

# Photograph Analysis Project

## Omeka Digital Exhibit



In 1936 in Nipomo, California, Farm Security Administration photographer Dorothea Lange photographed Florence Owens Thompson and her children. This image, "Destitute peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February 1936," is the most well-known of the set of images known as "Migrant Mother" that Lange produced in this series. *Photo courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.*

An oft-repeated phrase is "the camera cannot lie." The equipment itself cannot "lie," but photographs can influence viewers' perception of events. Because "a picture is worth a thousand words," photographs are charged primary source documents that reveal the photographer's perceptions of events and trends. As noted in *After the Fact's* "The Mirror with a Memory," the "mirror" of the photograph is "silvered on both sides, catching the reflections of its user as well as its subjects." One cannot assume that images are bias-free, as every photographer makes interpretative choices, manipulating his content in order to impart a "coherent message" through his photography. Therefore, historians must carefully analyze and explore images just as they would other evidence from the past, for Oliver Wendell Holmes warned that a photograph was an illusion, with the "appearance of reality that cheats the senses with its seeming truth."

### Project Description

Each student will choose one period photograph to place in historical context and analyze. The student will display his conclusions in a 900 to 1300 word essay to be posted, with the image, in the Omeka digital exhibit for this class "Silvered on Both Sides." Students will upload their preliminary project

**The camera is not a simple “mirror of reality.”**

Images can be powerful weapons to arouse the public imagination.

**Photographs must be analyzed in the same way a written narrative is scrutinized.**



Clockwise from top left: The staff of the *Oakland Tribune* recorded the aftermath of a huge earthquake in Oakland, California, on October 17, 1989. *NYT* photographer Angel Franco documented New Yorkers' reactions on 9/11. German photojournalist Horst Faas took this image of American troops in Vietnam. The final photograph is an example of spiritualist photography in the late 1800s.

materials (25 points) on eCollege two weeks before the final project (75 points) is due. Late assignments will be docked 10% per day and will not be accepted after three weekdays.

## Photo Collection A or B?

You will notice on the class schedule that there are different due dates for Photo Collection A and B. Each student will be completing one of these projects, so students will be divided into two groups (*though the projects are entirely individual*) so that we have more complete coverage of images for the entire course.

**Photo Collection A** (due 3/17; preliminary materials due 2/23) can include images from 1877-1939. Topics covered include the West, the Gilded Age, Jim Crow, the Spanish-American War, the Progressive Era, World War I, the Roaring Twenties, and the Great Depression.

**Photo Collection B** (due 4/14; preliminary materials due 3/31) can include images from 1939-2008. Topics covered include World War II, the Korean War, the Civil Rights Movement, the Cold War, the Turbulent 1960s, the Vietnam War, the Gulf Wars, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina.

How to choose a group/collection? Students will be divided equally, and it is first come, first serve. The best chance to ensure your inclusion in your preferred collection is to email the instructor by noon on February 9 with your preference. Everyone else will sign up in class.

## Assembling Your Preliminary Materials

Worth 25 points, these materials will let the instructor know what image you plan on using and what direction your essay will take, so we can make any necessary adjustments before the final project.

