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## **Class Pictures: Representations of Race, Gender and Ability in a Century of School Photography**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines photographs taken of American public school classes between the 1880's and the 1940's. Most of the images were found in two virtual archives: The American Memory site at the Library of Congress and The National Archives and Record Center. These very large photograph collections were searched for representations of race, gender, and physical ability. The photographs were compared and contrasted and analyzed for elements of hidden curricula using techniques drawn from the social sciences and humanities. It was found that these large photo collections have significant gaps and historical amnesias. Collections made under conditions of racial segregation are themselves segregated and continue to reproduce images of hierarchy and dominance. To the extent these sites function as important resources for teachers and students searching for primary source documents for history and social studies projects, the archives convey significantly biased views of the history of education and minority groups in America.

It is a common experience of childhood in America. Teachers tell their class to wear dress clothes tomorrow because the photographer is coming to take the class picture. School photography was a regular source of income for local photography studios, a source of pride for schools, and a memento for students and their families. Most of these photographs did not withstand the tests of time — faded, lost, or thrown out with the rest of our childhood things. Others survived and found their way to local or state historical collections or historical archives. Often the only thing preserved in the process was the image itself, with little provenance or documentary material to understand the image (see, Figure 8 below, for an intriguing example). Occasionally entire studios with tens of thousands of negatives were donated to or purchased by state historical societies or museums. Advancing technology that includes digitized images, databases allowing fast search and retrieval, and the Internet for dissemination has spurred a secondary development as entire collections are being swept into ever more enormous virtual archives that are open to anyone with a personal computer and access on line. (Note 1)

An article in the New York Times (November 29, 1998) entitled "Digitized Artifacts are Making Knowledge Available to All, on Line" suggests the scale of a new resource:

The Library of Congress, which has 117 million items in its archives, hopes to have four million items digitized and accessible on the World Wide Web by the turn of the century. The Denver Public Library expects to put 95,000 photographs of the old west on-line. California has linked 35 universities and museums into one on-line archive.

Clearly, in a very short time most of the major historical photograph collections will go on-line thus creating a searchable data base of millions of historic images. Future developments will include search engines designed specifically to retrieve photographic images, not indirectly by a key word system but by seeking images directly. (Note 2) Mega-sites like the Library of Congress's "American Memory" digital archive with 42 separate collections and hundreds of thousands of images and the National Archives and Records Administration with 54,000 images are enormously popular. These and similar electronic archives are free and open to the public twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. Image banks have quickly become an invaluable source of primary source data for students doing research and gathering material for reports and class projects, and they are a remarkable resource for teachers and others preparing lectures, doing research, or just browsing. (Note 3) If, as the Library of Congress name suggests, they have literally become a representation of our collective memory, an essential question becomes: What is the nature of that memory?

## **A Simulacra of History? Historical Photographs on the Internet**

These technological developments have opened an entirely new niche to historians and scholars of visual communication, making possible research which was unimaginable only a decade ago. (Note 4) While this is a remarkable technological advance and a general benefit for scholars and researchers, there are a number of caveats to this development, of which I will mention just two that are particularly salient to this discussion. (Note 5)

The first has to do with the uses to which such freely available images may be put.

As the Internet develops into what will be in effect a single archive, the meanings of the individual collections (and photographs) will tend to become submerged. Alan Sekula, posed central questions for those interested in understanding and using historical photographs: "How is historical and social memory preserved, transformed, restricted, and obliterated by photographs" (Sekula, 1983:193)? Having raised those questions, Sekula (1983:195) warned that "Photography constructs an imaginary world and passes it off as reality." He drew attention to some of the sources of error and misrepresentation in collections of historic photographs. He mentioned the fallacies of assuming that photographs "transmit truths"; "reflect reality"; or are "historical documents." "The very term document," explained Sekula, "entails a notion of legal or official truth, as well as a notion of *proximity to* and verification of an original event" (Sekula, 1983:198).

Sekula (1983:194) has also given a great deal of thought to photographic archives, observing that ownership of photographs or photographic archives and their subsequent alienation or sale, can have important ramifications for historians and photo researchers:

... not only are the pictures in archives often *literally* for sale, but their meanings are up for grabs....This semantic availability of pictures in archives exhibits the same abstract logic as that which characterizes goods on the marketplace.

In other words, regardless of the intent of the photographer, captions and documentary evidence preserved with the image, or attempts by the repository to control or restrict usage, these digital images can be downloaded and used in ways that may be quite antithetical to the original meanings (cf., Margolis, 1994). Ripped free from context, photographs become free floating signifiers that appear to be little snippets of reality and can be used to bolster or "prove" a variety of contradictory theses. (Note 6)

The second warning has to do with meaning of such enormous archives as a whole—that is, with the ontology of the archive. What does it mean to have a media collection called "American Memory?" Jean Baudrillard (1983), the French sociologist, described the developing image world as a "simulacrum," a "hyperreal" media world of copies of copies where there is not and has never been an original. Everything in this symbol system refers to other symbols. Basic to the discussion of photographic archives is Baudrillard's (1983) observation that

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality...  
(p. 3)

In place of the two-dimensional concepts in written history, we are faced with an (imag)inary model of history. Baudrillard described a world of allusion and trope, maps referring not to territories but only to other maps, news referring to other news, photographs referring to photographs and so on. As millions of photographs are digitized and placed online in the "American Memory," this carefully constructed and selective simulacrum will be thought of more and more as something similar to Durkheim's "*conscience collectif*." (Note 7)

Precisely because of these twin issues, it is vital that scholars begin to seriously explore the photographic data banks (morgues?) that are growing on line. What is in the American memory? What has been forgotten? What survives in unconscious or unexamined form? What is myth, what is reality? Photographic images *do* provide a fresh source of data about our past, but this data has as much power to obscure as it does

to reveal. It is essential to temper the "semantic availability" that stems specifically from the conversion of photographs produced with particular use values into commodities with an abstract equivalence dictated by their exchange value, by studying the development of the virtual archive and providing the kind of social and historiographic scholarship necessary to understanding. In this effort it is necessary to study both available meanings and the lacks and oversignifications of the images and the data banks: as I shall demonstrate, whole classes of photographs are not represented, while others exist in such replication and proliferation that they crowd out alternative meanings and critical perspectives. We will need to develop a new paradigm to discuss the developing simulacrum itself. How shall we conceive of a web site with hundreds of thousands of images and documents that calls itself "American Memory?" Is it a thing, a process, a reflection? What research tools might one employ to study such a complex entity and the people who use it?

