

Race, Sex and Gender in Art

An Introduction to critical theory
and visual representation

This is an on-line course. All instruction, readings, videos and discussion are done virtually.

I encourage you to meet with me on campus to discuss any problems, questions or to just chat.

My office hours are listed on the course syllabus and if those times don't work, we will set up something else.

You must do your part.
Read the articles, lectures, view links.
The biggest mistake students make is falling behind.

The website is set up to help you. Learn to use it and if you have a problem, let me know. Sometimes I make mistakes or links get broken or otherwise messed up.

Student Meeting Hours:
Tues 10-11:15
Wed 10-11:15
Th 9:50-11:20 (S115)
or by appointment.

Office:
Maguire 20

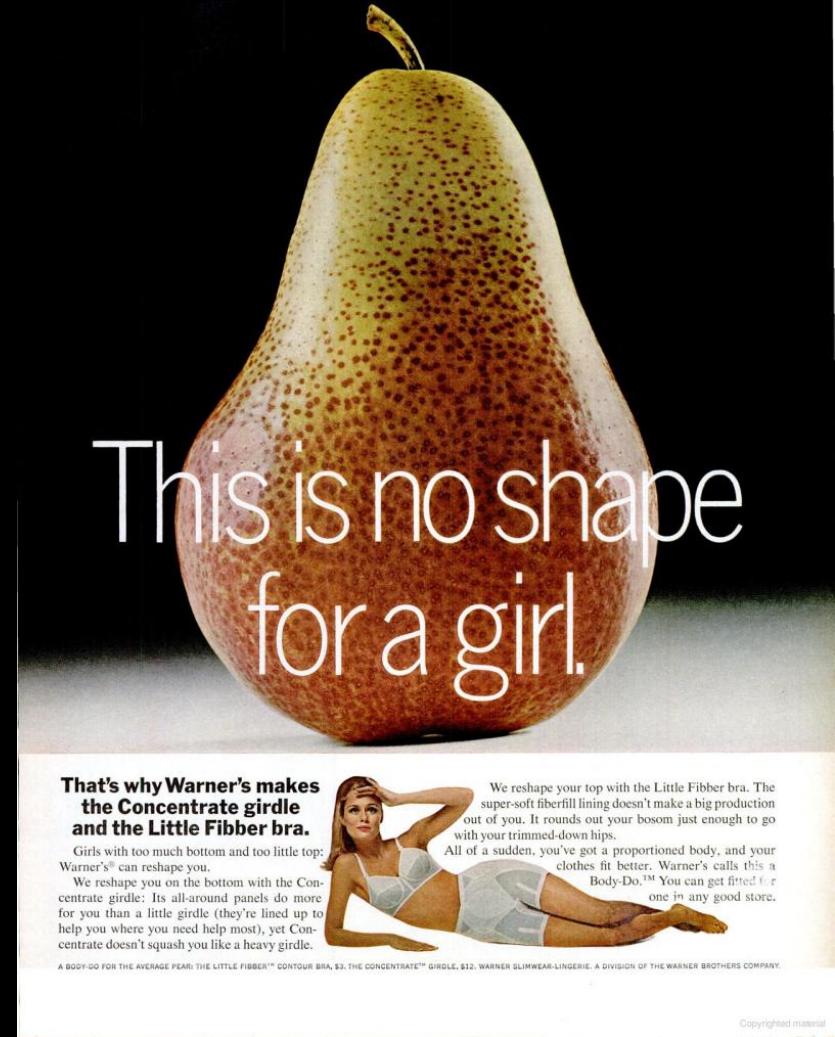
In this class we look at images throughout Art History and popular culture through the lens of critical theories regarding race, sexual orientation and gender.

Rather than see art objects alone, the ways in which the images reflect and reinforce cultural and social ideas are addressed.

While current artists and advertisers are sensitive to ways images can reinforce stereotypes, often depending on your particular position of privilege in the social structure, these stereotypes can still seem invisible.

Let's see what you think.

