

## Special Topics in Political Science Politics & the Graphic Novel

*“Comics Studies...is an anti-discipline: a way of slipping between the universes, academically speaking”  
--- Charles Hatfield<sup>1</sup>*

*“SEQUENTIAL ART is an art form. It is, essentially, the art and technique of arranging a series of pictures or images to tell a story or convey a message that is somewhat more complex...I believe that we are at a turning point in the history of this medium. I am convinced that there are enormous opportunities for new, creatively innovative, and courageous applications of the sequential art form. The climate for a career in this area has more depth than ever before” --- Will Eisner<sup>2</sup>*

*“Comics are a highly charged medium, delivering densely concentrated information in relatively few words and simplified code-images. It seems to me that this is a model of how the brain formulates thoughts and remembers. We think in cartoons” – Art Spiegelman<sup>3</sup>*

The main objective of this course is to explore exemplar graphic novels (or in bare terms, “comics”) that express political science themes to apprehend contemporary issues with significant future implications for social and political change. The major topical themes we will study include:

- Economic insecurity, crises, and society
- Cultural assimilation, repression, and memory
- Organized protest, state violence, and accountability
- Conspiracy, myth, and dehumanizing the “other”
- War, state failure, and patterns of “apocalypse”

What can “sequential art” teach us about politics? A great deal actually. An interdisciplinary mindset helps. And what makes this course interdisciplinary rests on appreciating how the comics form aids in comprehending political, economic, social, cultural, legal, and epochal historical processes as well as the human agency embedded in patterns of change. Cultural memories are one specific example that graphic novels can elucidate in unique ways. The comics form can speak emotional truth and reveal empathetic perspective-taking in ways that are deeply illuminating of the “big canvas” that political science is cast on. More than that, as you will learn

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hatfield, “Foreword: Comic Studies, the Anti-Discipline,” in Smith, M. and Duncan, R. (eds) *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies* (Routledge, 2017): xi.

<sup>2</sup> Will Eisner, “Sequential Art at SVA (School of Visual Arts, NYC): Introduction to the Course,” (1988 syllabus version; available at wowcool.com).

<sup>3</sup> Art Spiegelman, “An Introduction to Barefoot Gen: Comics After the Bomb,” in Nakazawa, K., *Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima*. Volume 1 (Last Gasp, 2004/1990).

in Scott McCloud's intro to the world of comics, we are studying a highly globalized, transnational body of ideas and influences. It is a creative field not easily contained in the square pegs and round holes of a traditional ivory tower (hence, anti-discipline). Comics can do two things that I hope the course achieves in convincing everyone of its potential: (1) Comics can open one's mind to new realities (including "counterfactual" ones), or have what in jargon-terms we call "constitutive effects," and (2) Comics provide endlessly rich evidence of how complex, infuriating, vexing, astonishing, enlightening, wonderful, tragic, inhumane, selfless, retrograde, and progressive politics (and the human condition) can actually be. In the end, I have a pragmatic goal in mind for this course's learning objectives: in completing this course you should come away with a deeper appreciation of how rich the global field of comics are as well as capture your imagination in understanding politics in ways you might not have previously considered.

The course thus emphasizes discipline boundary-crossing content to contextualize "politics" in a more liminal space that sheds light on big canvas themes. Rather than some grand theory, there are a bevy of labels and pluralistic ideas about how best to pursue this way of thinking. My own views stem loosely from what is labelled "historical sociology" although other labels might suffice just as well. My interest in historical sociology started in graduate school and a Sociology seminar with Anne Orloff, a disciple of the eminent scholar Theda Skocpol. We read Skocpol's classic edited volume (1984), *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* and this work made a long-term and diffuse impression on my own mental maps as a political scientist. In Skocpol's words:

"...historical sociology is better understood as a continuing, ever-renewed tradition of research devoted to understanding the nature and effects of large-scale structures and fundamental processes of change. Compelling desires to answer historically grounded questions, not classical theoretical paradigms, are the driving force...Broadly conceived historical analyses promise possibilities for understanding how past patterns and alternative trajectories might be relevant, or irrelevant, for present choices."<sup>4</sup>

Over time, I have come to realize that the rich creative space of comics shares close affinity with the ethos of historical sociology. This Special Topics course is the result, designed to illustrate how exemplar graphic novels can span traditional boundaries and add insight. As Charles Hatfield has put it, "Comics Studies can occupy a special place in the ecology of knowledge – a place that is no place, if you like, or many, many places."<sup>5</sup> If that sounds empowering as fresh ideas to thinking about significant contemporary political issues, then you are definitely in the right class to learn more.

The content of the course is illustrative and eclectic, not authoritative or comprehensive in coverage. The major topical themes have the advantage of perspectives that capture "big think" themes of political science. To borrow a phrase from Skocpol, describing historical sociology's potential, the graphic novel offers "vantage points for thinking big."<sup>6</sup> At the basest level, the

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<sup>4</sup> Theda Skocpol, "Sociology's Historical Imagination," in Skocpol, T. (ed.) *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge University Press, 1984): 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Hatfield, "Foreword: Comic Studies, the Anti-Discipline," in Smith, M. and Duncan, R. (eds) *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies* (Routledge, 2017): xix.

