Visual Literacy and Photoshop

The following is a quiz and related assignment that I used this semester in WMST 265: Constructions of Manhood and Womanhood in the Black Community. The first was a take-home quiz based on two image files (attached) and The Online Visual Literacy
Project website. After students completed that quiz, we spent two days in a teaching theater learning the basics of Adobe Photoshop (in my Photoshop tutorial, students manipulated the same images they had already analyzed in the quiz). Students then completed an assignment in Photoshop. I also held office hours in the WAM lab to assist students in Photoshop.

Link to The Online Visual Literacy Project:
http://www.pomona.edu/Academics/courserelated/classprojects/Visual-lit/intro/intro.html

VISUAL LANGUAGE QUIZ INSTRUCTIONS:

For this quiz, you are to evaluate two images in relation to key concepts in visual literacy.

All images are compositions. When you compose an essay (or a poem, song lyrics, etc.) you use the alphabet to form words, words to form phrases, phrases to form sentences,
and so on. Similarly, when you compose an image (a painting, drawing, photograph, or moving images like film and video) that image is constructed through *visual language*.

For this quiz, you are to evaluate the two images attached to this message in relation to concepts discussed in The Online Visual Literacy Project website (link available in the Course Materials section of WebCT). Completing this quiz involves three steps:

1) Select three of the "Basic Visual Elements" discussed in The Online Visual Literacy Project (e.g., line, shape, value, hue, saturation, etc.).

2) Analyze how those three elements are used in each of the two visual compositions attached to this message. Be specific.

3) Using your analysis above, compare and contrast the two images and discuss how you see black manhood being constructed in each. Do the two images convey similar messages about black manhood? Or do they convey dramatically different messages about black manhood? And how is visual language (i.e., the visual elements you identified above) used to accomplish these similar and/or different constructions?

Your answer should be posted in the Discussions section of WebCT by 12:00 pm on Tuesday, March 1, 2005. Like all assignments, please compose your posting in a word processing program before pasting into WebCT. You are also welcome to reply to one another's postings and generate discussions on this topic.

This quiz is worth one (1) point toward your final grade.

PHOTOSHOP ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS:

In this assignment, you will be using visual language and Adobe Photoshop to deconstruct one visual representation of black manhood or womanhood. You will also use writing to further explain the arguments you will be making visually.

This assignment is comprised of several steps:

1) Select an image of black manhood or womanhood and describe, in writing, what you feel the image is conveying about black manhood/womanhood. What are the characteristics and qualities of manhood/womanhood according to your image? Is there a name circulating in popular culture that connects to this image (e.g., player, athlete, ho)? Does this image rely on any historical archetypes to

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convey its meaning (e.g., matriarch, jezebel, urban coon)? And, most importantly, how is visual language used within the composition to convey the meaning of this particular construction of black manhood/womanhood? Be specific and detailed in your analysis.

2) Create a set of intentions, in writing, for how you might reconstruct this image to convey something different about black manhood or womanhood. What kind of characteristics or qualities would you like to convey? Are there any personal images (e.g., family photographs, memories), images from popular culture, or historical images that convey a meaning that you would like to recreate? Be specific and detailed.

3) Use Adobe Photoshop to adjust a digital copy of the image you selected in part 1 to communicate the intentions you set in part 2. You are welcome to lift elements from other digital images to assist you in this process.

4) Reflect, in writing, on the process of adjusting the image from one construction of black manhood/womanhood to another. What was it like re-working this image? What kinds of changes did you make (be specific)? How did you use visual language in making those changes? Were there limitations on how much you could change the image? If so, what were the sources of those limitations (e.g., the original composition, the technology)? And in the end, does this reconstructed image convey the meaning that you intended?

PLEASE NOTE: IT IS NOT NECESSARY THAT YOU CREATE A "POSITIVE IMAGE" OR EVEN AN IMAGE THAT YOU LIKE. What is important for this assignment is that you use visual language to convey the meaning that you intend.

Your assignment should be uploaded as three files to WebCT:
1) The original image as a JPEG or PDF file (files with the extension .jpg or .pdf),
2) The reconstructed image as a JPEG or PDF file, and 3) A word file with your responses to parts 1, 2, and 4 of this assignment. Your written responses need not be in essay form, but must be intentionally composed, proofread, and edited.
PLEASE DO NOT UPLOAD PHOTOSHOP FILES WITH THE FILE EXTENSION .PSD TO WEBCT.
Photoshop files are very large, so be sure to save your final documents as JPEG or PDF files.

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