*It is often easier to see how this works if we look outside our own time.
This is an ad from the 1960s.*



However, our current ideas about female beauty began long before contemporary advertising.

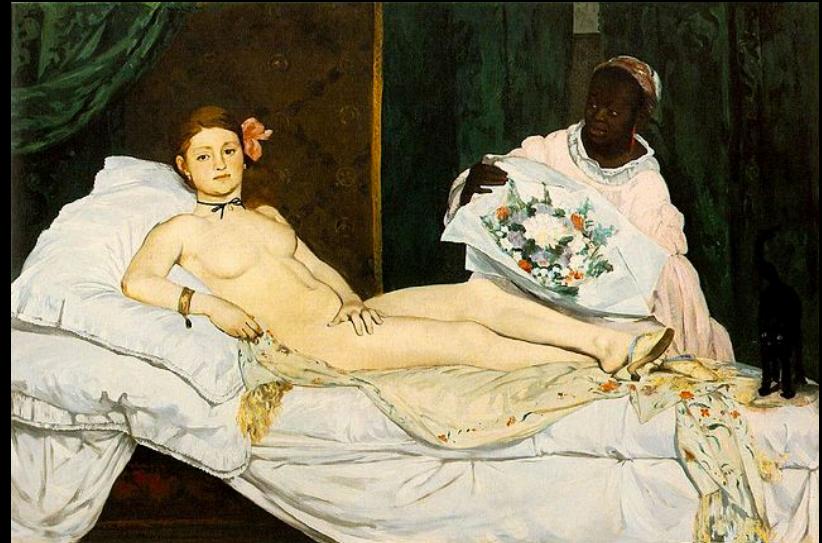


Praxiteles, *Knidian Aphrodite*, Roman copy after the original bronze of fourth century BCE, marble. Compared to a contemporary ad for Diesel Jeans.



Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486.

Titian, "Venus" of Urbino, c. 1538, oil on canvas.



Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, oil on canvas.

Throughout Art History, images of women have followed the female model of beauty begun in Classical Greece. Notice the similarity of Botticelli's figure to the one on the previous slide. Then, a very similar pose shifted to reclining.

All these paintings were made by male artists.



Yasumasa Morimura, *Portrait (Futago)*, 1988, photograph.

Jan Banning, *Danae Olympia*, from National Identities series, 2012.

Since the 1970s artists have begun acknowledging the history of female body image, including issues of race.

This page contains work by female artists who attempt to subvert the tradition in different ways. Compare to previous slide.

Sylvia Sleigh, *Philip Golub Reclining*, 1971, oil on canvas.



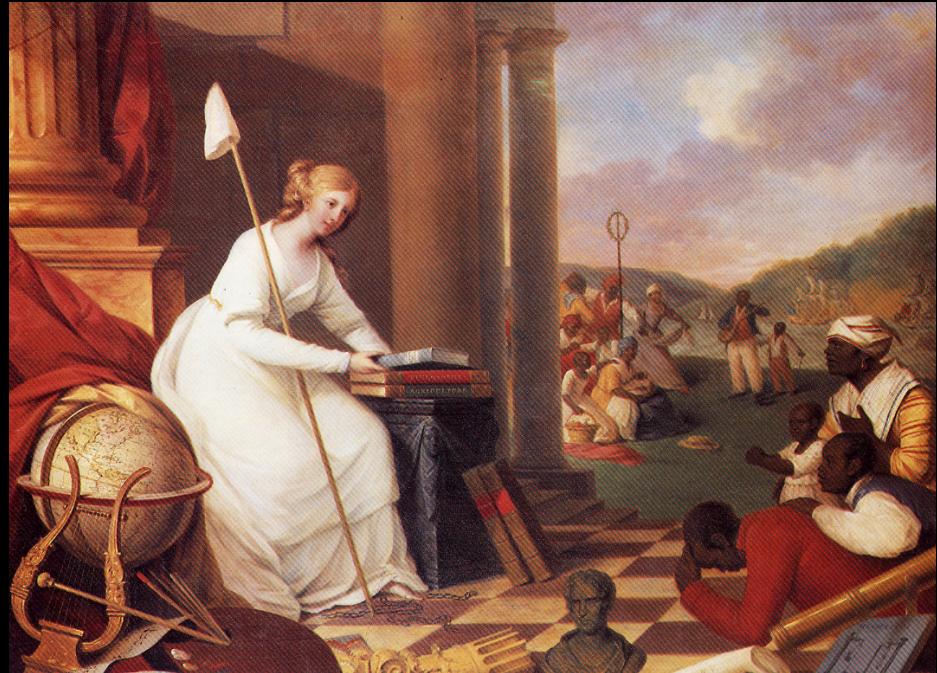
One of the main points we discuss with regards to art about race, sexuality and gender is POWER.