<sup>6</sup> Theda Skocpol, "Sociology's Historical Imagination," in Skocpol, T. (ed.) *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge University Press, 1984): 7.

graphic novel as a genre offers perspective on how human consciousness is shaped by diverse structural and ideational forces including economics, law, regulation, state power and authority, myth, ideology, nationalism, legitimacy, organized violence, protest, social movements, collective identities, and more.

A few words about what this course is not. To be clear, the course is not about “making comics.” Should comic-making interest you, I have included a few recommendations in the “Course Resources” section below. If you are working on comics, or have an aspiration to do so, talk to me, I’d like to hear your ideas. Nor is this a general survey course of comics studies or archetype of “classics,” such as *Maus*, *Persepolis*, or Snyder and Krug’s *On Tyranny*. In class, we will discuss these and other classics, but the reading selections reflect some deliberate choices about a range of forms and voices, and, to state the obvious, there are always tradeoffs. But bottom line: there are numerous classics and genres and sub-cultures of comic art that our readings do not reflect. Ironically perhaps, the course also makes no attempt to engage directly with the specialty field of political satire and editorial comics (though you might consider this field for a possible paper topic if interested). The material related to political satire is voluminous and has its own historicity, but a few exemplars for me would include:

- Tom Toles (find samples on [gocomics.com](http://gocomics.com)). My all-time favorite American political cartoonist who retired in 2020 from The Washington Post but was long the Buffalo News mainstay that I grew up reading. A true political scientist satirist
- Kevin Kallagher (Kal) ([kaltoons.com](http://kaltoons.com)). The resident cartoonist for The Economist as well as the Baltimore Sun
- Pia Guerra (especially her poleaxe of the Trump years, *Me the People*)
- Gary Trudeau (find samples at [gocomics.com](http://gocomics.com); also on Twitter). Who could leave *Doonesbury* off a list like this!

There is also a vibrant field of political satire more trenchant and incendiary with its own set of blurry boundaries to social activism, street art, graffiti, protest and other forms of resistance. A few exemplars might include:

- Seth Tobocman (2009/1989), *You Don’t Have To Fuck People Over To Survive*
- Badiucao ([www.badiucao.com](http://www.badiucao.com))
- Susan Philips (2019), *The City Beneath: A Century of Los Angeles Graffiti*

Want to dig deeper? Then you might be interested in:

- The Association of American Editorial Cartoonists ([editorialcartoonists.com](http://editorialcartoonists.com))
  - Wikipedia’s listing of notable editorial cartoonists by nationality: ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_editorial\\_cartoonists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_editorial_cartoonists))
  - Thomas Nast, a German-American considered “father of the American political cartoon” for his 19<sup>th</sup> Century work
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Finally, an important caveat emptor clause. There is a substantial amount of weekly reading for this class that you are expected to keep up with and be prepared to discuss in class. Let me put it this way: woe is the person who takes the class thinking this will be easy light reading of comic books! Expect to spend quality time each week reading and comprehending the substantive material as well as reflecting on the artistic choices and vocabulary of the comics form, connecting different storylines and themes, and thinking about some of the real world implications of our material, including the future.

### **Required Texts**

- Scott McCloud (1993) *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (HarperCollins). ISBN: 006097625X
- James Vance and Dan E. Burr (2006/1990) *Kings in Disguise* (W.W. Norton). ISBN: 9780393328486
- Joe Sacco (2020) *Paying the Land* (Metropolitan Books). ISBN: 9781627799034
- Derf Backderf (2020) *Kent State: Four Dead in Ohio* (Abrams Books). ISBN: 9781419734847
- Will Eisner (2005) *The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (W.W. Norton). ISBN: 9780393328628
- Joe Kubert (2003) *Yossel, April 19, 1943* (ibooks/Simon & Schuster). ISBN: 9780743475167
- Joe Sacco (2000) *Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995* (Fantagraphics Books). ISBN: 9781560974703

### **Course Resources**

Highly recommended resources include:

- Our library's Comics and Graphic Novels Collection, located on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor atrium and online here: <https://researchguides.csuohio.edu/c.php?g=1216764>. I recommend an offline visit, even just to browse – never discount the power of serendipity
- You can also find information about the book titles our library holds that are on course reserve here: [https://researchguides.csuohio.edu/er.php?course\\_id=92077](https://researchguides.csuohio.edu/er.php?course_id=92077)
- *The Comics Journal* which includes reviews, interviews and all things related to comic art: <https://www.tcj.com>
- The *New York Comics & Picture-Story Symposium* online series of public talks with artists et al. and catalog of former events available on YouTube. The website and instructions on how to register for upcoming presentations can be found here: <https://nycomicssymposium.wordpress.com>

