

## Linked Project: Visual Rhetorical Analysis

The study of representation – that one thing stands for something else - prevails across disciplines and cultures and assumes one underlying question: From which point of view? Edward Said, in his analysis of textual representations of the Orient emphasizes that representations always communicate a relationship of power or a perspective that benefits some more than others. Consider the visual image below. What is it communicating? What is the message? How do you know? What is the cultural, historical, political significance of the image? What can you infer about the context of its production? What does the image represent or stand for? Are there shades of truth in the representation?



### Assignment Description:

As your first linked project, compose a 4-5 page essay analyzing a cultural representation from the Cold War era. Specifically, **select a visual image that represents or is a response to the cultural and social changes of the Cold War era, and the protest movements of the times.** In many respects, the Cold War was a war of words and images.

The image you select, whether a movie poster or lobby card, an advertisement from a newspaper or magazine, an album cover, or other work of creative art, is a cultural artifact of the time period in which it was produced, and by studying the visual and textual elements of that chosen image (use of symbols, text, and other elements of composition), you can come to a better understanding of the historical and social context in which the artifact was produced.

Your essay should place the artifact in its historical and social context, and explore the ways in which the visual piece documents some of the political controversies of the time, or helps us as students of the past to identify some of the significant social changes of the time. Consider these questions as you select and analyze your image:

- How does the image embody changing perceptions of group identity, changing social roles defined by gender, race, age or sexuality, generational conflict over values, or emerging manifestations of social or environmental justice?
- In what ways does the image constitute an expression of a political position grounded in or produced by the civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, the gay liberation movement, or the anti-war movement?

**Audience:** Academic - your classmates and professors. Because you personally know your audience, you are free to employ evidence (illustrations, examples, support) that will resonate, compel, and commonly appeal to their sense of logos, pathos, and ethos.

### Process:

1. Select an image and seek approval of your CAP 115 and 123 professors

*Criteria for selecting an image:*

- Response to the cultural, social, and political changes in the U.S. during the Cold War era;
- Response to one of the protest movements: civil rights, women's liberation, gay liberation, anti-war;
- Approved by your 123 and 115 professors;
- Distinct from classmates' images in your section (No repeated images).

2. Invention / Pre-writing Activity: Analyze the image rhetorically and contextually

*What are the specifics of the rhetorical situation informing this visual text?*

- What is the subject(s) in the image and what is its purpose?
- Who produced the image? What is the producer's stance or attitude toward the subject?
- Who was its intended audience? What symbol or entity is targeted?
- What is the underlying message of this image? What idea is it trying to convey to its audience? What is it saying about its subject? What type of rhetorical appeal does the image feature? Does it rely primarily on logos,

pathos, or ethos to make its point? How does attention to the appeal manifest itself visually in the image?

- What is the relationship between words and image, if applicable? How does this relationship contribute to its rhetorical appeal?
- How do design elements such as use of color, font, layout, and image selection (photograph v. illustration) work as persuasive element in this text?
- What strategies of argumentation does the image use? Does it feature narration? comparison/contrast? example?
- Does the image use stereotypes or symbols to convey its message? How do stereotypes or symbols figure as rhetorical devices in this situation? How does the stereotype or symbol place the image in context of a larger cultural discussion?

*What are the specifics of the larger context from which the image extends?*

- What is the *historical* context for this image?
- What was the *political* situation of the time?
- What was the *socio-cultural* climate of the time?
- How does an understanding of the historical, political, and socio-cultural contexts affect our understanding of the message?
- How does the image represent ideas of a particular protest movement?

Source for rhetorical analysis questions: Alfano, Christine L. and Alyssa J. O'Brien, *Envision: Persuasive Writing in a Visual World*, 2005, p.120.

3. Identify Secondary Sources (at least 3)

What kinds of sources might you consult to understand the context, meaning, and rhetorical force of this propaganda image? Find several and take notes.

4. Select a focus

- Based on your rhetorical and contextual analysis of the image, and your survey of secondary sources, select 2-3 ideas that are most compelling or revealing.
- Begin writing.

5. Generate a working thesis

*Criteria for a thesis:*

- Summarize the image in a phrase
- Take a position (a stance) toward an interpretation
- Make an assertion (not a statement of fact or observation)
- Base your assertion on clearly stated support
- Use specific language (rather than general or broad)
- Think holistically (condensational metaphors, cultural symbolism, linguistic phrases)

Below are some examples of Visual Representations of the 1960s. Let's practice making critical and rhetorical observations.



**Writing:** The same techniques for good writing apply for this essay as for the others you've written or read. After you know how you will focus your essay and you write a tight thesis, develop an introduction that employs a deliberate rhetorical strategy aimed to engage the audience with your topic. *Develop* paragraphs with plentiful evidence and even more explanation of the connection between that evidence and your arguments/assertions. Be aware and selective in using emotional, logical, and ethical appeals. Remember to write a conclusion that goes beyond reiteration and leaves the audience with something to think about.

**Revising:** Review the comments your colleagues have made about the content of your essay. Have they somehow misunderstood your perspective? If so, address their problems. Have they provided constructive critique or suggestions? If so, decide whether and how to incorporate these in a revision. Specifically review the form of your introduction and your thesis statement. Is it clear? Do you have paragraphs that hinge on one main idea and offer pertinent or enlightening evidence for your thesis? Do you use enough examples? Are they relevant and sufficient to prove your points? Do you argue a thesis that unifies your writing and that is unpacked throughout the essay? Essentially, use your rhetorical analysis skills to evaluate your essay before submitting the final draft. As usual, be sure you have an interesting and informative **title** that distills the thesis of your essay or a creative one that engages the reader.

**Collaborative Oral Presentation:** One competency that this course aims toward is collaborative learning and negotiation of multiple perspectives. After completing a rhetorical and contextual analysis of your selected image of Cold War in the 1960s, you will be paired with a classmate (different from your WID partners) to prepare and present to your colleagues a comparative interpretation of both images. This is a formal, graded presentation. *See separate rubric for guidelines.*

**Reflective Essay:**

After you have composed the final draft of your essay, write a one-page reflective essay written in the first person that does the following:

- (1) Describe your writing process and what you learned about your own writing;
- (2) Evaluate the effectiveness of your essay, the rhetorical choices you made, and how you tried to compel your audience through your course of discovery and analysis;
- (3) Describe the effectiveness of the project overall for you as a writer (peer review workshops, teacher/T.A./writing studio input)
- (4) Assess your contributions and your partner’s contribution to the visual rhetoric presentation and your process of working together.

**Due Dates** (all due times are at 10:00 a.m. on specified date unless otherwise noted)

Image Due for 123 approval (Submit image to BlackBoard)	Due by Friday, 2/20 midnight
Annotated sources Due for analysis workshop	Monday, 2/23
First Draft Due (at least 2 pages, outline)	Wednesday, 2/25
Second Draft Due for peer review Collaboration proposal due (post to BlackBoard)	Monday 3/2
Oral (Team) Presentation Due (class will run from 10:00 to 1:15)	Monday 3/9
Final Draft Due with Self-Assessment/ Reflection	Wednesday 3/11