Who has the power? Who doesn't? And why this matters.

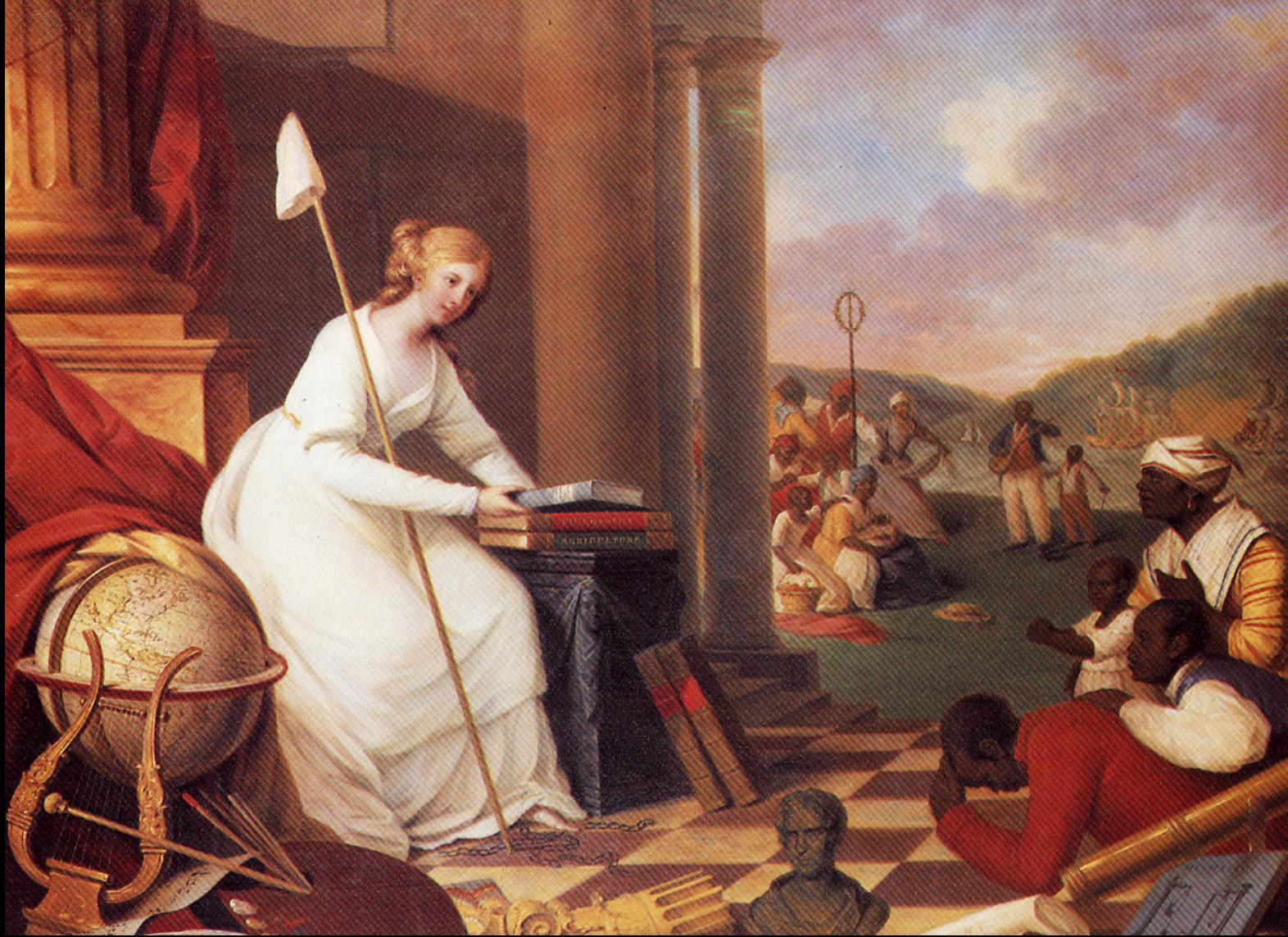
We call this Marxist Methodology after the economist, Carl Marx, who wrote about ways power dynamics function in societies.