### What to include:

1. Include the **image** you have chosen and a **link** to the exact location where you found the image online. I want to be able to see the image, confirm that you have been able to download it from the internet, and verify that you got the image from a reliable source. **(See separate sheet uploaded on eCollege DocSharing for recommended websites.)**
  - **Image requirements?** The image must be a still photograph (not a drawing, etc.) and must be “American” in content—either taken in America during the correct period or depicting Americans elsewhere (such as soldiers). Make sure you choose an image that you have enough information about to complete the assignment.
  - **What about the copyright on these images?** Fair Use allows for a limitation and exception to copyright law. In other words, you can use someone’s work without asking their permission or paying a royalty fee. Examples of Fair Use exemptions include parody, criticism, commentary, search engines, research, teaching, library archiving, and scholarship. We are creating an electronic reserve for educational research, which falls within Fair Use parameters.
2. Identify the **photographer** and indicate if you have been able to find background and contextual information about him. Give a brief synopsis of what you have found. (Three to five sentences is fine for now.) Hint: Step one in finding out about your photographer, if the website you got the image from does not have any information about him, is googling the name with “photographer.” You will be surprised what pops up.
  - List your sources for this photographer background information. See below for correct format.
  - Helpful hint, when you Google the author’s name, you may be able to find other applicable images by the same photographer, which you can refer to in your analysis, if doing so will enrich your essay.
3. Stipulate your **focus for the historical context** of your image. For example, for the image “Destitute peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February 1936,” on page 1, your topic could be the upheaval of the Great Depression which forced people to wander about looking for work, the effect of the Depression on family life, the Resettlement Administration (which relocated struggling urban and rural families to communities the federal government planned), farm migrant labor, the work of Farm Security Administration photographers such as Lange, or something else that strikes your fancy (and is subsequently approved).
4. Last but not least, include a **preliminary bibliography** of works you plan to use (at least two works). This is a *preliminary* bibliography, as you may find other sources later that you use, or some of these sources may end up being a disappointment. Wikipedia is *not* an acceptable source. You must include at least one scholarly source, whether it be an article or a book. The scholarly source cannot be the texts required for this class, and go beyond class notes for the essay.
  - Suggested places to start looking for sources:
    - *Google Scholar*: To access, google “Google Scholar,” then type in the topic you are researching with as many specific words as possible. You may have to play around with it. For my sample entry, I used Google Scholar, entering the search terms *African Americans convicts 1800s*.

- *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*: To access, go to the TCU Library website, choose databases, select “H,” scroll down, and choose “Historical Abstracts with Full Text.” You will need to enter key words and may need to play around with wording to get what you need.
- *FrogScholar*: To access, go to the TCU Library website, choose FrogScholar (above databases). Type in some appropriate key words and hit the “search” button. When you get your mammoth search results, use the check boxes at the left of the screen to narrow your results. FrogScholar will offer books you can access online or check out of the TCU library as well as digitized journal articles.
- See below for how to format the works in your bibliography. Hint: If you are copying and pasting from a database or using RefWorks, choose **Chicago/Turabian** citation style.

Internet:

Ebert, Robert. “The Last of the Mohicans.” Roger Ebert.com. Accessed August 20, 2015, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-last-of-the-mohicans-1992>.

Book:

Blackmon, Douglas A. *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*. New York: Anchor Books, 2009.

Journal article:

Bellamy, Donnie D. “Macon, Georgia, 1823-1860: A Study in Urban Slavery.” *Phylon* 45 (fourth qtr., 1984), 298-310.

All of the above materials (items 1-4) should be included in a single Microsoft Word document or PDF and uploaded in the correct **dropbox on eCollege by noon** on the date due (Collection A: 2/23 or Collection B: 3/31). I need a digital copy so that I can go directly to your sources via links.

## Writing the Final Project Essay

Students will display their research and analysis in a 900 to 1300 word essay (not counting the bibliography) due 3/17 for Collection A and 4/14 for Collection B. To avoid late penalties, the final essay must be posted on Omeka by noon on the due date. Information on how to post to [omeka.net](http://omeka.net) is in the next section.

For this essay, you do not need to have formal introduction and conclusion paragraphs, and it is not necessary to tackle historical context, photographer background/analysis, and your image evaluation in any particular order. Yet, your essay should flow easily from one subject to the next and show clear organization. Finesse the conclusion of your essay, avoiding an abrupt ending. **(For further guidance in writing your final essay, see the sample project “Stripes but No Stars” posted on [omeka.net](http://omeka.net) and uploaded in DocSharing on eCollege.)**

### Questions to consider in your essay: (if applicable)

- What is the historical context? (As noted in the preliminary material information above, your context here can be rather broad.)
- Who was the photographer? What was her background, and how did it influence her work?
- How did the photographer view his work? (Example: Jacob Riis saw his photography as a way to open people’s eyes to the plight of the poor, not as art.)
- How did the photographer use his work? (Was it published in newspapers or in books? Was it meant for wide consumption? Was the “artist” a commercial photographer hoping to sell prints to individuals?)