If you are interested in “making” comics, a few recommended sources include:

- Lynda Barry (2019), *Making Comics*
- Kevin Huizenga (2015-2018), *Comix Skool*, Complete set of twelve zines for comix students (See KevinHuizenga.com)
- Will Eisner’s instructional triptych (2008), *Comics and Sequential Art, Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative, Expressive Anatomy for Comics and Narrative*
- Dave Sim and Carson Grubaugh (2021), *The Strange Death of Alex Raymond*

A few of my favorite comics publishers and/or distribution companies for your further interest include:

- Domino Books (dominobooks.org). Austin English’s inimitable Brooklyn-based company curates and publishes a huge variety under the mantra of “mind expanding comics for free-thinkers worldwide”
- Fantagraphics (fantagraphics.com). The comic art superpower and publisher of *The Comics Journal*
- KUS! (komikss.lv). Pronounced “koosh,” this Latvian comic art publisher is one of my favorite presses, including the anthology series “S!” (or Baltic Comics Magazine) which is organized into thematic topics and displays the global reach of comic art in pocket-sized, full color editions (most current issue is #45)
- Drawn & Quarterly (drawnandquarterly.com). This Montreal-based publisher is home to some of the best creative comic art in North America
- Frémok (FRMK) (fremok.org). A titan of Franco-Belgian experimental comics and publisher of some of the most beautiful books I have ever seen
- Glacier Bay Books (glacierbaybooks.com). This small Pacific Northwest distro/publisher specializes in alternative manga comics
- Bries (bries.be). Another superstar Franco-Belgian publishing house of the *bande dessinée* tradition
- Spit And A Half (spitandahalf.com). John Porcellino’s venerable (pre-internet) company focuses on small-press and self-published comic art, including his own acclaimed long-running zine series *King-Cat Comix & Stories*
- Floating World Comics (floatingworldcomics.com). Based in Portland, OR, this alternative comics shop and independent publisher has tons to offer and takes artistic eclecticism to a higher level
- Wow Cool (wowcool.com). Not just comics, but boy do they have a wonderful and wide selection
- Atomic Books (atomicbooks.com). Also not only comics, but this Baltimore-based book shop has a terrific selection and constant flow of interesting new material

There are many more out there, and even more I am probably not aware of, but this list will get you started should you wish to explore the world of comics further.

Want even more? Well perhaps you should consider pursuing a career in comic art or comics studies. Where to start? A few specialized resources and programs include:

- The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum (BICLM) ([library.osu.edu/biclm](http://library.osu.edu/biclm)) boasts “the world’s largest collection of materials related to cartoons and comics, including original art, books, magazines, journals, comic books, archival materials, and newspaper comic strip pages and clippings.” Right in our own backyard!
- The Center for Cartoon Studies (CCS) ([cartoonstudies.org](http://cartoonstudies.org)). Based in White River Junction, VT and offering MFA and other certificates in cartooning
- The Joe Kubert School of Cartoon & Graphic Art ([kubertschool.edu](http://kubertschool.edu)). Located in Dover, NJ and specializing in cartooning and graphic art
- The School of Visual Arts (SVA) ([sva.edu](http://sva.edu)). This NYC icon of the visual arts has a storied BFA Illustration and Cartooning Department
- Parsons School of Design ([newschool.edu](http://newschool.edu)). The globally ranked design school in NYC with a huge interdisciplinary faculty of comic art and illustration specialists

One last “even further” list: a few of my own personal favorite comics. Each has impacted me, and while none are covered in this course, they possibly prove just how eclectic the comic form is (the intersection points of these works in McCloud’s pyramid of forms would be a geometric shape of certain oddity):

- Jason Lutes, *Berlin*
- Imai Arata, *F*
- Joann Sfar, *The Rabbi’s Cat*
- Emil Ferris, *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*
- Luc Leplae, *War Time And Play Time*
- Brecht Evans, *The City of Belgium*
- Frédéric Coché, *Hortus Sanitatis*
- Emelie Östergren, *The Duke and His Army*
- E.A. Bethea, *Francis Bacon*
- Clara Bessijelle, *Face Man*
- Chas Andres, *CPU Wars*
- Laurie Sandell, *The Imposter’s Daughter*
- Dominique Goblet, *Pretending Is Lying*
- Anders Nilsen, *Tongues*

### **Office Hours and Contact Information**

Office Hours: TTH 12:00 – 1:15, and by appointment

Office: RT 1748

Phone: (216) 687-4678

Email (preferred method of contact): [j.lewis07@csuohio.edu](mailto:j.lewis07@csuohio.edu)

### **Course Requirements**

You are responsible for all required readings listed on the syllabus. It is important to keep up with the weekly reading assignments since classes and assignments will assume familiarity with them.

