Ways of Seeing: Evidence and Learning in the History Classroom

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In a recent essay, David Pace decried the “chasm” between current practices in research and those in teaching in our profession. For more than a century, historians have worked together to build a research enterprise “infused with a commitment to rigor and collective responsibility.” Yet the discipline’s approach to teaching could hardly differ more. Because we generally teach in isolation, behind doors that keep our students in and our colleagues out, a significant gap exists, in both orientation and practice, between our research and our teaching. We tend to frame problems in our research as exciting opportunities, and we often seek out colleagues to discuss our work. When it comes to teaching, however, we see problems as disreputable, something to be hidden, rather than as invitations to further the knowledge of a community of practitioners through discussion and scholarship.¹

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¹ David Pace, “The Amateur in the Operating Room: History and the Scholarship of Teaching,” American Historical Review, 109 (Oct. 2004), 1171. On viewing teaching problems as positive and worthy of research, see Randy

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Over the past decade, an increasing number of academics, including many historians, have explored the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) as one way to bridge the chasm by giving the same careful, methodical attention to problems in teaching as to problems in research. As in other forms of scholarship, knowledge claims in SOTL must be embedded in a body of knowledge, open to peer review, and accessible for exchange with and use by disciplinary colleagues. In SOTL for history, then, professional historians consider the questions about student learning that matter to them and apply standards of historical scholarship to tackle those questions. Their lines of inquiry often begin with questions about classroom practice—"How can I help students understand and use primary documents better?"—but return to issues fundamental to teaching and learning historical knowledge. The fundamental questions are varied, but historians engaged in SOTL have concentrated on two broad lines of inquiry: "What do students bring to the history classroom that may have a major impact on their learning?" and "What mental operations and procedures must [students] master in order to think historically?"

Those initial questions motivated the five authors of the case studies that follow. We are historians at institutions ranging from open-admission public colleges to highly selective private universities and were participants in the Visible Knowledge Project (VKP), a grant-supported project funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies that involved over seventy humanities faculty members on twenty-one campuses across the United States. Over the five years of the project (August 2000 to October 2005), VKP participants sought to make visible and to open for inquiry problems in teaching and student learning across the fields of history, American Studies, and ethnic studies, among others. In these case studies we report research into student learning that responds to three developments. First, the scholarship of teaching and learning, or the pedagogical turn in the profession, engages historians in investigations of how students learn to think historically, treating student work as evidence to be evaluated using discipline-specific research methods. Second, the pictorial turn in culture studies prompts historians to reconsider the significance of images in the construction of historical understanding. Despite the ubiquity of images in online archives, in classrooms, and in the broader culture, many history students and scholars struggle to devise reading strategies or protocols that are as rigorous and rewarding as those used to interrogate textual sources. Finally, the digital turn in the profession encourages scholars and students to experiment with the use of digital media to develop new forms of historical discourse, through the creation of Web- and multimedia-based articles, archives, and narratives.

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On the Visible Knowledge Project (VKP), see <http://crossroads.georgetown.edu/vkp/> (Sept. 25, 2005). In July 2003 the Atlantic Philanthropies ended its program of grant making in higher education to focus on areas such as population growth and human rights. See the Atlantic Philanthropies <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/areas_of_support/earlier_programs.asp> (Dec. 13, 2005).
The Visible Knowledge Project (VKP) Web site provides links to syllabi, sample assignments, and multimedia projects from the authors’ classes as well as those of colleagues from across fields related to American history and culture. See <http://crossroads.georgetown.edu/vkp/> (Jan. 22, 2006). Courtesy Visible Knowledge Project, Center for New Designs in Learning & Scholarship, Georgetown University.

The Pedagogical Turn

At the beginning of the Visible Knowledge Project, our research explored intersections between new digital environments and our classroom practice. Over the course of our investigations, technology became secondary to questions about student learning and historical thinking. We gradually shifted from asking what new media could do for us as teachers to exploring how students learn historical-thinking skills and content knowledge in our classes. Student work became our crucial source of evidence as we probed to see when and how students made incremental steps (or, more rarely, large leaps) toward historical understanding. Our emphasis was on the processes by which students become more expert in their thinking, so rather than concentrating on the final products of a course (such as exams or research papers) we collected evidence throughout the term, focusing on what the scholar of historical cognition Sam Wineburg has called “the moments of confusion before an interpretation emerges, while indecision and doubt reign and coherence remains elusive.” We then approached that evidence as we would sources in our scholarly research—systematically performing close and contextualized readings to develop a narrative response to our original research question.4

As in traditional historical scholarship, our individual work became part of a larger scholarly discourse about fundamental questions—in this case, about how students learn history in our classrooms, how the use of visual sources shapes and disrupts historical narratives, and how new media can provide innovative opportunities for the expression of historical understanding. Because we based our inquiries on evidence rather than intuition, we could examine our separate projects together to understand crucial issues better. We have attempted to go beyond the anecdotal, beyond the teacher-centered narrative, to analyze evidence rigorously and to engage theoretical aspects of the related scholarship. We apply to all of these strategies what the SOTL theorist Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori has called “unprecedented attentiveness to students’ work.” For us, this significant move has converted our classrooms into places where, as Salvatori envisions, evidence of student learning becomes “a litmus test for the theories that inform a teacher’s approach.”