- What was the photographer's attitude toward his subjects? (Example: Did he distance himself like Riis, "tourist of the slums"?)
    - Are prejudices evident?
    - How do we interpret his photographs, knowing his predispositions?
  - What messages are the images meant to convey?
  - How did the photographer compose the image to achieve a certain message? (For an example see Jessie Tarbox Beals's "room in a tenement flat, 1910" discussed in *After the Fact* pp. 218-220.)
  - What does the photograph leave out? What does it intentionally include?
  - Did the publication of these images further any institutional agendas?
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- Consider details in the image that give hints about what life was like.
  - What can the historian learn from the photograph?
  - How might the modern viewer see the image differently than the photographer intended? (Examples include Jacob Riis's "Tenement-house Yard" discussed in *After the Fact* pp. 221-222 or Jessie Tarbox Beals's "Room in a tenement flat, 1910" discussed in *After the Fact* pp. 218-220.)
  - What emotions/reactions does the image invoke?
  - Do the images encourage a specific view of the event, or are they "neutral"? If so, how?



"Marc: Broken Dreams" by John Kaplan, 1992. Before the start of his first game as a professional NFL football player, Marc Spindler grimaces during the playing of American national anthem. A knee injury would end his rookie season after just three games. *Photo courtesy of Pulitzer Prize Winner Workshop.* **Note: Students may choose sports or entertainment images but only if the student's project focus is some substantive issue. If you aren't sure, ask!**

Students should be as specific as possible in answering these questions, citing unambiguous details. Papers should not consist entirely of detailed descriptions of the photographs. Any description should be tied to a specific point.

The essays will be graded for the quality of their research and original analysis as well as clarity and coherence. **The instructor will upload a rubric in DocSharing on eCollege before the final projects are due.** Please, proofread your work, double-checking grammar and spelling. Avoid passive voice, contractions (ex: can't, won't), first and second person (I, you, we, etc.), and repetitious language. The use of proper verb tense can be a bit thorny here. Use past tense when referring to the photographer's actions or the historical context. Use present tense when describing the image. (Example: "Stripes but No Stars" by photographer Thomas H. Lindsey (1849-1927) *gives* mute testimony to a reality of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that is oft forgotten. By 1900, state legislatures in many southern states *had passed* laws that targeted African-American males.)

Please, keep direct quotes short and cite them appropriately with parenthetical citations. In this case, you should cite more than statistics and direct quotes. Basically, anything that is not commonly known should be cited. This does not mean that you need to put a citation at the end of every sentence that has information from outside sources. If you have several sentences with information from the same source, you can combine your citation at the end of the paragraph or material from that source. For clarification,

see the sample project, “Stripes but No Stars.” See below for the correct format for parenthetical citations:

**Book or Article:** The county then sold his contract to U.S. Steel Corporation, where he worked in a mine near Birmingham (Blackmon, 2).

**Internet:** Lindsey wrote, “To many, this is the most interesting class in our entire list” (Museum of Photography).

At the end of the paper, include a complete bibliography of all the sources you consulted for your final essay in alphabetical order. Use the same formatting as the preliminary bibliography above (page 4).

## Posting Your Essay on Omeka

Once you have prepared your essay, it is time to post it. Remember, to avoid late penalties the final essay must be posted on Omeka by noon on the due date (3/17 for Collection A; 4/14 for Collection B).