**Attendance/Participation.** While we are utilizing Blackboard to submit assignments, papers, and the final exam, this is an in-person class and attendance is required. The format of the class places a premium on class discussion and if you are not in class you are missing an important element. The combined attendance/participation score is worth 20% of your final grade. We will discuss the qualitative expectations for attending and participating in class, but think of it this way: occupying a seat without active participation does not insure you a good score on this portion of your grade; technically speaking, perfect attendance by someone who merely keeps a seat warm all semester should expect to earn a grade of less than 50% for this portion of the grade.

**Weekly Reflection Essays.** You are expected to write and upload weekly reflection essays (approximately 600-750 words) based on topics that I will assign. Topics will range in format (some will be based on an extended reading, or interviews with a graphic novelist, or exploring other examples of the comics form to expand the idiom of what we study). Your reflection essays should reference the weekly material based on the topics or questions that I assign. The reflection essay should be double-spaced and uploaded into Blackboard by the end of the weekly deadline (see “Important dates” below).

**Research Papers.** In addition to weekly reflection essays, each student will produce two short research papers, approximately 6-8 pages each (around 2,000 words each). Paper 1 focuses on extending or applying what you learn about the comics form and Paper 2 focuses on extending or applying aspects of what you learn about contemporary politics and implications for possible future change.

**Short Research Paper 1: Comic Studies Analysis.** The purpose of this paper (2,000 words, 80 points) is to study the craft of comics, applying the vocabulary of McCloud’s book to a comic work or tradition of your choice and providing an analytical assessment of the work’s construction, design choices and voicing, and relationship of form to insight about significant topics, themes, events, etc. Your case may be a deep dive into one of our assigned books or can be something different based on your own selection. I have a pluralistic, open-minded idea of suitable works for this assignment, but they should be substantial enough (not an analysis of a single mini-zine) and/or have implications in a broader field of comics (such as Japanese manga or Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée* cartooning, or feminist anthology comics, etc.). If you have questions about a possible source or have something creative in mind, just talk to me for some feedback.

**Short Research Paper 2: Contemporary Politics Analysis.** The purpose of this paper (2,000 words, 80 points) is to apply one of the main substantive themes we are studying to an analysis of other relatable cases, including what the significance of your findings are for possible future implications in politics. Or, if you prefer, you can elect to provide an extended analysis into one of our required texts and themes such as updating the contemporary relevance of a historical event or comparing additional cases/contexts. As with Paper 1, my sense of what could be ‘fair game’ is open-minded and the hope is something we read catches your interest and you want to research further. Put differently, there are no shortage of economic deprivations, failed/failing

states, cataclysmic societal events and traumas, organized patterns of protest and violence, and so on for you to draw connections and analyze further. In this paper, the source material is likely to consist of primary news and other relevant secondary sources such as books or journal articles.

See the attached appendix that explains how to meet the course's WAC requirements. Additional information about the research papers and advice on selecting topics will be discussed in class. Papers must be double-spaced and submitted in Blackboard.

**Extra Credit Option.** You can also earn bonus points to revise one of the two completed research papers into a short presentation made during class (about 5-10 minutes). What I have in mind is perhaps a 5 minute presentation followed by a short discussion and Q&A session, with the topic and date to present coordinated with me in advance. The class presentation of a research paper (your topic and findings) is voluntary and worth extra credit points (up to 15 bonus points in your Participation grade) and in no way represents an alternative option to the written research paper 1 and 2 by the required deadline.

**Final Exam.** There is a cumulative final exam of short answer and essay questions with a 120 minute time limit. You will have a two day window available to take the final exam at your own convenience, the timer will start once you open the exam in Blackboard and you will have to complete the exam once opened (you cannot log in and out of the exam). The final will draw on all aspects of the course including the weekly reflection essay material.

**Deadlines.** For the **weekly reflection essays**, they are **due by Friday BEFORE 11:59 p.m.** The only exceptions are 11/11 and 11/25 which are University Holidays; for these Fridays you can turn your reflection essay in by the following Monday (see dates below). **For all other assignments such as research paper deadlines and the final exam, they are due on the specified due date (see below) BEFORE 11:59 p.m.** If you fail to submit work prior to the deadline you will not receive credit for that work.

See the attached appendix that explains how to meet the course's "Writing Across the Curriculum" (WAC) requirements.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Total Point Value (500)</u>
Weekly Reflection Essays	140
Attendance/Participation	100
Research Paper 1 (Comic Form)	80
Research Paper 2 (Contemporary Politics)	80
Final Exam	100

### **Important dates:**

Reflection Essays Weekly Friday deadline, 15 total (9/2, 9/9, 9/16, 9/23, 9/30, 10/7, 10/14, 10/21, 10/28, 11/4, 11/11 (University Holiday – So extended weekly deadline to 11/14), 11/18, 11/25 (University Holiday – So extended weekly deadline to 11/28), 12/2, 12/9)

Short Research Paper 1	Oct. 21
Short Research Paper 2	Dec. 2
Final Exam	Available Dec. 13, DUE BY Dec. 15

Last Day To Withdraw                      Nov. 4

Last Day of Class                            Dec. 9

Reminder: All due dates have the same deadline of “**before 11:59 p.m.**” and all work is to be submitted via Blackboard.