Three core factors characterized our effort to undertake research in the scholarship of teaching and learning:

1. **Questions**: a sustained inquiry guided by questions about how students develop historical understanding
2. **Methods**: the use of discipline-based research methods to analyze evidence of student learning
3. **Scholarship**: the connection of individual research projects and findings to a larger body of related scholarship on teaching and learning

This approach has allowed us to begin the process that David Pace has described as “replacing an understanding of teaching based on folk traditions and unfounded personal impressions with one rooted in a rigorous and collective examination of what fosters student learning.”

**The Pictorial Turn**

While an emerging body of scholarship addresses the development of historical-thinking skills using textual sources, little has been published on how the pictorial turn might simultaneously complicate the study of history and offer new opportunities for faculty to teach students to think historically. If, as the historian Robert B. Bain has suggested, “the problem for history teachers begins with trying to understand what defines meaning making in history,” then the growing emphasis on understanding history through visual images as artifacts and sources suggests that our inquiries into how students come to understand historical-thinking skills should not be restricted to written texts. Our decision to make images central in our classrooms reflects a convergence of factors. Many cultural

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6 Pace, "Amateur in the Operating Room," 1189.
Theorists argue that we are in the midst of a major transformation. In 1994 W. J. T. Mitchell, a theorist of images, asserted that this change marked the end of the centuries-long text-based linguist turn in Western society. But historians have been slower than their colleagues in other disciplines to accept the pictorial turn. “If historians have heard of it,” the historian of education Sol Cohen noted in 2003, “they have ignored it.” Historians traditionally have preferred textual over visual sources, and traditional historians continue to argue for the primacy of written texts. Yet, increasingly some historians have begun to rely on images as essential sources for scholarship, and recent investigations of photographs and portraits, advertisements and buildings, have illuminated significant aspects of the past.7

Technological changes have made it easier to use images and other primary sources to teach history, but abundance and availability do not guarantee historical understanding. In the past decade, visual archives have burst onto the World Wide Web in ever-increasing numbers, making it simple to paste images onto class Web sites and into PowerPoint presentations. Textbook publishers offer teachers and students a dazzling array of sources, graphics, and other visual materials. While visuals have become commonplace in history classrooms and texts, rarely do images move to center stage to become the focus of interpretation or the source of new insights. Pedagogically, visual materials are too often used only as presentational props.8 A slick slide shown in class or an appealing Flash movie posted on a course Web site might transmit information effectively, but such uses fail to capture the interactive possibilities of images and new media, used together, in promoting students’ historical understanding.

Students might enjoy, even demand, visual stimulation, but students do not necessarily enter a college classroom able to give visual sources the disciplinary reading that furthers their historical thinking. As Wineburg has argued, historians read primary documents in a distinct way, applying a “sourcing heuristic”—that is, a set of questions about a document, its author’s intentions, and its reliability—to use texts to build arguments about the past. Students, in contrast, read sources in a less sophisticated way, as sources of information, or “content knowledge.” But because many historians have been so skeptical of images, we have few conventions for reading images as historical sources. Louis Masur maintains that pedagogy is perhaps the most challenging aspect of the emerging image-based scholarship: “Letting one’s students interrogate, speculate, and often hyperventilate is an alarming business, especially when at the [end of class] you cannot tell them definitively how to read a picture or precisely how an image shaped history.” The point of our


classes is not to entertain our students, but to help them learn to think historically—to develop their facility for making historical meaning from the images, texts, and objects in the world around them. Responding to the pictorial turn will require historians to help our students become sophisticated readers—and perhaps even authors—of image-based historical narratives.

The Digital Turn

Teaching students to craft engaging and effective historical interpretations, a perennial challenge, becomes even more problematic in the digital classroom where faculty ask students to design multimedia- and Web-based projects that demonstrate their ability to think historically. In comparison to more traditional assignments such as term papers, multimedia compositions allow students to use various forms of evidence (text, images, audio clips, and music) to experiment with new forms of critical analysis and narrative. Individual and collaborative multimedia authoring in the classroom—involving multiple skills and points of view and frequently connecting a public audience to student work—resembles, on a much more modest scale, the efforts of historians to develop new forms of scholarship tailored to the digital medium. Can the digital turn do what William G. Thomas III and Edward L. Ayers, pioneers in digital authoring, envision—can it make visible or reconfigure “deeper connections among documentation, evidence, and analysis than a single plane of fixed text can offer”? What opportunities and obstacles do electronic environments offer novice and expert historians interested in rethinking historical narratives? How might the scholarship of teaching and learning help us better


understand how the digital turn affects the development of historical thinking in our students?