## **The Hidden Curriculum in Black and White**

This project began as a search for photographs to be used as illustrations for a series of lectures on the history of American education. At first the enormous numbers of photographs of schools, students, and teachers available on line seemed overwhelming. In an evening I found more images than I needed for three lectures. A closer look at the photographs, and the collections that they were found in, raised a simplified set of research questions informed by the issues asked by Alan Sekula: What photographs have been included? How can we understand the meaning of these photographs? What photographs were made that are not in the archives? What was not photographed?

The research on class pictures was theoretically informed by an interest in socialization processes and hidden curricula having to do with the reproduction of race and gender hierarchy (Margolis and Romero, 1998). The term "hidden curriculum" was coined by Philip Jackson after he observed public school classes. He noted the peculiar disciplines and behaviors in classrooms and embedded in school practices that do not necessarily further intellectual development. Jackson (1968, p. 33) observed that students are awarded credit for "trying," rewarded for "neatness, punctuality and courteous conduct," and that negative sanctions are levied for the violation of institutional rules. The concept of hidden curriculum came to refer to the socialization that takes place in school but is not written into the formal curriculum.

Socialization functions of the hidden curriculum have been further analyzed as encompassing three distinct functions. Apple and King (1977) building on the work of Elizabeth Vallance (1973) termed the first two "weak" and "strong": 1) a "weak" Durkheimian concept of the socialization essential to social life —reproducing the connections to civil society that transform children into social beings able to live and work together, form social institutions, and agreed upon meanings; and, 2) a "'strong' sense of control wherein education in general and the everyday meanings of the curriculum in particular were seen as essential to the preserving of the existing social privilege, interests, and knowledge of some elements of the population at the expense of other less powerful groups. Most often this took the form of attempting to guarantee expert and scientific control in society, to eliminate or 'socialize' (acculturate, assimilate) unwanted racial or ethnic groups or characteristics or to produce an economically efficient group of citizens..." (Apple and King 1977, p. 34). Strong controls are highly visible in gender role socialization practices, in segregation and different curricula

provided to different racial/ethnic groups and in the reproduction of social classes (Anyon, 1989). The third function of the hidden curriculum is the direct production of ideological belief systems, for example patriotism, certain forms of representative democracy, market capitalism, heterosexual family structures and so on.

While the education literature refers to socialization curricula as "hidden" they are actually quite visible and have readily been photographed. From a critical perspective, class pictures can be viewed as an historical record of certain elements of the hidden curriculum. The photographs show bodies with certain race, gender, age, and ability characteristics spatially arranged in an environmental setting. As social scientists, historians, and educators we interpret these visible relationships as representations of social relations learned about elsewhere: segregation, integration and hierarchy, gender socialization, social class structures. Moreover, we infer that the images were not randomly produced but were carefully fashioned using agreed upon conventions of representation to be symbolic representations of such social qualities and others including: order, discipline, purity, equality, patriotism, and community pride and stability. In these photographs we can see attempts to denote social processes such as socialization, assimilation and acculturation which cannot be directly photographed. Clearly this interpretative enterprise is fraught with peril. Precisely because one cannot actually photograph social relationships, there is a fundamental issue of ethnographic sense making: we cannot be sure if we understand "from the native's perspective" what the project of photographer and her subjects entailed; nor can we ever be sure that our reading is not an error, a misplaced abstraction, or an aberrant decoding.

## **In the Archives**

Once upon a time newspapers called their collections of photographs assembled for the future obituaries of persons still living, "morgues." Now photograph collections are becoming our collective memory. This paper will focus on two of the federal government's major archives each encompassing a number of collections. The various collections were created for different purposes, in different geographic locations, in different historical periods and provide distinct and different views of school life. In essence, much like schools and America itself, the photographic collections are segregated. Separate collections offer divergent and sometimes confusing or contradictory views of race and ethnicity, social class, rural/urban life, and ability/disability. As previously discussed these collections are to some extent losing their identity and becoming submerged in the digital archive. Even though each image retains its citation and whatever provenance exists, the fact that one can search across collections by topic begins a process of homogenization. The National Archives and Records Administration, for example is not organized by collection. There are about 54,000 photographs currently available and nearly 1600 of them can be retrieved with key words "teacher, student, school" (although not all are linked to digital images). Some major collections were discovered this way: photographs from the relocation camps for Japanese Americans, photographs from the Roosevelt Library depicting African American schools in the south, photographs of the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School, and so on.

The "American Memory" site run by the Library of Congress is organized by collection. While one can choose to search the entire site, one can also search each collection individually. The following chart describes some of the collections in the

"American Memory" site that have large numbers of photographs of schools.

**Table 1**  
**School-related Images Available Through the**  
**American Memory Site, January 1999**

Components of the American Memory Site	Number of Images in Component	Images Found with Keywords "school," "teacher," or "student"
Architecture and Interior Design for 20th Century America: Photographs by Samuel Gottscho and William Schleisner, 1935-1955.	29,000	1,479
Touring Turn-of-the-Century America Photographs from the Detroit Publishing Company, 1880-1920.	25,000	302
America from the Great Depression to World War II: Photographs from the FSA-OWI, 1935-1945.	56,600	463
Built in America: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, 1933-Present.	35,000	542
American Landscape and Architectural Design, 1850-1920, A Study Collection from the Harvard Graduate School of Design.	2,800	46
The Northern Great Plains, 1880-1920: Photographs from the Fred Hultstrand and F.A. Pazandak Photograph Collections.	900	30
Taking the Long View: Panoramic Photographs, ca. 1851-1991.	4,000	149
Washington as It Was: Photographs by Theodor Horydczak, 1923-1959.	14,000	374

In what follows, I will show and discuss a small number of photographs drawn from several of these sources. The goal will be to ask what can be learned from the class photographs found in these great archives. This is not an attempt to present a statistical analysis, although we are rapidly approaching the point in sheer numbers where such an undertaking would be fruitful. Rather, it is more a qualitative and ethnographic study in which a few images have been selected as indicative of specific categories and will be quoted and analyzed in an attempt to capture the scope and detail of this source of data. One other note. The archives contain many photographs of school related subjects like sports, recess, school dances, etc. The images selected for analysis are those that would generally be considered "class photographs." Some images were selected because they are representative, but as in the selection of quotations from interviews in more conventional qualitative research, images were frequently chosen because they were

unique—particularly articulate, well-composed, and interesting. A number of techniques will be employed in the analysis. Photographs will be compared to other photographs and collections to other collections. Meanings will be elucidated by current perceptions and theories of schooling, as well as by symbolic and literary understandings. Concepts such as status, body language and position, discussed by many analysts of photographs (Goffman, 1976; Solomon-Godeau, 1991; Trachtenberg, 1989), will be utilized. Additional data about the social world in which these photos were made will be brought to bear, for instance, the social settings in which they were produced and consumed. Thus, "class pictures" will be treated as social constructions and will be analyzed using techniques developed in diverse fields including literary criticism, art theory and criticism, semiotics, deconstructionism, ethnography, and symbolic interaction.

