention to the details of these works can provide humanizing insights into the experiences of people who

may otherwise not be visible in our history textbooks.

Students are reminded that these images were created by (and largely for) a European or white U.S. American audience. The Amerindians depicted in many cases did not consent to their depiction, and if they did consent to the portrait, had minimal control over the end result. Still, these are some of the best visual images we have that are first-hand and created “from life” (in french “au vif”) and give us a “lively” depiction of people seen in “real life,” whether truly honest or not.¹

Part 1: American Indians

English speaking people have used a number of tropes or stereotypes to try to understand their interactions with Indigenous Americans. These tropes are a useful tool in interpreting images of Indians from the early colonial period through the early US Republic. The five tropes that we will examine are: The Natural Man, The Noble Savage, The Indigenous Ambassador, The Vanishing Indian, and the Romantic Indian.

The Natural Man

This lesson pairs with background information students have already learned about the earliest English colonies, places like Roanoke, Barbados, and Jamestown. The image is also discussed in the context of the late 1500s and early 1600s and Renaissance ideas about the New World and its people. The first impression English settler colonists had of Indians was that of the “Natural Man” who was friendly, pure, and was compared to the Picts of British prehistory. For visual examples of this trope students should look at the watercolor images by John White [especially those depicting the “werowance” and his wife and child 1585-1593] for examples of this kind of cautious admiration.²

We do not know if the people painted by White consented to being illustrated. We do not know if they posed for the artist, or for how long he interacted with each of them. The images, however, appear lifelike enough to have been drawn from first-hand experience.³ The image analysis starts with listing the things we can see in the watercolor. A bow, a quiver of arrows, a shirtless man, with tattoos, a necklace, bare feet, etc. The next step is to try to go one step deeper and ask students to decide the extent to which they think the images are objective. John White depicted the Indians of Virginia in poses familiar to European audiences, with weapons that were recognizable.⁴ The images were created for an audience of potential colonial investors, and with the intent of showing the pleasant and friendly Indians that would meet future settlers.⁵

The Noble Savage

This lesson pairs with the 17th and 18th century colonial period. Students can make connections to their earlier study of the Enlightenment debates between Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jaques Rousseau. Elite colonists were influenced by these ideas, and this influenced the way they viewed the Haudenosaunee and Algonquian peoples they encountered. Rousseau’s ideas about the corrupting influence of “civilized” society and the basic tendency of people towards liberty and equality influenced painters such as Jan Verelst and Benjamin West.⁶ The Indians in these paintings are shown as noble and wise, because of their relative liberty and self-imposed moral framework. In this context, these men are valuable (and noble) allies for the British in fights against the French.

The two major works to examine here are *Four Indian Kings* painted in London by Jan Verelst in 1710, and the *Death of Benjamin Wolf* painted by Benjamin West who had been in America and had observed details there to lend truthfulness to the painting.⁷ These two paintings represent a view of American Indians from an informed distance across the Atlantic. Jan Verelst met the men he painted, and Benjamin West lived in America and based the details in his painting on objects he obtained while there.⁸

Image analysis starts with listing the details students see in the painting. For example, in the *Death of Benjamin Wolf*, an indigenous ally of the British is depicted in contemplative pose in the left foreground. Students should be directed to notice the details of the man's tattoos, hairstyle, and beaded bag as ways to identify him as a Mohawk Soldier. The Realism of his muscular body makes him human and relatable while his nakedness in contrast to the other soldiers clearly identifies him as an Indian. The Battle of Quebec was fought in September, when battling nearly naked is not practical, however Benjamin West shows the generic Indian's "nakedness" for reasons of moral messaging about the nobility of the technologically backward, but pure morality of the native people of America.⁹ After students examine the image in detail it is important to reveal that the man depicted was *not* based on any actual Mohawk man. It is not a portrait of a specific individual, instead it is a trope, based on ideas, Greek and Roman statues, but not on real life.