**Final grades will be based on the following scale:**

A	458-500
A-	448-457
B+	438-447
B	408-437
B-	398-407
C+	388-397
C	348-387
D	298-347
F	297-0

*Please check these dates and deadlines carefully. If you cannot meet any of these deadlines, I recommend you do not take this course. No early exams will be given under any circumstances. Make-up exams will only be given in exceptional circumstances; and I should be notified prior to the exam.*

Early/late research paper policy: Early research papers are always welcome. **Late research papers will be accepted, but late penalties apply; for each calendar date late, deduct 15 points.** If you consider this late assessment severe, I agree, so please be sure to turn your papers in on time or early.

**Students With Disabilities:**

Educational access is the provision of classroom accommodations, auxiliary aids and services to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of their disability. Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Disability Services at (216) 687-2015. The Office is located in Rhodes West 210. Accommodations need to be requested in advance and will not be granted retroactively.

**Regarding COVID-19:**

Given the effectiveness and widespread availability of vaccines and boosters, and based on the latest guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), masks are optional on campus. We recognize and appreciate that some members of the community will choose to continue wearing a mask. Free masks are available at the information desk in the Student Center. Please remember that **vaccination plus booster shots offer the absolute best**

**protection** against serious illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19. We continue to provide free vaccinations and boosters for students, faculty and staff at [CSU Health and Wellness Services](#) by appointment at the Center for Innovation in Medical Professions, Suite 205 (2112 Euclid Avenue). For other area locations offering free vaccines and booster shots, visit [gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov](http://gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov). People who have symptoms of respiratory or gastrointestinal infections, such as cough, fever, sore throat, vomiting, or diarrhea, should stay home. Testing is recommended for people with symptoms of COVID-19 as soon as possible after symptoms begin. Please notify me if you have tested positive for COVID. If you experience severe symptoms from COVID, please contact the CARE Team at [magnusacts@csuohio.edu](mailto:magnusacts@csuohio.edu) for additional support.

### **Academic Integrity:**

My policy on academic dishonesty is strictly zero tolerance. Cheating on exams or plagiarizing material will result in a zero for that assignment. The University's policy on academic integrity can be found in the student code of conduct; a particularly relevant passage you should be familiar with reads as follows:

Academic honesty is essential to maintain the integrity of the University as an institution and to foster an environment conducive to the pursuit of knowledge. The Cleveland State University Academic Community values honesty and integrity and holds its members to high standards of ethical conduct. Academic dishonesty is, therefore, unacceptable, and students must be prepared to accept the appropriate sanctions for any dishonest academic behavior...Academic misconduct refers to any fraudulent actions or behaviors that affect the evaluation of a student's academic performance or record of academic progress. It includes:

**Cheating** -- Fraudulent acquisition and/or submission of another's intellectual property. This includes but is not limited to the unauthorized giving or receiving of a copy of examination questions, the use of unauthorized or fabricated sources in carrying out assignments, and copying the examination answers of others.

**Plagiarism** -- Stealing and/or using the ideas or writings of another in a paper or report and claiming them as your own. This includes but is not limited to the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment.

Please read the definition of plagiarism carefully. "I didn't know how to cite things" is not a valid defense for failing to give **full and clear acknowledgment** of the ideas or work of someone else. For more information, consult the CSU webpage on Academic Integrity: <https://www.csuohio.edu/academic-integrity/academic-integrity>

### **Course Outline**

The weekly course outline below maps out the order of the required texts as we will read them for each topic. In addition, for every weekly module of the course, there will be other material uploaded to Blackboard that delves into our topics further, supplement our themes, and/or cover the weekly reflection essay topics that I will assign. For each main topic, I also list some relevant "honorable mention" comics and further "other recommended readings" that you may find of interest.

### **Topic 1: Intro to Comics & Economic Insecurity, Crises, and Society**

The course begins with a classic study of the comic art form. We will read and discuss chapters of this work over the first seven weeks and integrate the insights into the graphic novels as we read them:

- Scott McCloud (1993), *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*

Synopsis: An authoritative graphic novel studying how graphic novels are made, this work will train you to read text and images simultaneously, grasp the vocabulary of the sequential/pictorial art form, and appreciate the historicity of how “comics” are steeped in visual culture. As Amitava Kumar depicts the role of visual culture, “it matters what you see, and what you see can change you and determine the history of the world.”<sup>7</sup> The endless variety of the comic form is a hidden strength as a visual art since “it promotes a form of seeing.”<sup>8</sup> Scott McCloud echoes this point: “no ways of seeing are out of bounds” (pg. 22). But the graphic novel is not *just* a visual experience, it is about how the material speaks to you in a vernacular that can convey meaning, and that connects us right back to historical sociology and finding vantage points for thinking big about politics.