## White Students

The first public school law in the Dakota Territory was passed in 1883. The Northern Great Plains Collection contains photographs of the rural, one room schools that were built in the townships. These photos from the 1880's and 90's were generally posed outside the school in the sunshine. The shot reprinted here is part of the Fred Hultstrand collection that was donated to North Dakota State University. Hultstrand was born in 1888 and would have been eight when his class picture was taken; he photographed extensively from 1905 through the 1950's, collected photographs of frontier life, and spent much time hand tinting. While these are photographs of real schools, they also helped constitute a pervasive, nearly mythological, image of American public schools. The common school, with its modest architecture, ungraded classrooms, local control, strong community support, and curriculum limited to primary instruction, is often credited with being the backbone of America.

Figure 1 reveals a number of possible meanings. The building in the background is visually less important than the people. There are forty-seven children; boys and girls are not casually mixed, nor were age groups. Everyone dressed for the portrait. Men and boys wore black or somber colors; all the males stand except for three older boys who were posed on horseback. Women and girls were wearing clothes that appear white in the black and white photograph but the hand-tinted copy shows dresses painted in pastel colors. A row of little girls was seated in front in a decorative and passive pose. Overall the people were arrayed in an open semi-circle facing the camera with younger and smaller pupils placed in front and older and



**Figure 1.** "Soper school, Soper Post Office, North Dakota, 1896 G.G. Grimson, teacher; Mandus, Fred, Bernard Hultstrand" Typical of rural schools found in the Northern Great Plains Collection. Fred Hultstrand History in Pictures Collection, NDIRS-NDSU, Fargo. North Dakota State University Institute for Regional Studies PO Box 5599, Fargo, ND 58105-5599. American Memory,

larger students and teachers in back. The created image—very much in keeping with the model of the one room school—suggests the older protecting or shielding the younger.

Library of Congress. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**

Interestingly the image is also one of equality in that the teachers and adults are standing among the students and not indicating superior status by clothes, body language or position. Despite the fact that a few of the children are barefooted, this is not highlighted as a marker of poverty (but see Figure 6). Images such as these, from Walton's Mountain to Little House on the Prairie, shape an American mythology of a bucolic golden age of schooling that inspires our periodic longing for a return to basics, simplicity, morality and so on.

Everything is not quite what it seems. In the case of white immigrants, nationality and linguistic proficiency are invisible, but according to text at the Hultstrand web site, many of the children were recent immigrants speaking Swedish, German, Norwegian, etc. These meanings disappear in the photographs, as they disappeared in society where white immigrants became invisible through assimilation in a generation. It is important to note that all the people in the photograph are white, not because one would expect racial diversity in the territorial communities of the Northern Great Plains but because "whiteness" is precisely part of the taken for granted quality of the American Common School. (Note 8) It was lucky that the Northern Great Plains collection preserved these particular images, but in doing so the images of specific schools begin to pass over into an archetype of the one-room school. Photos like this raise a question: where were the others? Did the African American, Native American, and Asian communities that existed at that same historical moment in the South, the Northeast, or on the West Coast also educate their children in one-room schools? What did they look like? What kind of historical or cultural amnesia accounts for the fact that these photos are not present in the American memory collection or National Archives? In fact without substantial historical research we do not know if the photos are not present, because they were not made (or not made in the same volume), because they were not preserved, or because they were not archived

Figure 2 is one of more than sixty images from the Detroit Publishing Collection depicting urban high schools. The picture was selected because of the children; most of the other views of urban high schools show buildings only. Despite the rather grandiose title: "Touring Turn-of-the-Century America," images in this collection were not created as an overview of the nation. These views, as they were thought of, were made by professional photographers to be reproduced as postcards — that is, they had to sell. Other than date and location there was little documentation. The collection site describes it this way:

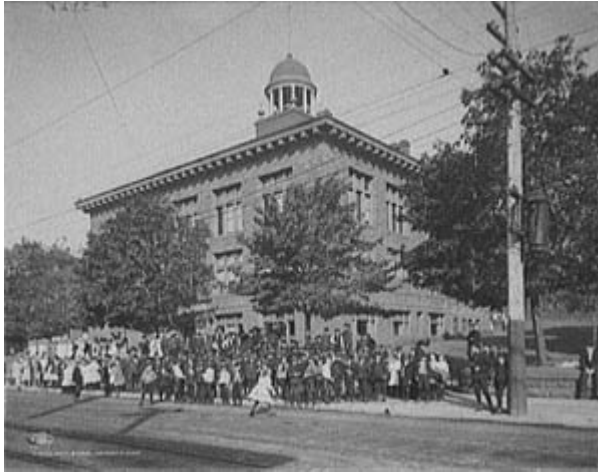
The Detroit Photographic Company was launched as a photographic publishing firm in the late 1890s by Detroit businessman and publisher William A. Livingstone, Jr., and photographer and photo-publisher Edwin H. Husher. They obtained the exclusive rights to use the Swiss "Photochrom" process for converting black-and-white photographs into color images and printing them by photolithography. This process permitted the mass production of color postcards, prints, and albums for sale to the American market.

According to Bogdan and Marshall (1997, p.6), in the early years of the century more



than a billion postcards were mailed each year and many cards depicted architectural monuments and large-scale institutions. They were able, for example, to collect more than sixteen hundred *different* views of asylums and institutions for the mentally ill or retarded.

Figure 2 was made ten years after the North Dakota photograph and contributes a countervailing view of American schools around the turn of the century.



**Figure 2.** High school, Hancock, Mich. C. 1906  
Detroit Publishing Co. American Memory, Library  
of Congress. (Click on the image to view a larger  
version.)