The Indigenous Ambassador

In the period between the French and Indian War (Seven Years War) and the War of 1812 the 13 colonies developed into the United States. This period of wars and conflicts can be understood as a constant struggle between three major populations, the British, the Indians, and the Colonists. Students will have read and learned about the adventures and exploits of mythical heroes such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. However, these men would not have been able to create the USA without assistance and alliances with Indigenous men. Thayendanegea (called Joseph Brant by most English speakers) was a Mohawk ally against the French.¹⁰ Ut-ha-wah (sometimes called Captain Cold) was an Onondaga chief of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy who helped the American Republic fight against the British in 1812.¹¹



[Captain Cold, or Ut-Ha-Wah (Onondaga, ca. 1770-1845) Artist William John Willgus (American, 1819-1853)]

This period in US history is filled with “great men” who are described as mythical heroes in history textbooks. Thayendanega and Ut-ha-wah offer an alternative pair of heroic men who served to usher the new country into being. Portraits of these men can be analyzed for hints at these men’s hybrid cultural status as a cultural bridge between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the United States. These portraits can be examined in parallel with a lesson on the influence the Haudenosaunee (sometimes called Iroquois) Confederacy had on the formation of the US government and the philosophy of the founding fathers.

The portrait of Ut-ha-wah can be analyzed for clues to the hybrid identity of these men who were cultural ambassadors and military allies. We do not know if he sat for this painting, or the conditions under which it

was commissioned, but the realism and detail of the image lead us to believe in his humanity. We can “read” several details in this work that can be used to understand the hybrid status of an individual of his stature. The diagonal red sash evokes wampum belts, which were used as a means of communication and treaty-making.¹² The feathers on his head were called *gustoweh* and were an Iroquois tradition.¹³ Which clearly marks him as part of the Haudenosaunee culture. He is wearing a white ruffled shirt and dark blue coat which identify him as participating in the clothing traditions of the Anglo-Americans. It is also important to note the symbolism of his posture and how Ut-ha-wah is standing in front of the American wilderness, almost as though he is the gate-keeper of access to the land.

The Vanishing Indian

In the early nineteenth century the US Republic began expanding its claims to inland territories. Cities and settlements grew, and US Americans demanded increasing amounts of land to build family farms and plantations. After the War for Independence, the Indians who had once stood in the way, no longer had French allies or “Redcoats” to support them.¹⁴ From the perspective of the US Americans the Indians seemed to be “vanishing.” Some Amerindians fled to Canada in the wake of the US war for Independence, and others fled west like the herds of Bison that once roamed as far east as the Appalachians. From the perspective of east-coast cities, the Indians were either leaving or dying out.¹⁵

There was a third option though. Some Amerindians were blending in. The so-called “Civilized Tribes” of the Southeast were adapting. The Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, and Seminole were determined to stay in their homelands and chose to adopt Anglo-American lifestyles and clothing. This process can be seen in paintings of individuals such as David Vann, a Cherokee Chief, and the 1827 portrait of Sequoyah, a Cherokee scholar, and the “father” of the Cherokee written language. These men were almost indistinguishable from their US American contemporaries, were it not for some details of their dress or language that give away their Indigenous identity. Fringe on the collar of a coat, or the wearing of a turban serve to indicate their identity as Cherokee while their white shirts, cravat, hairstyle, or in the case of Sequoyah, his quill pen, tell us they identify as part of “American” society.

The Romantic Indian

Just after the Jacksonian period of Indian Removal, and the creation of the Oregon Trail by early fur traders, but before the westward movement of large numbers of “pioneer” settlers there was a cultural shift towards viewing the Amerindians of the west as romanticized symbols of the death of their way of life. This period corresponds to an increase in industrialization of the cities of the east, and the romantic movement in literature, music, and art. Students can connect the paintings in this section of the unit to studies of cultural reformers, and the Second Great Awakening.



[George Catlin, Mát-ho-tóh-pa, Four Bears, Second Chief, in Full Dress 1832 Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.128]

Indigenous movements against the influence of U.S. American culture such as the spiritualism of Shawnee Prophet Tenskwatawa, can be visualized in the paintings of George Catlin and Karl Bodmer of the Mandan and Sauk. The portraits of Mandan Chief Mah-to-toh-pa/ Mato-Tope (Four Bears) can be examined as examples of a sense that the Amerindian “way of life” was soon to go extinct. These images are especially important in gaining insight into the perspective of the Mandan leader himself. He chose the way he was depicted and sat for the paintings wearing clothing and accessories he selected for himself.¹⁶