#### GRAPHIC NOVEL:

- James Vance and Dan Burr (2006/1990), *Kings in Disguise*

Synopsis: A classic account of the Great Depression era showing the best and worst of humanity in hard economic times, from the perspective of economic migration by train hoboing and glimpsing into the disparate economic effects on society, family life, and public health. Realistically shows the travails and atomizing dislocations that economic crisis and democratic capitalism can generate from the infamous 1930s. The Great Depression has enormous relevance today, only instead of riding the rails or picking peaches imagine rent evictions, gig economy job security, noncompete employment clauses, or living in your car at the Walmart parking lot.

#### Week 1: Aug. 30 – Sept. 2. Intro to Comics & Economic Insecurity Part 1.

Required readings include:

- *Understanding Comics*, introduction and ch. 1
- *Kings in Disguise*, introduction – pg. 64

#### Week 2: Sept. 5 – Sept. 9. Intro to Comics & Economic Insecurity Part 2.

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<sup>7</sup> Amitava Kumar (2021), “Ishan Tankha: A Peal of Spring Thunder,” in *Aperture*, Looking Out/Looking In: Delhi, Volume 243, pp. 88-95: 88.

<sup>8</sup> Kumar’s terminology, *ibid*.

Required readings include:

- *Understanding Comics*, ch. 2
- *Kings in Disguise*, pps. 65 - 128

**Week 3: Sept. 12 – Sept. 16.** Intro to Comics & Economic Insecurity Part 3.

Required readings include:

- *Understanding Comics*, ch. 3
- *Kings in Disguise*, pps. 129 – 190

Other Honorable Mention Comics:

- James Vance and Dan Burr (2013), *On The Ropes* (sequel to *Kings in Disguise*)
- Rob Vollmat and Pablo Callejo (2007), *The Castaways*
- T. Edward Bak (2007), *Service Industry*
- Katsumata Susumu (2018), *Fukushima Devil Fish*
- Céline Hudréaux and Geert Ooms (2013), *It's Not An Ocean*
- Ben Jones (2015), *On The Way Down*

Other Recommended Further Reading:

- Wolfgang Streeck, *How Capitalism Ends?* (esp. introduction and chapter 1)
- Immanuel Wallerstein et al., *Does Capitalism Have a Future?*
- Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*
- Peter Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times* (esp. preface and chapter 1)
- Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (esp. on the self-regulating market and fictitious commodities, chapters 6, 20, 21)
- John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (esp. picker camp/labor strike portion, ch's 25-26)
- Stephen Shore, *Steel Town* (esp. preface by Helen Epstein)
- Kurt Vonnegut, short story "The Epizootic"
- Paul Graham, *Beyond Caring* (including 2021 postscript by Graham)

## **Topic 2: Cultural Assimilation, Repression, and Memory**

GRAPHIC NOVEL:

- Joe Sacco (2020), *Paying the Land*

Synopsis: In this remarkable work, Sacco examines Canada's treatment of Indigenous communities and the forcible removal of children into state-sponsored residential schools. From the late-1800s to the mid-1990s, an estimated 150,000 children were assimilated and banned from using Indigenous languages and cultural practices often with violent, abusive tactics (administered by the Catholic church no less). Not about cultural memory per se, since he covers a range of economic and resource development issues in Canada's Northwest Territories (e.g. tradeoffs between lucrative mining income and environmental degradation), the material brilliantly reveals how a society inherits the traumas that cultural repression creates. Since publication, the discovery of mass unmarked graves at Canada's now-shuttered schools has heightened awareness and generated a broader resonance with Indigenous cultures, national minorities, and acts of "cultural genocide."

**Week 4: Sept. 19 – Sept. 23.** Comics con't. & Cultural Memories Part 1.

Required readings include:

- *Understanding Comics*, ch. 4
- *Paying the Land*, pps. 1 – 82

**Week 5: Sept. 26 – Sept. 30.** Comics con't. & Cultural Memories Part 2.

Required readings include:

- *Understanding Comics*, ch's 5 and 6
- *Paying the Land*, pps. 83 – 160

**Week 6: Oct. 3 – Oct. 7.** Comics con't. & Cultural Memories Part 3.

Required readings include:

- *Understanding Comics*, ch's 7 and 8
- *Paying the Land*, pps. 161 – 260

**Other Honorable Mention Comics:**

- Redrawing Stories From the Past II (2019), Baltic Comics Magazine, *S!*, #34
- Redrawing Stories From the Past (2015), Baltic Comics Magazine, *S!*, #23
- Joe Sacco (2001), *Palestine*
- Nora Krug (2018), *Belonging*

Other Recommended Further Reading:

- Michael Mann (2005), *Dark Side of Democracy* (esp. chapter 4, “Genocidal Democracies in the New World”)
- Joseph Koudelka, *Gypsies*
- Vahe Oshagan and Ara Oshagan, *Father Land*
- Susan Meiselas, *Kurdistan*
- Tommy Orange, *There There*
- Canada’s National Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the “missing children”
- Oklahoma’s Commission on the 1921 Tulsa Massacre
  - See also, 60 Minutes segment (May 2021) “How Tulsa’s Greenwood Massacre Echoes Today”

**Topic 3: Organized Protest, State Violence, and Accountability**

GRAPHIC NOVEL:

- Derf Backderf (2020), *Kent State: Four Dead in Ohio*

Synopsis: A forensic, fine-grained account of the context, events, and implications of the Kent State shootings by the Ohio National Guard in the era of Vietnam War protests. Most fascinating from this is the fact that public accountability for the shootings has never been achieved. Captures a timeless snapshot of how close to the precipice our society was to large-scale collapse or breakdown at that moment in time.