A large mass of students stand in front of an imposing stone building. While apparently called out of school for the photograph, the students seem to be casually milling around and much less orderly than in the rural school. No teachers or adults are in evidence; neither was an attempt made to arrange the students by size. Here too the students are all white but more homogeneous in age than in the prairie school. The images of shelter and protection are completely missing; in fact, students in the street and lounging against a telephone pole suggest urban toughness and self-sufficiency. Overall this is a photograph of a school; the building

was emphasized over the students who form a faceless mass. Comprehensive high schools like this were expensive public works that were sources of civic pride. The high school views were perhaps similar to the mental institution and asylum photos discussed by Bogdan and Marshall (1997) who observed that:

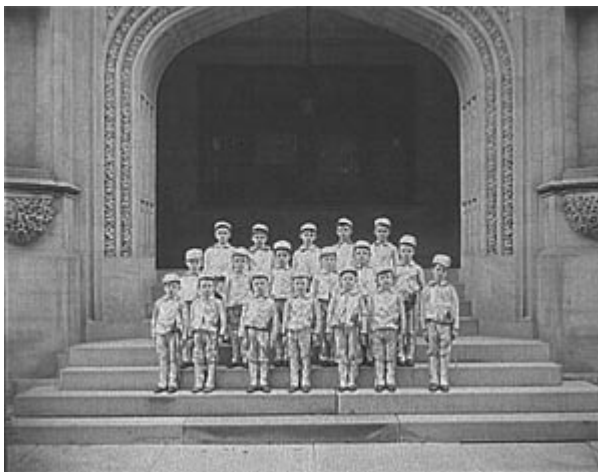
The initial impression the postcard pictures leave is that these institutions were orderly and therapeutic environments. One way to understand the cards is that they were part of the visual rhetoric of hegemony — they helped manage the public's understanding of the legitimacy of professional control of deviance. (p. 5)

High schools were, of course, not asylums, but when these schools were built and these postcards circulated, the notion of universal high school education was new. Images such as these were reassuring, lending *gravitas* and legitimacy to bold social institutions that were taking professional custody over all children — ending family control and child labor practices that had marked history to this point.

Figures 3 and 4 provide additional insight into the ways in which school and children were imagined at the turn of the century. The two shots were made in the same doorway, presumably the same day. The photographer has used the steps as risers and the doorway as an ornate frame, carefully posing the children to create images of order and obedience. White children are dressed in white, a symbol of innocence and purity. The imposing door, itself a metaphor for the doorway to knowledge, is forbidding. Knowledge is not depicted as an open process of personal growth or something gained in family and community. It is the property of the awe inspiring institution behind the children through which they must pass. The children are ready for the challenge. They stand at attention, equidistant, not quite touching, the girls in bonnets and white dresses the boys in what appear to be uniforms with short pants, leggings, shirts and caps.



**Figure 3.** "School Girls" created between 1900 and 1905. Detroit Publishing Co. American Memory, Library of Congress. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**



**Figure 4.** "School Boys" created between 1900 and 1905. Note says "Students holding swords at their sides." Detroit Publishing Co. American Memory, Library of Congress. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**

The caption informs us that the little boys have swords at their sides. This is a particularly telling example of the ways in which gendering, one of the strong elements of the hidden curriculum, and school discipline, one of the weak elements, were represented on film.

Even though nearly all of the thousands of photographs of schools in these collections are photographs of white students and teachers, they were not identified as such. Figure 5 is particularly interesting because of its caption which identifies children of white migrant workers. In the United States "white" is the taken-for-granted category. White has been the color of invisibility, the norm, the

regular and average (Frankenburg 1993). There are no hits in either "American Memory" or the National Archives site for "white students" or "white teachers." "White schools" produced a single hit from "American Memory," a 1938 Marion Post Wolcott photo of a dark school building with the caption "'White school house, Chaplin, Scotts Run, West Virginia.'" The National Archive site produced three hits on white school. One was a "Sunday School Indians and Whites" Indian Territory (Oklahoma) 1910. The other two were segregated schools. One photograph from 1941 is a picture of a building with the

following caption: "Harmony Community, Putnam County, Georgia.... The Harmony white school was closed down for several years because there were not enough children to make its continued operation worthwhile. Two years ago it was reopened, and last year it had an enrollment of 11, three of whom were from outside the Community. The few high school age children in Harmony go to Eatonton in a bus operated by the County—but no transportation is furnished for children of grade school."

I reproduced the other as Figure 5. "Whites" are only identified as such in opposition to people of color, whereas people of color always have their ethnicity attached as a marker and identifier.



### African American Students

As Elliott Eisner (1985, p. 97) suggested, it is important to consider the "null curriculum"—that which is missing. It is, of course, not news that schools in turn-of-the-century America were segregated by race and ethnicity. But complete invisibility is surprising. *None* of the 300 school photos in the Detroit Photography collections showed Black, Native American or Asian children in school. If children of color were not in school, it occurred to me to look for them elsewhere in that collection. Searching the 25,000 images of the Detroit collection for "Black Children" yielded half a dozen photographs. Figure 6 is typical of these stereotyping images. This is not a candid shot nor is it documentary; it was made by the same postcard company that posed the White children in the doorway. These four children were also posed, arrayed in a line in front of their house. The image constructed had the intention of emphasizing their "otherness." They were not dressed-up, even though they may well have owned Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. They were not posed in a meadow where bare feet might have been read as a youthful or romantic symbol.

**Figure 5.** A school for the children of white migrant farm workers is maintained at the Osceola Farm Labor Supply Center operated by the Office of Labor, War Food Administration. This is the second grade, taught by Mrs. Emma Greenwood. Department of Agriculture. Office of Information. Photographer, Osborne 3/1945. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**



The tableau of clapboard house and fence with clothes thrown over emphasizes their poverty. Photographic postcards of African Americans, produced for white audiences, were not as overtly racist as the popular cartoon cards of alligators, pickaninnies, and mammies (Turner 1994; Mellinger 1992). Still, Figure 6 is a clear example of what Turner termed "contemptible collectibles," postcards produced for white consumers that

**Figure 6.** "Four black children in yard" from the Detroit Publishing Collection. Created between 1890 and 1910. American Memory, Library of Congress. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**

conformed to certain racialized stereotypes: Black children were frequently photographed outside dressed in rags and tatters. As Turner (1994, p. 16) observed: "Picture postcards featuring poorly dressed

little black children romping in cotton fields suggests that if they had been given a choice, they would have chosen to spend their days in the field rather than in the schoolroom." Images of diligence, order, and innocence were never included.

Curiously, while the "American Memory" site allows one to search a large number of individual collections as a group, the "The African American Odyssey," which is part of the site, must be visited separately and is not searchable for photographs. (Note 9) An expanded search of the entire "American Memory" collection for "Negro Children" produced about fifty hits, all the photographs of African American students, teachers or schools dated from the Farm Security Administration collection in the 1930's. Figure 7 is representative of a series made by Marion Post Wolcott at Prairie Farms school in Montgomery Alabama in 1939. Germany was already making war in Europe and the worst days of the depression were behind America.