There are four major portraits of Mato-Tope that can be examined in this portion of the unit. Mah-to-toh-pa, Four Bears, Second Chief, in Full Dress can be used as an example. Investigation of these images should start with asking students to list the details they see, and then progressing to deeper questions about why this man chose to dress like this for the portrait. Mato-Tope arrived for his portrait sessions dressed how he wanted to be portrayed. He met with Catlin and Bodmer separately several times and was interested in crafting the way

he was depicted. He selected his clothing and pose to express who he was and what his culture was. But it is important to remember that white Americans were the audience paying the artists. The Mandan people were experiencing a period of great change when these portraits were made. Contact with fur traders and other US Americans increased, and it seems Mato-Tope himself was aware of the fleeting nature of the lifestyle he was living.¹⁷

Conclusions about Amerindians in portraits.

The goal of this unit is to pull together student understanding of white American perspectives and stereotypes about Amerindians, with the nearly hidden Amerindian self-expression that sneaks out of these historical images. Even in a period of US history that subjected native people to the diseases, conquest, and violence of settler colonists, the humanity of the men in these portraits can still be appreciated.

Part 2: Afro descended and mixed-race women

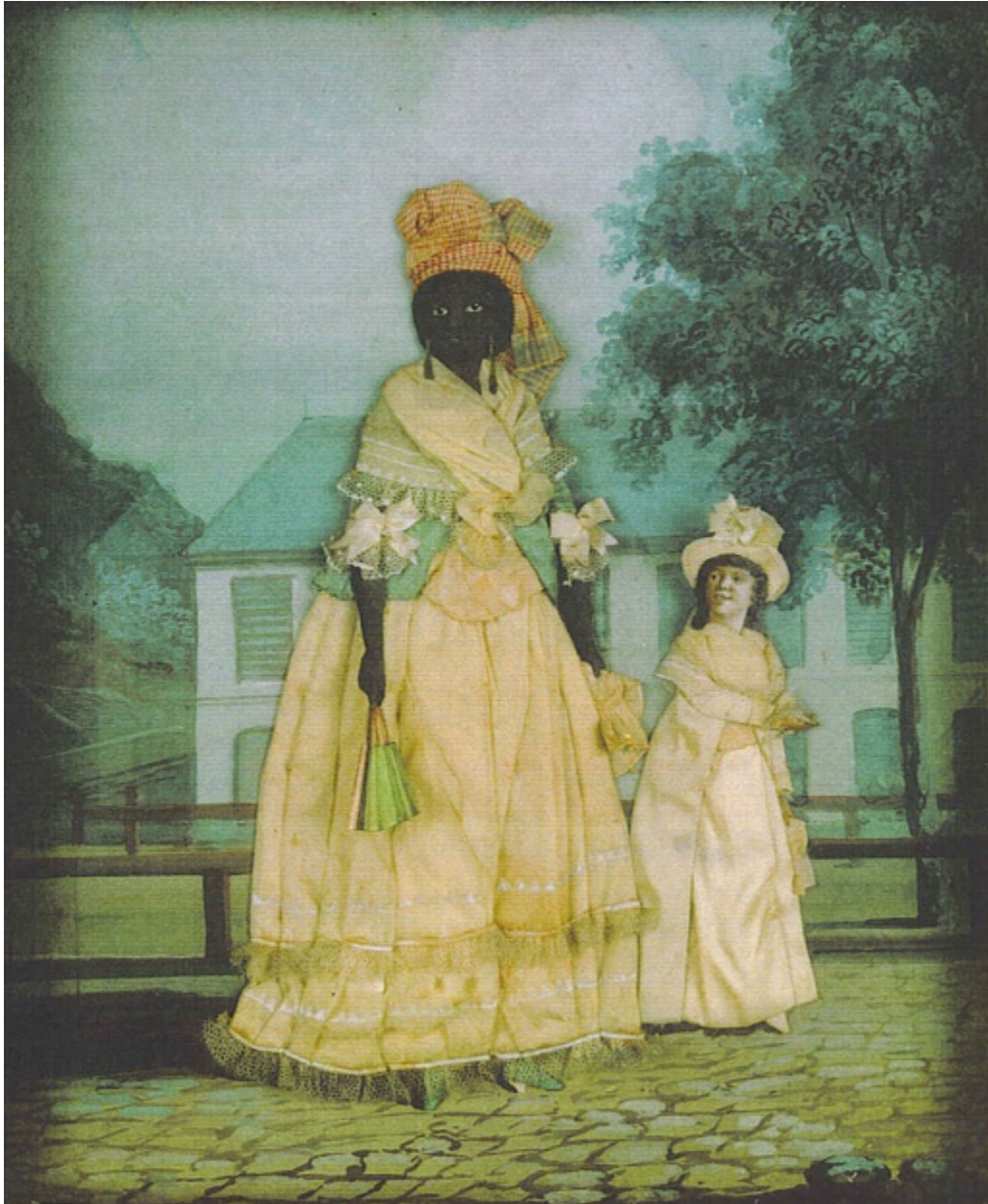
The clothing and body decorations a person chooses to wear project a certain sense of self to the world. Some aspects of appearance convey gender, some convey status. The more control someone has over their appearance the more you can "read " something about how they saw themselves. For individuals who have little to no control over their appearance, the *details* are where they wield their limited agency.¹⁸