As we examine artworks throughout Western history, the role of the patron—the person who commissioned and/or paid for the artwork—matters.
Why?

In this painting to the right, Lady Liberty is personified (that means an idea is given human form) as a white female.



Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences, or The Genius of America Encouraging the Emancipation of the Blacks, 1792 Samuel Jennings - librarycompany.org



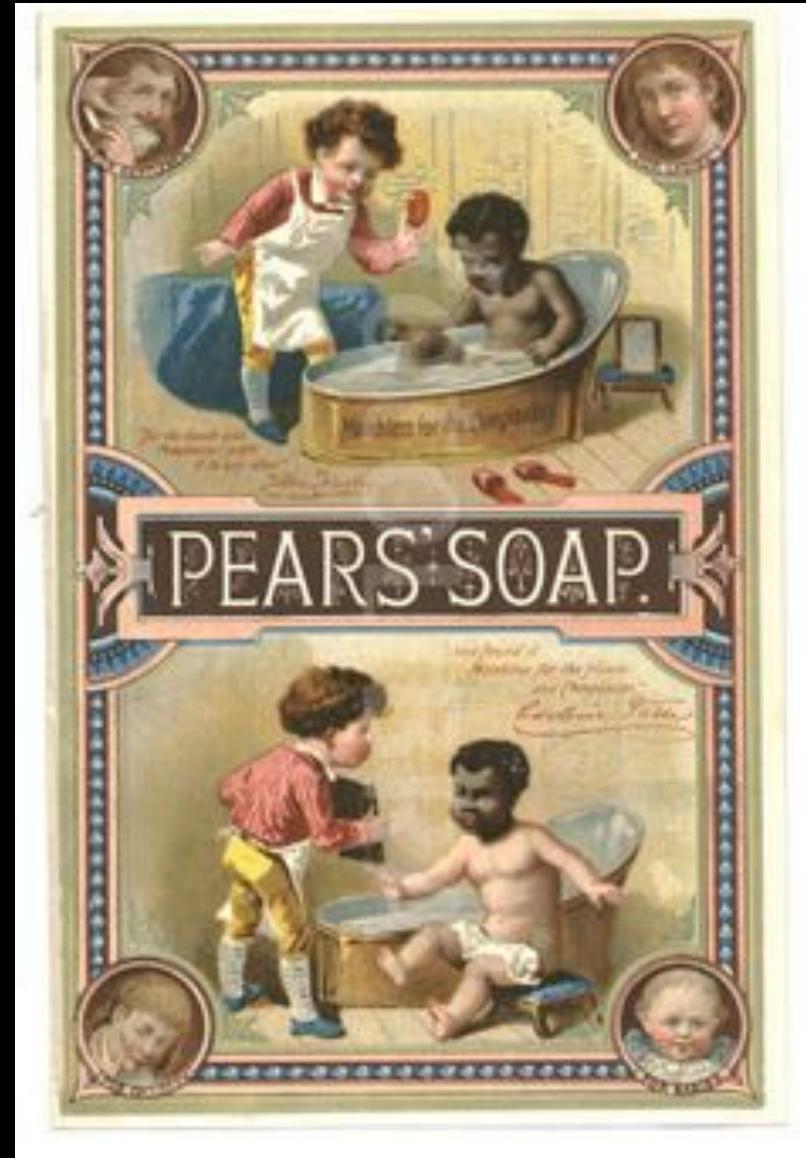
Look carefully at this painting of 1792 by Samuel Jennings.
Make sure you discuss what you see in the painting in your annotation.
What is this painting telling us about the different people?
Look at roles and race and see if there is a message here.

