As the nation faces unprecedented challenges to fulfill a vision of fairness and opportunity for everyone—expressed most vocally in popular political culture in the Occupy Wall Street Movement—historians too are beset by new questions of representational fairness. Cultural historian Matthew Frye Jacobson claims that historians are crafting new relationships to history itself, a process he describes as “a mental habit of apprehending the past in the present and history-in-the-making.”

The biennial Visual Culture Conference organized by graduate students in the American Studies Department at Saint Louis University seeks graduate student papers from all disciplines that engage the theme, “Politics of the Eye: Imagery of the American Political Landscape.” Recognizing that the American political landscape expands beyond Wall Street reform, right-wing opposition to Obama, and street protests, the conference seeks to explore how visual aspects of the political landscape force us to examine how diverse and competing political narratives, past and present, are created and refined through visual media. Mindful of Jacobson’s urging to apprehend “the past in the present,” we are also interested in papers that question the current model of the visual archive and explore how we might expand both the means of archiving information and the criteria for what deserves archiving.

We seek papers that expand upon a wide variety of visual media, including photography, television, film, art and digital media, to explore critical perspectives in the production, interpretation, and consumption of the American political landscape, past and present. Some areas of inquiry might include, but are not limited to:

- Discourses on the politics of representation
- Visuality and spectatorship
- Creation of meaning in competing cultural and political arenas
- Theories on political, visual documents
- Documenting the political process
- Alternative visual histories
- Visual, political texts involving memory
- How visual media create and sustain political dichotomies
The Keynote speaker for this year’s conference will be Matthew Frye Jacobson of Yale University ([http://www.yale.edu/amstud/faculty/jacobson.html](http://www.yale.edu/amstud/faculty/jacobson.html)). Jacobson, a professor of American Studies, History, and African American Studies at Yale and author of five books in the areas of immigration, race, empire, and US political culture, launched his online visual history project, Historian’s Eye, ([http://historianseye.commons.yale.edu/](http://historianseye.commons.yale.edu/)) in 2009 to answer a central question: “What does the current historical moment look like where you live?” This conference maintains that the current events that take place in the streets are of historical significance and that, when given an diverse range of study, captures in rich detail the wide-ranging historical forces sweeping through American Main Streets.

The Conference Committee invites all those interested to submit abstracts of up to 500 words for individual papers, or up to 750 words for panel submissions, no later than **May 1, 2012**. Please also submit a current one-page CV with contact information (especially your email address) for each presenter, and a list of any audio and/or visual equipment necessary for your presentation. Email submissions to SLUVCC2012@gmail.com.

Please visit the conference’s website at [http://www.sluvcc2012.blogspot.com](http://www.sluvcc2012.blogspot.com) and follow us on Twitter @SLU_VCC_2012. For further information about the conference, please contact Conference Chair Mike McCollum at Atl2boulder@gmail.com.

Sincerely,
Mike McCollum
Chair, 2012 Saint Louis University Visual Culture Graduate Student Conference
PhD Student in American Studies, Saint Louis University