The job of Farm Security Administration photographers was shifting from the focus on depression misery to an emphasis on America's strength and resiliency. By the 1930's, advancing photographic technology made it easier to take photographs inside, and the image Post-Wolcott made shows African American students seated reading at a table with their African American teacher standing over helping a student. The class is small with books and tables and chairs instead of rows of student desks. Boys and girls seem to be working together, perhaps reading. The choice of a new and apparently well-equipped but segregated school creates an affirming vision of Black America as "separate but equal." The photograph similarly creates an image of teaching as an active and caring activity. Other images in Post Wolcott's proof sheet include playing basketball and volleyball in which the teacher also takes an active role.



**Figure 7.** Spring 1939. "Primary class in new school, Prairie Farms, Montgomery, Alabama" Marion Post Wolcott, photographer. Still Picture Branch (NWDNS), National Archives. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**

A better source for historic photographs of African Americans in school is the Schomburg collection of the New York Public Library. The Schomburg offers a searchable archive of 19th Century images of African Americans. A search of the "education" category produced fifty images. The earliest of these are wood block

engravings made for *Harper's Weekly* and published in the 1870's.



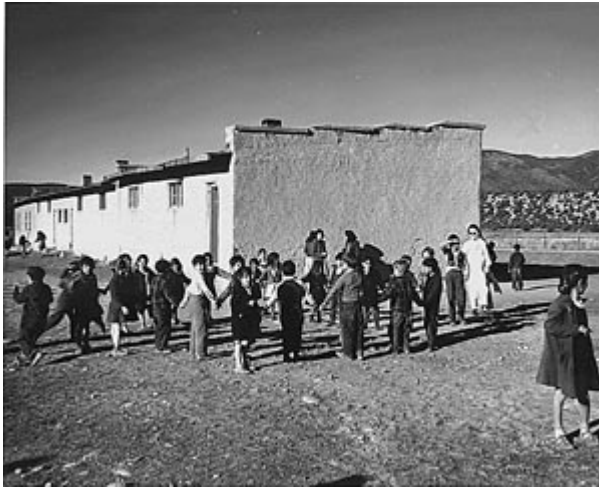
**Figure 8.** "Class of school children posing outside with their teacher, Espy, Pa. Spring 1912. Thomas 8, Eleanor 7, donor: Eleanor Drayton," Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**

They show "freedom schools" for emancipated slaves. There are a number of photos of famous educators, Booker T. Washington, for example, and there are many photographs from the historical black colleges: Hampton Institute and Tuskegee Institute. Figure 8 is unique in depicting what is apparently an integrated school class in Pennsylvania in 1912. It is one of those important images that appear in historic collections with inadequate captions and provenance. The caption identifies the photo as a gift to the Schomburg by Eleanor Drayton, and we might assume that she is the Eleanor age seven in the photo. Other meanings are more problematic. Thirty students including Whites,

Blacks and apparently Non-White ethnics (Native Americans? Eastern European immigrants?) were clustered together shoulder-to-shoulder on a bleacher with the African American teacher standing on the left with her arm symbolically embracing the entire class. The students probably dressed for the photograph. They do not seem sorted by race or gender. This is the clearest image of equality and diversity that I found in any of the collections searched. A good deal of research would be necessary to discover whether integrated classes were common in Espy, Pennsylvania in 1912, or if the Anglo-appearing students were immigrants whose "otherness" set them apart as well.

Latinos were even more invisible than Blacks in schools. A search of the American Memory collection for Spanish American, Puerto Rican, or Mexican schools, teachers or students yielded nothing before a single image taken by Russell Lee in July 1940 with the caption: "Spanish-American farmer who is also justice of the peace and teacher in local grade school, Chamisal, New Mexico." (Note 10) The National Archive site produced a group of seven shots taken by Irving Rusinow for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in Peñasco, New Mexico in 1941. Figures 9 and 10 are representative

selections from that shoot.



**Figure 9.** Taos County, New Mexico. Children play in the Peñasco schoolyard. Photographer, Irving Rusinow, December 1941 Department of Agriculture. Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Still Picture Branch (NWDNS), National Archives. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**

In Figure 9, a long low adobe school building stands against a line of arid mountains in the background marking the geography as the Southwest and establishing a Spanish feel. The students are clearly aware of the camera; some appear to have been posed in a circle holding hands, others are wandering around as if at recess. Overall this is not an image of order like Figures 3 and 4, or of the specific relations of teaching and caring evidenced in Figures 7 and 8. In place of order, book learning or scholarship, we see playfulness. A Dominican nun approaches the circle from the right, but she is not working with or embracing the students. The image is especially interesting because of the caption: "School was

built by the Catholic Church, then deeded over to the State, and most of the teachers are Catholic Sisters, though this is a public school. Sisters' salaries are paid by the State directly to the Church. Though religious teaching does not take place during the regular school period, the Sisters "naturally express the Catholic way of life, and by association with them the children cannot but receive some of the religious essence." (Father Morgan)

In the last half of the 19th century Spanish speaking families in the southwest tried to escape anti-Mexican sentiments, and in particular "English only" school requirements, by sending their children to Catholic schools that they found more welcoming and less hostile to their culture. The situation reported by the photographer Rusinow suggests that by the middle of the 20th century the state was beginning to reassert control.

Figure 10, depicting a class of older female students in a home economics class, is a familiar image of women's traditional gender roles. The young women are apparently making clothes for dolls as Christmas presents. Sex segregated home economics classes are a form of vocational education, preparing Mexican-American girls to be domestics and mothers. (Note 11) Similar pictures were made regularly at the Indian boarding schools showing Indian girls using sewing machines or cooking.



### Native American Students

Compared with other racial/ethnic groups, Native American Indians were dramatically over-represented in the photo archives. They were frequently photographed as part of the documentation of federally-funded Indian boarding schools, and as official records these images were preserved in large numbers. The American Memory site produced about sixty hits on "Indian School" and the National Archives and Record Center site yielded 106. Figure 11 is a panorama of the Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial School. In the collection, there are a number of additional panoramas showing the buildings and grounds of Indian Schools in Phoenix, Arizona, Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and other places. The Mount Pleasant panorama is an interesting composition. Female students in white dresses were placed in small groups and circles around the grounds.