American History books are full of images that use pathos to emphasize the incredible violence and dehumanization done to the people who were enslaved. This part of the unit is designed to humanize and make African descended people in the Americas more relatable. Students often start my class assuming all black people in history were enslaved which is why it is important to show that enslaved was not the condition of all people of African descent in the Americas.

This nuance is difficult for some students to understand. The images in the four parts of the second half of this unit look at a few different angles on the concept of race, skin color, and status. These categories played out differently in the United States compared to Iberian and French colonies, and the US versus the Caribbean. By comparing events in the US with contemporaneous images in other regions, my hope is to show the diversity of experiences across places at the same time.

The four topics of this half of the unit are explained using a selection of historical images. The first topic is an examination of the variety of specific racial categories or "castas" in Latin American colonies compared to the literally "black and white" categories in the United States. The second topic is the "Tignon Law." A restrictive dress-code that was appropriated by women who were forced to cover their hair in public. The third topic is the population of free people of color in the eighteenth century on the island of Dominica (not Saint Domingue, or Santo Domingo—which confuses students at first). The fourth and final topic is that of "fancy girls" who were enslaved women sold for their specialized skills.

Unreliable racial categories Latin America vs the U.S.A.



[Free woman of color with quadroon daughter; late 18th century collage painting, New Orleans. Artist unknown]

This public domain image titled “Free Woman of Color with her Quadroon Daughter” is a good place to start the discussion of racial categories and identity. In New Orleans, where this painting was made, the racial categories were determined by the percentage of “black” parentage. Terms like Quadroon and Octoroon were used to describe people who were one-quarter or one-eighth black.¹⁹ In Spanish and Portuguese America there were specific and detailed categories that named biracial people as Mulatto, Morisco, and Chino. These terms existed alongside even more offensive ones such as “Cambujo” for a particularly dark-skinned black man, or “Loba” (wolf) for a non-specific mixed race person.²⁰

The Casta paintings of Miguel Cabrera are a good place to start with student analysis of racial categories. Students will make detailed observations and describe the people in the images. They should also speculate as to whether these images were based on real people or stereotypes. Comparing the Casta paintings to *the*

Free Woman of Color in New Orleans can also start the conversation about stereotypes versus the people who lived with these labels.



[Isaac and Rosa, Emancipated Slave Children, from the Free Schools of Louisiana, 1863-1864 Albumen Print by Myron H. Kimball]

Racial Categories in the USA were literally more “black and white.” Images such as this photo of two young children— Isaac and Rosa, slave children from New Orleans—were used by social reformers and abolitionists to argue against enslavement. Despite their appearance, both children would have been legally “black.” In the US children of enslaved women were considered to be enslaved regardless of their skin color. Race based hereditary enslavement laws date to the aftermath of Bacon’s Rebellion in 18th century Virginia.²¹ Because enslavement was associated with racial categories, the “One-drop Rule” came to define any person with at least “one drop” of “black blood” legally black. The Focus for this lesson is on the concepts of Colorism versus Racism. Students will read an excerpt from “Who is Black? One Nation’s Definition” By James Davis and explain how it was possible for people who appeared to be “white” could be legally “black.” ²²