**Week 7: Oct. 10 – Oct. 14.** Comics con’t. & Patterns of Organized Protest Part 1.

Required readings include:

- *Understanding Comics*, ch. 9
- *Kent State*, pps. 1 – 109

**Week 8: Oct. 17 – Oct. 21.** Patterns of Organized Protest Part 2.

Required readings include:

- *Kent State*, pps. 110 – 253

**REMINDER: Short Research Paper 1 due by Fri., Oct. 21.**

Other Honorable Mention Comics:

- Igor Tuveri (Igor) (2016), *The Ukrainian and Russian Notebooks: Life and Death Under Soviet Rule*
- Harvey Pekar, Gary Dunn, and Paul Buhle (2008), *Students for a Democratic Society*
- Joe Sacco (2009), *Footnotes In Gaza*
- Lun Zhang, Adrien Gombeaud, and Ameziane (2020), *Tiananmen 1989: Our Shattered Hopes*
- John Vasquez Mejias (2020), *The Puerto Rican War*
- H.C. Oesterheld, Alberto Breccia, Enrique Breccia (2022/1969), *Life of Che*

Other Recommended Further Reading:

- Joseph Koudelka, *Invasion 68: Prague*
- Susan Meiselas, *Nicaragua*
- Memory Laws and what Timothy Snyder calls “forced forgetting” (NYTs Magazine, 4 July 2021)
- Gilles Perres, *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing*

## **Topic 4: Conspiracy, Myth, and Dehumanization**

GRAPHIC NOVEL:

- Will Eisner (2005), *The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

Synopsis: Traces the transnational spread of a fabricated story first published in 1905 “documenting” the cabal-like attempt of Jewish leaders to take over the world, described as “one of the most devastating hoaxes of the twentieth century.” Although discredited time and again, it still resurfaces in various antisemitic forms today. Based originally on state-sponsored propaganda, swirled with espionage and cloak and dagger intrigues, dappled with cheesy plagiarism, this is a real version of “fake news” that has had outsize influence.

**Week 9: Oct. 24 – Oct. 28.** Patterns of Collective Myth and Misinformation Part 1.

Required readings include:

- *The Plot*, preface – pg. 67

**Week 10: Oct. 31 – Nov. 4.** Patterns of Collective Myth and Misinformation Part 2.

Required readings include:

- *The Plot*, preface – pps. 68 - afterword

### Other Honorable Mention Comics:

- Timothy Snyder and Nora Krug (2021), *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons From the Twentieth Century* (Among the many insights of this remarkable work are the detailed warning signs and symbols of proto-fascism/authoritarianism)
- Ville Kallio (2010), *P-FE/FRAF* (Fascinating mini-KUS publication, sort of a sci-fi imaginarium in AI, indoctrination, and global fascist ideology)
- Paula Lawrie (2020), *High Socks New Jersey 1950*
- Andreas Ferraris and Renato Chiocca (2019), *The Scar: Graphic Reportage From the U.S. – Mexico Border*

### Other Recommended Further Reading:

- Cass Sunstein, *#republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*
- Michael Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy* (esp. chapter 3, “Two Versions of “We, the People””)
- Larry Fink, *The Polarities*
- Ralph Ellison, short story, “Tell It Like It is, Baby”
- Tomasz Niezabitowska and Malgorzata Tomaszewskii, *Remnants: The Last Jews of Poland*

## **Topic 5: War, State Failure, and Patterns of “Apocalypse”**

### GRAPHIC NOVELS:

The incredible depth of field for this material warrants a contrast of viewpoints from different historical periods.

First, on the WWII era’s scale of human tragedy:

- Joe Kubert (2003), *Yossel, April 19, 1943*

Synopsis: A powerfully emotive viewpoint framing the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising from a counterfactual understanding of the Holocaust that sheds empathetic light on the scale of human destruction and what it means to be a survivor. From a comics’ master, the raw visual style, lettering and plaintive narrative tone of this *magnum opus* form is arresting right down to the tactile feel of the ersatz grey-tone sketchbook paper pages.