**Figure 11.** Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial School c. 1910 Taking the Long View: Panoramic Photographs, 1851-1991. American Memory, Library of Congress (**Click on the image to view a larger version.**)

The image of the "industrial school" belies its name by presenting a peaceable view of grounds including a formal pond and young girls holding hands ("Ring-a-ring-a-roses, A pocket full of posies"). While clearly we are looking at an institution, nothing in the image tells us that Mount Pleasant was an "Indian" school. The pastoral scene, manufactured by architecture, costume, gendering and photography, suggests gentility and civilization without any hint of the struggle for the hearts and minds of Indian children: removed from family and community; locked in this institutional compound; sent to boarding school to

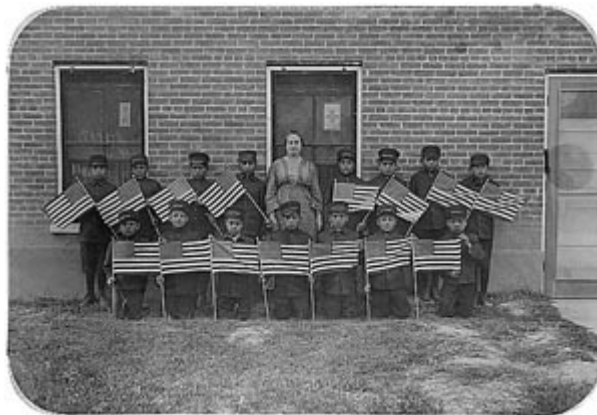
become White.

Indians were subjected to forced regimes of acculturation/assimilation unique in American history. Students were taken far from their parents and community, had their hair cut, were required to wear Euro-American dress and forbidden to speak their mother tongue. Alongside quasi-military discipline, cultural "re-education," and cleverly articulated attempts at cultural genocide to "Kill the Indian and save the man," Indian schools provided vocational training, art and music education, and sports. (Note 12) These were well-funded federal institutions with a coherent curriculum. Compare the Indian school movement, for example, with the treatment of African Americans who were denied schooling in the South until the end of slavery. Although some northern abolitionist women teachers opened "freedom schools" for freed slaves, there was no federal program to provide education to emancipated Blacks. Instead, southern states rights imposed the jim crow system of segregated schools, and northern urban school districts were segregated "de facto" by housing practices and gerrymandered districts. The legacies both of the Indian boarding schools and of segregation have yet to be overcome.

Figure 12 depicts young Indian Boys at the Albuquerque Indian School. The image is one of symmetry and order. Wearing uniforms and holding American flags, the children were posed quite formally, arrayed as a design around an Anglo American woman (teacher? supervisor? guard?) who stands in the center of the composition. Uniforms are a very important element both of the schooling experience and of the photographic images.

Uniforms were part of the original concept for Indian schools: Captain Richard Pratt who originated the concept, dressed the losers in uniforms similar to the cavalry that defeated them, and then regimented them like soldiers (PBS Video, 1991). In the photo, uniforms submerge individuality and produce an image of both conformity and interchangeable parts; moreover, they accomplish what Goffman (1976, p. 32) termed "function ranking" removing any ambiguity or status inconsistency. They also serve to strip the children of their native identity. (Note 13) The woman's lack of uniform makes her the only individual and sets her apart.

Taller than any of the children, eyes fixed firmly on the lens, the woman holds her arms stiffly at her side. In the midst of a group she stands alone, not touching any of the students. Her position is quite different from the teachers in Figure 1, who stand among the students but to the side and are depicted on the same level; or Figure 7 where the teacher seems to make a gesture of inclusion; or Figure 8 where the teacher is symbolically lowering herself to the students' level. The caption material in the Archive reads: "This is one of a small collection of photographs of the Albuquerque Indian School, which was established in 1881 to provide off-reservation industrial training to the Indians of the Southwest. By 1912, the school had 8 primary grades and over 300



**Figure 12.** Very early class of young boys with flags at the Albuquerque Indian School. c.1895 National Archives and Record Center. Still Picture Branch (NWDNS), National Archives. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**



students; by 1925 enrollment increased to over 800 students and grades 11 and 12 were added. The Albuquerque Indian School continued operating until 1982, when its program was transferred to the Santa Fe Indian School."

As the photographs make clear, the Indian school's curriculum of socialization and acculturation was not at all hidden. They were consciously created as industrial training centers to train the students for working class occupations and jobs in white society. The fact that most returned to reservations where these jobs did not exist was conveniently overlooked.

## Asian Students

A small set of photos of Chinese children emerged from a search of the "American Memory" site. Figure 13 is representative of a single shoot showing an unnamed group of Chinese at about the turn of the century posed on a rooftop. They were made by the famous western photographer William Henry Jackson.



**Figure 13.** "Chinese Subjects" Photograph by Wm Henry Jackson c. 1901. No location given. American Memory, Library of Congress. Detroit Publishing Co. American Memory, Library of Congress. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**

He made a number of exposures of the same family, but he left no firm date, location, or discussion of the occasion for the shoot. (Note 14) I find these photographs similar to the Detroit collection's images of Blacks: they share the stereotyping feel of photographs of the exotic "other." The first segregated school for Chinese students was opened in San Francisco in 1885, and rigid segregation was enforced until 1905 when the board of education allowed Chinese students into a regular city high school. In 1906 a separate school in San Francisco was established for Japanese, Korean, and Chinese children (Spring 1997, p. 76). Perhaps photographs of these schools can be found in California.

No photographs of Japanese children appear in either American Memory or the National Archives collections before 1941, when a slew of photographs were made to document the relocation procedure. Dorothea Lange and other Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographers were now working under the auspices of the Office of War Information (OWI) and completed assignments to show Japanese students in California schools and orphanages on the eve of relocation. This was followed by a long term campaign to document the internment camps, including many images showing Japanese children in school in Tule, Manzanar, Salt River and the other sites. Figures 14 and 15 are representative of these efforts. Figure 14 was made by Dorothea Lange at an

integrated San Francisco public school with large numbers of Japanese students.

The occasion was the rounding up of Japanese families so that they could be shipped to relocation camps. The choice of patriotic images, saluting the flag, clearly advanced a view of Japanese as patriotic and law-abiding Americans. Figure 15, also by Lange, shows a school class in Manzanar. Students with what appears to be a Japanese teacher are hard at work reading and writing. They have the same sort of modern desks and chairs that can be seen in Figure 7. The hidden curriculum portrayed in the relocation photographs is an unabashed patriotism illustrative of school's role in the direct reproduction of ideological belief systems. As the captions indicate, these are a class of photographs taken not to showcase school children but demonstrate to the world that the United States relocation camps for Japanese citizens were much different from concentration or POW camps. They featured images of well-equipped schools, caring teachers, and happy willing students.