I am sending you all an email invite to our class exhibit “Silvered on Both Sides” on [omeka.net](http://omeka.net). Clicking on the link in the invite email will send you to a webpage where you can set up your new Omeka account. Choose the “free Basic plan” at the bottom. Select a username and a password. You can activate your account when you receive a second email from Omeka after completing the above process. Click on the second email’s link and then choose “manage the site” [silvered.omeka.net](http://silvered.omeka.net). Students will be “contributors” without full editorial powers. If you do not receive an email invite from me, let me know.

- When you are ready to post your project, log in to Omeka, click on “Items” on the left, and then choose the “Add an Item” button.
- At this point you will need to fill in the Dublin Core, information about the image and essay you are posting. For this project, you are only required to fill out the core from “Title” down through “Contributor.” For “Coverage” through “Identifier,” enter N/A. See the example below:

**Title**

Stripes but No Stars *[the title for your essay; it can be the title of the photograph, if appropriate]*

**Subject**

race; African Americans; the South; Birmingham; North Carolina *[separate keywords and subjects with semicolons]*

**Description**

"Stripes but No Stars" provides a glimpse into the lives of both blacks and whites in the Gilded Age South. *[a brief abstract; include the title of the photograph here and don't forget to put your photograph title in quotes]*

**Type**

Essay

**Creator**

Scarlet Jernigan *[your name]*

**Source**

Image Courtesy of the American Museum of Photography *[the website you got the image from]*

**Date**

circa 1892 *[be as specific as possible with the date]*

**Format**

digital

**Contributor**

Thomas Lindsey *[photographer]*

**Coverage**

N/A *[through Identifier at the bottom]*

- Once you have entered the Dublin Core information, choose the tab “Item Type Metadata.” In the drop-down menu select “text.” Under the Text box which appears, click the HTML box. Then copy and paste your essay (sans title) into the “Text” text box. (Do not put an extra line between each work in your bibliography, as you would normally do. Also, your bibliography should be in alphabetical order.)
- In the “Original Format” box, enter the image’s original format. Example: photograph, platinum print, 5x8
- Select the tab “Files.” Choose the file from your computer to upload your image.
- When this is all completed, hit the “Add Item” button at the right of the screen. This will send you back to the “Items” page. You can click “Edit” for the item you just added and then the “View Public Page” button on the right to view your work as others will see it.
- If you need to go back in and adjust your post in Omeka, make sure to save your changes as you go along!

## Writing Your Response Papers

Students will complete two short response papers (300-600 words; typed, double-spaced, 1 inch margins), one for each photo collection, focusing on other students’ posts in the omeka.net exhibit. These papers will be worth 20 points each and are due a week and a half after the photo collections are posted on omeka.net. Bring a paper copy to class or email the instructor a copy if absent from class. (Due dates: 3/29 for Collection A, 4/26 for Collection B)

For this short paper, students will consider and comment on 1 to 3 other students’ posts in the correct collection. To view other students’ work, you must log in to [omeka.net](http://omeka.net). If you have not yet created an Omeka account, see the instructions under “Posting on Omeka” on page 6, but instead of choosing “manage the site,” select “view the site.” If you have already set up an account or are already in the site, choose the “exhibits” tab on the left and then select the “Silvered on Both Sides” exhibit. You may browse items and exhibits here, perusing other students’ work. To view images larger than the provided thumbnail, click on the image itself within the post.

**Questions to consider for your essay:** Is there anything that the original post missed? Do you reach a different conclusion concerning the image or the photographer’s intentions? What does the image mean to you? Avoid merely informing the instructor of what the essayist wrote.

Include a bibliography for your response paper, copying and pasting the appropriate citation(s) from the bottom of the post(s) you consider. For instance, if you had commented on my post (which you should not!), include the following citation in your paper:

Scarlet Jernigan, “Stripes but No Stars,” *Silvered on Both Sides*, accessed February 3, 2016, <https://silvered.omeka.net/items/show/1>.

## Credits

Much of the language and inspiration for this project comes from “The Mirror with a Memory” in *After the Fact: the Art of Historical Detection* by James W. Davidson and Mark H. Lytle.