We look at the images within the context of their time and place in history.

We examine why these images were made. Who do they serve? What ideology is supported?

Images are a powerful means of communicating ideas.

Images are not neutral.



This is an advertisement for Pears Soap. In Victorian times the ideas reflected in this advertisement seemed 'normal.' What does this advertisement say about race?

Contemporary Artists realize this history and make work to bring attention to the realities of representation and power.

Female artists recognize how art and advertising present women who represent the 'ideal' as defined by men.

Many contemporary female artists address this reality in their work.

This method of analyzing art falls within the 'Feminist Method.' More discussion of Critical Methods to come.

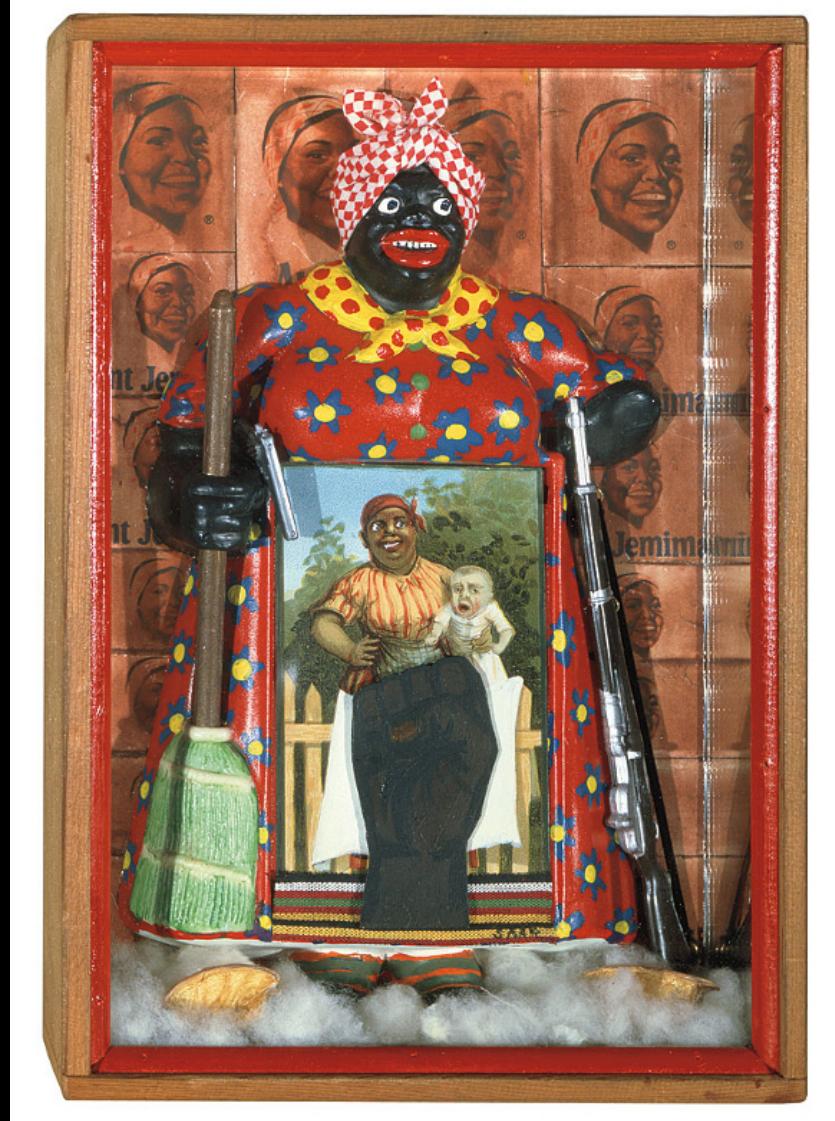


Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)*, 1989

In addition African American Artists, like Betye Saar, made art that brings attention to ways images functioned to dehumanize an entire race.