**Figure 14.** "San Fransisco, California. Flag of allegiance pledge at Raphael Weill Public School, Geary and Buchanan Streets. Children in families of Japanese ancestry were evacuated with their parents and will be housed for the duration in War Relocation Authority centers where facilities will be provided for them to continue their education." 04/20/1942 Department of the Interior. War Relocation Authority. Photographer, Dorothea Lange. Still Picture Branch (NWDNS), National Archives. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**



**Figure 15.** "Manzanar Relocation Center, Manzanar, California. These young evacuees are attending the first elementary school at this War

There is another hole in the American Memory. Children with disabilities were as invisible as children of color. Based on my survey of these two mega-archives, America's photographic images of schools, and the historical memories they engender, consist nearly entirely of able-bodied white children and teachers. A search for deaf schools retrieved a single Detroit Publishing view of the outside of the "Deaf and Dumb School, Columbus, Ohio." This was a familiar institutional view with no persons present. The search also retrieved and a number of potential ("not yet digitized") photos of deaf and dumb schools from the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American

Relocation Authority center. There are six grades with volunteer teachers and voluntary attendance." 07/01/1942 Department of the Interior. War Relocation Authority. Photographer, Dorothea Lange. Still Picture Branch (NWDNS), National Archives. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**

Engineering Record. These too are likely to be photographs of architecture. Figure 16 from the National Archives is the only photograph found in either site depicting crippled, deaf or blind children in school. It is interesting that this photograph was attributed to

Franklin D. Roosevelt who was himself crippled by polio.

## Discussion

Along with all the other historical photographs in the archives, class pictures are becoming part of a modern hidden curriculum as well. Web access in schools is making historical photographs into a "curriculum" of primary source materials for teachers preparing classes and for students doing projects. There are many implications of this development for how students are taught about American history in general and specifically about the schools and students who came before them. As the preceding analysis demonstrates, the record encompassed by these photographs is full of holes. Some views are over-represented, while whole groups of students and types of schools are simply absent. This is likely the case whether one searches for school-related photographs or photos in any other category.



**Figure 16.** WPA, "Blind children at work in Art Center Workshop in Salem, Oregon." Creating Indiv. Roosevelt, Franklin D. Federal Arts Project; Works Progress Administration; 1941. Still Picture Branch (NWDNS), National Archives. **(Click on the image to view a larger version.)**

There are two central issues in the implied critique of the World Wide Web: In the first place one must consider what exists at this point in time. Clearly the historical photograph collections currently available on line reproduce the familiar historic amnesias, lapses and sins of omission, while continuing to overemphasize powerful, dominant and hegemonic structures. In this way it resembles the historiography of the first half of the 20th century with its great men theories and inattention to workers, to women, and to people of color. The photo archives valorize assimilation models, a peaceful bucolic past, upward mobility, and order at the expense of cultural diversity, domination and conflict. The second question has to do with the potential of the Web to offer a different vision. Because it is global, decentralized, and offers open access it is quite probable that some of these deficiencies will be overcome. If archives are opened to images from all sources: personal collections, small local history societies, private collectors, newspapers and so on, it is easy to imagine that a search for schools, teachers, students would return a far more heterogeneous selection.

However, even if *all* extant photographs of schools were to be made available as

digital on-line images, we would still be confronted by the deficiencies of photography itself. Many things were not photographed. I found, for instance, no views of teacher unions or organizing activities, no photographs of school boards or teacher meetings where the central decisions shaping schooling were made. There were no photographs of conflicts and tensions in schools—between teachers and students, among students, between school boards and communities. No pictures of discipline and punishment. No photographs of boredom. And even if such photos did emerge, they would not solve the central problem of the photograph; photography is powerless to represent some things. I argue in an earlier piece (Margolis, 1999) that it is not possible to photograph social relationships. My example in that article was, that although photographs could represent the coal mining process and technological divisions of labor, they could not capture the social relations of production which remain invisible: ownership, alienation, exploitation, fear, and so on. Similarly, photography can capture the physical relationships of schools, but cannot make visible the social relationships of education: failure, intellectual excitement, oppression, resistance, or teaching/learning. These are multidimensional concepts that cannot be reduced to a visual icon.

Recognizing the inherent limitations of visual images is critical if one intends to use them as other than propaganda vehicles. Given that, there are many ways that photographs can be used by historians of education, not just as illustrations to make textbooks and lectures visually interesting, but as primary source data. The preceding analysis should be taken as only suggestive, as most of the issues raised need to be investigated on their own and in more depth. This paper is meant simply as a provocative introduction, indicative of new avenues for educational research. In effect, it opens a space analogous to an environmental niche which can be explored and settled in a number of ways. As suggested earlier, there is room for the application of additional analytical techniques including quantitative methods to many of these issues. One might ask questions about the frequencies and ratios of certain types of representations, and about their correlations. It should be possible to statistically compare geographic regions and/or historical periods. It is likely that changes in representation can be seen over time. For example, one might hypothesize that the number of photographs showing integrated classrooms increases since 1954.

In some locations there exists a fairly dense and complete photographic record, allowing a kind of retrospective rephotography project to be done. Researchers could collect and arrange in sequence photographs taken at the same school over decades in order to examine and analyze social change. For instance, some of the Indian schools appear to have left a fairly detailed photographic record from the 1880's through the 1930's. It would be interesting to examine the change in these images over half a century. (Note 15) Additionally, much might be learned from cross-cultural investigations. One might compare, for example, images of order and discipline in class pictures taken in England, Japan, and the U.S.

As well as asking diachronic and comparative questions, synchronic questions need to be addressed in more depth. Careful historical analysis of the people, places, and occasions photographed is necessary. What can be discovered about the actual school, the children, teachers and communities? What can be learned about the photographers, the occasions upon which the photographs were made? How can other documentary evidence shed light on the images, and vice versa? The conventional touchstones of historical research: newspapers, school and government records, census data and so on need to be consulted and cross-referenced with the images (Margolis 1988). (Note 16) Where possible, it might be extremely fruitful to employ oral history and ethnography to gather additional information. It seems likely that it would still be possible to find and

interview students depicted in pictures made in the 1930's, for instance. More recent history, for example the period following *Brown v. The Board of Education* in 1954, could be even more useful both because participants are available to study and because the sheer volume of photographs probably increased. The techniques of the visual anthropologist — photo elicitation, inventories of various types and surveys can be employed to examine, for instance, issues relating to the inequalities of "separate but equal" or same gender schools (cf., Collier and Collier 1986).

It should also be clear that the study of school photographs is not only a historical undertaking. Social science researchers can examine current collections of school photographs: year book photographs, sports pictures, class pictures, the huge collections of snapshots and vernacular pictures found in virtually every school. One might do interesting research simply with the bulletin boards (or more recently web sites) found in many grade school classes. These constitute different simulacra, image worlds manufactured by students, parents, and school personnel. These images can be studied in much the same way, examining both the actual occasions and intentions governing the production of the photographs, the apparent symbolic meanings, and selection, juxtaposition and arrangement for display. Photographs produced as part of school culture, like historical photos, can be analyzed as icons with symbolic, iconic and indexical meanings. (Note 17)

## Notes

The author would like to acknowledge Jon Wagner and Mary Romero whose comments on earlier drafts of the article were extremely helpful in framing the argument. Marina Gair helped with copy editing on the final draft and obtaining photograph permissions.