Self expression and Tignon Laws

The next question students should be confronted with is “If people who looked white were legally black, how

did anyone know?" When New Orleans switched from French to Spanish control, "one major concern was that free Black women were too beautiful, and too many white men were attracted to them. In 1786, the governor of Louisiana proclaimed that all free Black women must wear tignon to make them different from white women." This so-called "Tignon Law" (pronounced TEEN-yon) required all black women to cover their hair to delineate which women they were, as well as to limit their attractiveness.²³ Women of color in the region appropriated the style and used it as a symbol of beauty, resistance, and a proud association with West African traditions of head-wraps and turbans.²⁴

Images of women wearing Tignons can be analyzed as a class, and students are encouraged to think about whether the women in these portraits are victims, confident agents of their own destiny, or something else? Class discussion can make connections to the Native American Studies concept of "survivance", or the idea of appropriation by a subaltern population. Students will be encouraged to think of times when a restriction was used as a source of pride by a marginalized group and how this is different from "cultural appropriation" by the dominant population.

Settler Colonies versus Exploitation Colonies: Brunias' Dominica



[Linen Day, Roseau, Dominica ca. 1780, by Augustino Brunias, Yale Center for British Art]

In the USA, enslaved people had little chance for manumission or escape from enslavement. Running away to

another country—Canada or Mexico— were the only real options for permanent freedom.²⁵ People of color in the West Indies are not often discussed in US History class, however the cultural and economic connections between places like Dominica, Martinique, and Barbados and Georgia and the Carolinas were close. Planters traveled between these places, sometimes bringing enslaved people with them.²⁶

In the 18th century the thing that made the West Indies distinct from the 13 colonies on the continent was that they were exploitation colonies not settler colonies.²⁷ This meant that the blended race offspring of master-slave sexual liaisons could be manumitted without disrupting the economy of the islands. In places like Dominica a large population of free people of ambiguous racial background lived in a parallel world quite different to that of the USA.²⁸ Paintings and Prints by Augustino Brunias are a window into this world of high-status people of color. Their cotton and linen clothing—in varying degrees of fashionableness can be a way for students to analyze the relationships between the people in the images. It is worth pointing out that visitors from Europe were impressed with the luxurious clothing that was more affordable in the colonies.²⁹ Darker skin tones seem to correspond to either the shabbier clothing of the enslaved or the livery of personal servants.

Fancy Girls dressed for the White Male Gaze

Now the unit returns to the US southern states and the image of the slave auction. However, the images used are not those of naked people in chains. The goal here is to convey a kind of unseen trauma, that of so-called “fancy girls.” Women who were sold as domestic servants with “special skills” such as sewing, cooking, or child care would have to look refined. There also was an understanding that the older definitions of the phrase “to fancy” was a contraction of the word “fantasize” and that these women were also destined to a future of sexual exploitation and violence.³⁰

Enslaved Women were dressed in colorful calicos to increase their “sale” price at auction. Paintings such as *Slave Auction, Virginia* by LeFevre J. Cranstone (1862) or *Slaves Waiting for Sale, Richmond, Virginia* by Eyre Crowe, show women dressed in clean bright colors. The Cotton from the fields that other enslaved laborers had grown, picked, and processed, had traveled to the cotton mills, textile factories, and back to Virginia in the form of textiles that dressed enslaved people to make them more appealing to potential buyers.³¹

Students should pay special attention to the way the white men seem to be interacting with the women. The posture and facial expressions on these women who did not choose to be painted, did not choose the clothes they wore, and certainly did not choose to be sold like some kind of prized livestock.

Conclusions about African descended women in portraits.

Comparisons to the images of Amerindian men from earlier in the unit can be made, and students should consider whether we can see any kind of truth in these images despite the lack of agency the individuals had over the mode, or manner of their depiction. These works are intended to reinforce the real human identity of the people in these images. To understand and appreciate the marginalization they faced and the ways in which they were victimized, while also seeing them as fully active participants in their own lives. None of the images is a self-portrait, and we cannot directly hear the words and opinions of these people, understanding their clothing, and seeing them for who they were is a start toward appreciating their *humanity*.