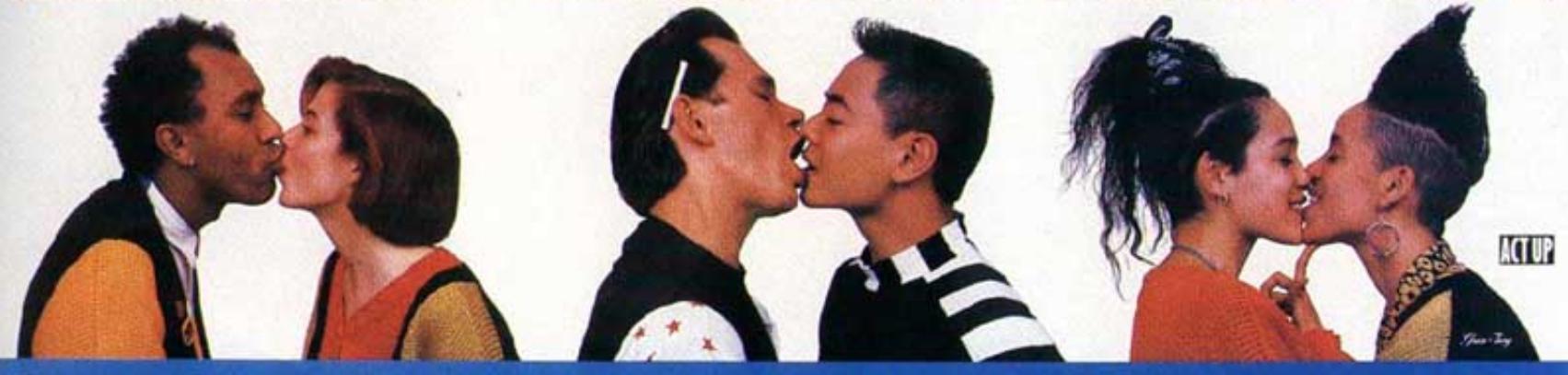
In this case, Saar reminds us that the image of Aunt Jemima existed to tame and control – create a stereotype– of African American women as caretaker and passive. Someone who need not be feared. Why?

What did Saar include in the picture as a reminder? What did she include to subvert this idea.



Betye Saar, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, 1972

KISSING DOESN'T KILL: GREED AND INDIFFERENCE DO.



CORPORATE GREED, GOVERNMENT INACTION, AND PUBLIC INDIFFERENCE MAKE AIDS A POLITICAL CRISIS.

Gran Fury, *Kissing Doesn't Kill: Greed and Indifference Do*, printed on postcards and displayed as billboards and bus posters, 1989.

Contemporary artists and designers use visual representation (images) to reflect the ideas of our time.

But can we also have 'blind spots' when it comes to seeing and understanding differences?

Maybe we can learn to see them.

Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self-Portrait*, 1980





Margaret Bourke-
White, *Kentucky
Flood, 1937*

Use Google search to find more information on this photo.

I used this photograph by Margaret Burke-White to introduce ways we can analyze Visual Images. It is posted to your class website. In your annotation this week include these things:

A clear visual description of what you see in the photo.

Brief historic context for the image. When was it made and why? Research this.

What is the message? What meaning is conveyed? Does it make you think of anything currently happening?

Next week we begin our journey through history.

I like to start in pre-historic times with the female figures because they tell us much about ways very early humans thought about life.

Long before men were praised as warriors and rulers, women were valued and maybe even worshiped for their role as generators of life—as mothers.

By definition, prehistory is a time from which we have not written record.

But we do have artwork.

We begin by looking at that.



The Venus of Willendorf,
28,000-22,000 BCE, 4.4" tall.