1. There are sixteen images included in this article and most of them are photographs of classes although they were not all examples of school photography Three were produced by a professional photography company to be reproduced as postcards (Figures 2, 3 and 4). Eight of the photographs were made by various government documentary projects (Figures 5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, and 16). Two of the images (Figures 11 and 12) were part of the ongoing photographic documentation of the federally financed Indian boarding schools. Two of the images were not school photographs at all, but an attempt to find photographs of children of color who did not appear in any of the class pictures: Figure 6 was made as a postcard and shows four African American children and Figure 13 is a William Henry Jackson photograph of Chinese children. Figure 8 depicting an integrated class in Pennsylvania in 1912 appears to be a school photograph, but has little provenance to clearly identify its genre.
2. For a useful review of some of the issues of searching for photographic images see Steiner, Kathy "Finding Photographs."
3. "The most thorough audience appraisal resulted from an end-user evaluation conducted in 1992-1993. Forty-four school, college and university, and state and public libraries were provided with a dozen American Memory collections on CD-ROMs and videodisks. Participating library staff, teachers, students and the public were polled about which digitized materials they had used and how well the delivery systems worked. The evaluation indicated continued interest by institutions of higher education as well as public libraries. The surprising finding, however, was the strong showing of enthusiasm in schools, especially at the secondary level." American Memory pilot—seed of a universally available Library

<http://lcweb.loc.gov/ndl/nov-dec.html#pilot>

4. Where historians and social scientists have typically used photographs to illustrate reconstructions of the past that are entirely language based, I have advocated the use of photographs as primary source material. For many years I have been collecting, paying attention to, and thinking about American historical photographs. This work was expensive to undertake and extremely labor intensive. It required traveling to libraries, museums and photograph collections and obtaining permission to make copies -- using a film camera and copy stand to photograph each image. Much of this work was part of a study of coal miners for which approximately 12,000 historic photos were collected from archives all over the country (Margolis, 1988; 1994; 1998). Cataloging, studying and working with a collection that by necessity included slides, prints, and negatives all associated with data about captions and provenance has been a very slow and inefficient process. This process is rapidly becoming as obsolete as the card catalog, handwritten note card, and carbon paper. In a few minutes once can visit a web site, search thousands of images by keyword, download the images one is interested in and paste them into your document.
5. Many critics of the image have drawn attention to problems inherent in photography and the creation of a mass culture "image world:" cf. Adorno and Horkheimer 1973), Baudrillard (1983), Rössler (1990), Sekula (1990), and, Solomon-Godeau (1991).
6. An anonymous reviewer correctly pointed out the reflexive confirmation of this quality of the image with the observation that: "One possible 'antithetical' use, of course, is the sort that occurs in this article: critical social analysis of pictures not made with this purpose in mind."
7. People have misconstrued Durkheim's notion of "collective consciousness" to mean some kind of group mind. But this is inaccurate. The engendering of collective consciousness is both an abstract and theoretical lesson and a practical activity. It is represented in collective action and in schools, libraries, museums, repositories, and now the Internet: "Society is not the work of the individuals that compose it at a given stage of history, nor is it a given place. It is a complex of ideas and sentiments, of ways of seeing and feeling, a certain intellectual and moral framework distinctive of the entire group. Society is above all a consciousness of the whole. It is therefore, this collective consciousness that we must instill in the child" (Durkheim, [1925]1961:277).
8. Many scholars have been working to make whiteness into a visible category. See Frankenberg, 1993 for one of the pioneering analyses of whiteness.
9. The site described it this way: "This Special Presentation of the Library of Congress exhibition, The African American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship, showcases the Library's incomparable African American collections. The presentation is not only a highlight of what is on view in this major black history exhibition, but also a glimpse into the Library's vast African American collection. Both include a wide array of important and rare books, government documents, manuscripts, maps, musical scores, plays, films, and recordings. This presentation is not yet searchable."
10. I actually have seen many photographs dating from the turn of the century or before that show Mexican and Spanish American children in school. Such photographs can be found in nearly every state historical society, local history museum and library in the Southwest. As is no doubt the case with the other racial/ethnic groups it is not the absolute lack of photographs that is problematic.

- It is the curious selection process that has produced the simulacrum of "National Archives" or "American Memory" that is the issue. Moreover, the problem that is so obvious in photographs of school is no doubt present in many other categories.
11. As Mary Romero pointed out: "The 'cult of domesticity' advocated sex roles that were not really applicable to working-class Mexican Americans whose economic circumstances did not allow the maintenance of gender-specific spheres of activity—that is, women in the private sphere of the home and men in the public sphere of production and trade." Programs such as this did, however, produce trained and "Americanized" domestic workers to work for nearby Anglo families (Romero, 1992, p. 81-82).
  12. These were the words of Captain Richard Pratt who established the Carlisle Indian School. He believed in subjecting Native American youth to quasi-military discipline: uniforms and drill exercises alongside instruction in English and industrial training. (Cf. PBS Video: *In The White Man's Image*, 1991).
  13. This is equally true for the children posed in Figures 3 and 4. Uniformed students are the perfect images of "product" for the industrial-efficiency model of schooling that was the hallmark of late 19th early 20th century education.
  14. In one of the shots there is a sign and the caption: "On tablet (translated from Chinese): Today we are the owners of money, yesterday we were the owners of the territory" which may suggest the occasion for the shoot.
  15. The technique of using photographs taken over time to examine social change was pioneered by Mark Klett and given a more sociological interpretation by Jon Rieger (Klett et al, 1984; Klett 1991; Rieger, 1996;)
  16. Such research might provide important information for the interpretation of Figure 7, for example.
  17. Semiotics, the science of signs, has developed a complex and highly technical language that can be useful in the interpretation of photographic images. Images and texts are analyzed along multiple dimensions described as Indexical (pointing), Iconic (representative) and Symbolic (cultural) meanings. Serious students might consult the works of Ferdinand de Saussure, Umberto Eco or Roland Barthes. These analytic tools of semiology can also be employed in the construction of images designed to produce certain impacts. See for example: Nadin, Zakia, and Nadin, (1995

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National Archives and Records Administration:

<http://www.nara.gov/nara/searchnail.html>

New York Public Library Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture: Digital Schomburg:

[http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/images\\_aa19/](http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/images_aa19/)

The Hultstrand site:

[http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award97/ndfahtml/hult\\_home.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award97/ndfahtml/hult_home.html)

The Detroit collection:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/detroit/detcoll.html>

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