Content Standards and Connection to State Requirements.

These are broad ranging topics so I expect this unit to last roughly ten class days. Over the span of the unit, I expect students to take on more of the image analysis and by the end will be able to create their own analysis of images from history and the present day. Students will complete the content in this unit after they have completed instruction in the time periods covered in this unit.

This entire unit is rooted in the Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills listed in the California content standards for Social Studies and will connect to state standards described as follows “...the impact of the Enlightenment on U.S. democratic ideals ... global industrialization to understand the emergence and impact of new technology and a corporate economy, including the social and cultural effects. They trace the change in the ethnic composition of American society; the movement toward equal rights for racial minorities and women... Students consider the major social problems of our time and trace their causes in historical events.”

I will be using the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program criteria to grade assignments. The “Criteria D” rubric outlines the major skills embedded in this unit. The student will complete a detailed discussion of concepts, issues, models, visual representation and/or theories. The student will synthesize information to make valid, well-supported arguments.

The student will effectively analyze and evaluate a wide range of sources/data in terms of origin and purpose, recognizing values and limitations. And the student will thoroughly interpret a range of different perspectives and their implications.

Teaching Strategies for analyzing Images as Documents

In the IB system we analyze sources of information using the Origin, Purpose, Value, Limitations framework. This is usually applied to written documents but can also be used for propaganda, videos, and in the case of this unit, images. Students will practice this type of analysis on all of the images in this unit. They will consider:

1. What is the origin of the image? Who made it? Where was it made? When was it created? Etc.
2. What was the purpose of this image? Why was it created? Who paid for it? What was its intended audience? Etc.
3. What makes this image valuable to us as evidence for our topic/goal? Was it created first-hand? Was the artist familiar with the subject? Is there an explicit message to the image? Is this image somehow special or unique? Etc.
4. What are the limitations of this image? What does it not tell us? What makes it less-than-perfect in terms of using it as a historical source? What are the biases of the artist/patron/publisher?

Classroom Activities

Introductory activity:

The goal of this unit overall is to learn to use historical images to learn some unique truths about the past. However, it is always useful to practice the skills involved without the burden of class content at the same time.

Students will be instructed to take a photo from your phone and put it in a google doc. They will then do an OPVL analysis of the image. Rather than learn this strategy while looking at historical images, they will analyze one of their own photos to practice the skills involved.

1. The first thing they should describe is the “Origin” of the photo. Who took it, when was it taken, where was it taken?
2. The second part of source analysis is the “Purpose” of the photo. Describe in as much detail as possible, why you took this photo/have it taken? Who was its intended audience? Were you posting it somewhere? Sending it to someone specific? Did that intended audience impact the way the photo was cropped, staged, or edited?
3. The third part of source analysis is to describe its “Value” as a source. What does the image tell the viewer about you? Your life? Your community? What judgment could be made about the subject of the image?
4. Lastly, we analyze the “Limitations” of the image. What does the image not show? This can be things such as describing what is cropped out? What is not shown that you know was there? Was a filter used? If there are people in the image, are they posed strategically? Does the angle of the photo disguise something? Was the image edited in any way?

Possible Discussion Questions for each of the “topics”

The “Natural Man” (Images by John White)

- “How do you think the artist felt about this individual?”
- “Do you think the artist thought this person was beautiful?”
- “What are some visual signs of judgment or stereotype?”
- “Do you think the sitter (the subject) of the image agreed to be painted, and/or posed for this painting?”

The “Noble Savage” (Death of Benjamin Wolf and the Four Indian Kings Paintings)

- Describe details you see about his tattoos, weapons, hairstyle, and accessory —the beaded bag.
- Describe what you notice about the muscular body, the pose, and details that make it seem realistic.
- Do we think it odd that the Indian man is nearly naked while everyone else is fully clothed?
- Point out that most of the people shown in this image were not actually present and that the painting is largely allegorical. What allegorical message is being conveyed with a naked Indian man?
- How does the figure remind us of a classical Greek statue?
- Comparisons between the generic Indian in West’s painting with one of the four “kings” by Jan Verelst can help students consider how the idea of the Greek nude, and the Noble Savage may have influenced the portraits of actual individuals.