Second, on today’s age of disintegration/state failure “apocalypse”:

- Joe Sacco (2000), *Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995*

Synopsis: Captures how tenuous life becomes when state-society disintegrates from a number of insider/outsider perspectives, but also, despite the depths of

cruel or banal indignities, how life goes on. Sacco combines participant-observer journalism with cultural ethnographic history in exactly a Skocpol sensibility of historical sociology. The genocidal dark side of this “post Cold War” story reverberates across time.

**Week 11: Nov. 7 – Nov. 11.** War/WWII Era Part 1.

Required Readings include:

- *Yossel*, intro. – pg. 64

**Week 12: Nov. 14 – Nov. 18.** War/WWII Era Part 2.

Required Readings include:

- *Yossel*, pps. 65 – 121

**Week 13: Nov. 21 – Nov. 25 (Note: Extended Weekly Due Date of Nov. 28 Due to Holiday).**  
War/Contemporary Era Part 1.

Required Readings include:

- *Safe Area Gorazde*, intro. – pg. 35

**Week 14: Nov. 28 – Dec. 2.** War/Contemporary Era Part 2.

Required Readings include:

- *Safe Area Gorazde*, pps. 36 - 108

**REMINDER: Short Research Paper 2 due by Fri., Dec. 2.**

**Week 15: Dec. 5 – Dec. 9.** War/Contemporary Era Part 3.

Required Readings include:

- *Safe Area Gorazde*, pps. 109 - 228

**Other Honorable Mention Comics:**

- Art Spiegelman (2011/1973), *Maus: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*
- Joe Kubert (2020/1996), *Fax From Sarejevo: A Story of Survival*

- Keiji Nakazawa (2016/1972), *Barefoot Gen*
- Jacques Tardi (2010), *It was the War of the Trenches*
- Jacques Tardi (2013), *Goddamn This War!*
- Imati Arata (2022), *F*
- Tom Kaczynski (2022), *Beta Testing the Ongoing Apocalypse*
- Olivier Kugler (2018), *Escaping Wars and Waves: Encounters with Syrian Refugees* (esp. chapter on France's Calais jungle)
- Joe Sacco (2012), *Journalism*
- Mazen Kerbaj (2017), *Beirut Won't Cry*
- Harvey Pekar, Heather Roberson, and Ed Piskor (2012), *Macedonia: What Does It Take To Stop A War?*
- Luc Leplae (n.d.; ~2000), *War Time and Play Time*
- Eric Hobbs and Noel Tuazon (2010), *The Broadcast*
- Ken Landgraf and Bob Huszar (2021), *Apocalypse 5000*

Other Recommended Further Reading:

- Robert Capa's photographs from the Spanish Civil War
- Paolo Bacigalupi, short story, "Yellow Card Man"
- NYT's article on WWII Jewish "forest survivors" (September 2021), shows example where we are still understanding the nuances of destruction (and survival) with new evidence
- Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*
- Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*
- Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands*
- Jan Gross, *Neighbors*

**Final Exam, First Available on Tues., Dec. 13 and due by Thurs. Dec. 15 before 11:59 p.m.**

## Appendix: Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Requirements

Cleveland State University, RT Library 123

Office Hours: M-TH: 9:30-7:00 pm; F: 9:30-4:00 pm

Director, Dr. Mary McDonald, 216-687-6981

### WAC Criteria

Require students to write between 3,000 and 5,000 words (10-20 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with 1” margins) in writing assignments (which may include drafts).<sup>1</sup>

Final versions of at least one assignment should total at least 2,000 words (eight pages).<sup>2</sup>

Teach students writing-to-learn strategies that foster students’ experiences in learning and writing-to-communicate strategies that foster students’ respect of readers’ experiences.<sup>3</sup>

Whenever possible, planning assignments (e.g. reading logs, pre-writing strategies) and peer reviews should be included.

Assign writing complex enough to require substantive revision for most students. The instructor should give feedback to assist students in preparing subsequent papers or drafts of papers. This feedback should not consist entirely of mechanical correction of punctuation and grammar.

Provide instruction in discipline-appropriate forms of texts, arguments, evidence, style, audience, and citation.

Assign writing throughout the semester.

Where appropriate, address the needs of students regarding library competency.

Assign writing in English unless the course is specifically geared to improving writing at the 300-level in another language.

**In order to receive a C or better in the course, students must write at a satisfactory skill level (C or better). If the student’s writing is weak, but shows understanding of the course material, the student may be assigned a D, in which case WAC credit will not be received for the course.**

Maximum enrollment for this course is 35 or 45 with a graduate assistant.

<sup>1</sup>The word count may only include one preliminary draft for each final draft.

<sup>2</sup>Exceptions to this criterion may be granted in disciplines or courses where students do a substantial amount of writing, but the course structure and/or content does not create opportunities for an assignment of this length.

<sup>3</sup>Writing-to-learn helps students use writing to explore many aspects of the course as well as their own reflections; these activities should foster learning at deeper levels than memorization or recitation. Writing-to-communicate emphasizes aspects of writing (style, grammatical correctness, coherence, focus) that allow a reader to navigate the writing as he or she wishes.