The Indigenous Ambassador (Portraits of Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant) and Ut-ha-wah)

- “Why is he wearing a white shirt?”
- “Does his coat resemble that of the Haudenosaunee or that of the US ‘founding fathers’?”
- “What is he wearing on his head?”
- “What can we learn from his facial expression?”
- “What is in the background of the painting, or what is he standing in front of?”

The Vanishing Indian (Portraits of David Vann and Sequoyah)

- Do these Cherokee and Choctaw men look like “real” Indians?
- Why might a member of a minority group adopt the clothing and appearance of the dominant group?
- How is this different from the other way around?
- When or where else can you think of times when the clothes people wear, tell you their political opinions?

The Romantic Indian (Paintings of the Mandan and Sauk)

- “What was he trying to convey by the way he is standing?”
- “Do you think the feathers and head-wear meant the same thing to the chief as they did to the painter?”
- “Do you think Catlin respected Mato-Tope?”
- “Do you think the Chief was attempting to look intimidating, or approachable?”
- This was painted right before a large influx of pioneers traveled through Mandan territory. Does this historical context for this painting change the way you feel about it?

Unreliable racial categories (The woman from New Orleans and her daughter)

- If this woman commissioned this painting of herself, how did she choose to be depicted?
- What can her clothes and the background of the image suggest to us about her as a person?
- If it is her daughter in the picture, why does her daughter have lighter skin? What conclusions can be drawn about this?
- We don’t know anything about her, the title is assigned by scholars, but how does this image subvert your expectations about a woman of color in America, in the late 18th century?

Self-Expression and Tignon Laws

- What does it mean to appropriate something?
- Is it different when someone who is a victim of a restrictive regulation uses that regulation to assert themselves?
- Is this the same thing as malicious compliance?

Settler Colonies versus Exploitation Colonies: (Brunias’ Dominica)

- Where did the cotton come from to make these really nice dresses etc?
- Why do the lighter skinned women still have their hair covered?
- Who seems to be wearing the more patterned cloth? The white cloth?

Fancy Girls dressed for the White Male Gaze

- Describe each woman in the paintings and what she is thinking, feeling, and wearing.
- I thought enslaved women dressed in rags how are these women different?
- Where did the cotton come from to make these calico dresses? How is this extra insulting?
- In the 19th century “fancy” was a contraction of “fantasize” how does this make the idea of a “fancy girl” auction even more icky than we already thought?

Conclusion activity:

At the end of the unit students should apply what they have learned from these historical images and create a self-portrait in the form of a staged photo with as much editing and filters as they would like. Then they should write an imagined pseudo historical essay about the person in the image. In the third person, the essay should describe the meaning of the clothing, hairstyle, accessories, setting, and any symbolism that they included to indicate parts of their identity.

Annotated Bibliography/Resources

For the historical background on American Indians the most useful sources were: *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* by Ned Blackhawk, and *Bloody Mohawk: The French and Indian War & American Revolution on New York’s Frontier* by Richard Berleth. These books outline Indian-colonist conflict and cooperation and between the two books, cover a long timespan.

For background and information about the key images in the first half of this unit I relied on *Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America 1710-1840* by William H. Truettner, and *American Adversaries: West and Copley in a Transatlantic World* by Emily Ballew Neff and Kaylin H. Weber. These sources offer analysis of the visual images as well as the historical context and background of the artists who created them.

The second half of the unit is about African descended women and the most useful sources for background information on this section were: *Centering the Periphery: Chaos, Order, and the Ethnohistory of Dominica*

By Patrick L. Baker, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* by Thavolia Glymph, and *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the World*, by Giorgio Riello.

In terms of the art and images used in the second half of the unit *Colouring the Caribbean: Race and the art of Agostino Brunias* by Mia L. Bagneris, as well as *Black Bodies, White Gold: Art, Cotton, and Commerce in the Atlantic World* by Anna Arabindan-Kesson. These sources help contextualize the images of African descended women. They shed light on the apparent contradictions of some women of color wearing luxurious clothing, while others are depicted in shapeless clothes made from “slave cloth.”

An excellent list of suggested readings and sources for early America can also be found through NY History.org website educational curriculum *Women and the American Story* Which is a digital curriculum for k-12 classrooms.

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Notes

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