**Bridging the Chasm: Case Studies from the Visible Knowledge Project**

In the sections that follow, each of us outlines how her or his own scholarship of teaching and learning research has explored the intersection of visual evidence, multimedia authoring, and historical understanding. Working with our students in new-media environments, we are generating evidence of how historical thinking with visual arguments develops in our students. Our analysis of that evidence leads us to posit five interrelated themes, each foregrounded in one of our essays:

1. In “Thinking Visually as Historians: Incorporating Visual Methods,” David Jaffee discusses how pushing our students to see visual evidence contextually can help us teach historical reasoning better.
2. In “Confronting Prior Visual Knowledge, Beliefs, and Habits: ‘Seeing’ Beyond the Surface,” Peter Felten illustrates how engaging students through a seemingly familiar and self-evident visual culture can also direct them to confront both their deeply held beliefs in particular historical narratives and the constructed nature of any source.
3. In “What’s the Problem? Connecting Scholarship, Interpretation, and Evidence in Telling Stories about Race and Slavery,” Tracey Weis explores how watching students connect evidence and scholarship as they construct historical arguments reveals ways to use new media to enrich student understanding of historical investigation and argumentation.
4. In “Moving beyond ‘the Essay’: Evaluating Historical Analysis and Argument in Multimedia Presentations,” Michael Coventry proposes that combining argument and evidence in multimedia historical narratives drives faculty and students to rethink the limits of writing as a way of representing historical knowledge.
5. In “Connecting to the Public: Using New Media to Engage Students in the Iterative Process of History,” Cecilia O’Leary documents how students become citizen historians by creating digital histories that not only connect them personally to the history they study but also give them the tools to make history public.

Our collaboration has helped us see that the very openness and uncertainty at the heart of the task of interpreting visual materials provide an opportunity to introduce students to the complexity of the past. That complexity often stands in direct opposition to prior knowledge and beliefs about history. Our research also leads us to propose that the confrontation with complexity and the sense of power gained in creating a visual argument replicate for students some of what practitioners experience as we create historical narratives in both traditional and nontraditional media. Making the process of student learning visible offers possibilities both for our students to learn to think historically and for us to develop a rigorous and open approach to our pedagogy, bridging the chasm between research and classroom practice in our profession.
Thinking Visually as Historians: Incorporating Visual Methods

David Jaffee

When students encounter images, they often offer incomplete readings, demonstrating difficulty integrating their insightful visual readings with contextual historical understanding. When asked to “look” and “react” to images, they frame responses that open and close with immediate reactions. All too often, visual materials promote relatively simplistic emotional interpretations because the student viewers offer freestanding responses based solely on the image before them, unencumbered by the context or additional documentation historians use to make meaning with such powerful visual documents. Studying the way my students looked at visual materials, I realized that word and image needed to be reunited if students were to learn to think visually as historians. I came to this conclusion by raking the pedagogical turn: watching my students look, paying attention to the intermediate steps they took on their way to understanding historical problems and mastering the use of sources. Analyzing their work in the light of the scholarship of teaching and learning has helped me develop a strategy that pushes students to see historical context, connection, and complexity as they develop interpretative strategies for visual sources.

For several years, I have collected evidence of student learning as a result of doing the online viewing assignments in my urban culture course, Power, Race, and Culture in the U.S. City, taught at the City College of New York. From the start, students were eager to look at the images as well as the historical and literary texts I posted for them. But the exercise of putting them together, of moving back and forth as a historian might do, proved elusive for many. When they moved onto the terrain of images, many students offered suggestive readings of the individual images before them, and they even referred to other visual materials, but few could integrate multiple sources into an interpretative narrative.

I saw evidence of this difficulty when I asked my students to look at the 1941 murals at the Health and Human Services Building, created by Seymour Fogel, and to describe and interpret what they saw. Henry wrote:

The painting "Industrial life" by Seymour Fogel (1941) echoes an Urban industrial society. In the painting, we can view five men at work. The artist is trying to project a sense of economic labor values that all America should follow and be aware of. Labor and Industrial is seen as one, the viewer in 1941 should have seen this painting as a positive step for his country. In the painting different labor is being introduced, from the scientist to the train conductor. The colors of the painting are flat tones and the drawings are simple in form. The art work was being in the Washington. D.C. Health and Human [Services] building, words to encourage the people to strive forward!!

Most students followed Henry, with general comments about the industrial character of the objects, drawn from the murals' titles, for example, and from the figures. They referred to the image's visual qualities or its historical significance but were unable to weave the parts into a larger whole. A few students expressed more complicated understandings of the images as visual constructions. Olivia perceived that portrayal of industrial work in a “romanticized light” as a historical change from earlier representations. Arthur, com-
David Jaffe uses Seymour Fogel's *Industrial Life* (1941) in an image-viewing assignment for his course Power, Race, and Culture in the U.S. City at the City College of New York. *Courtesy Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the General Services Administration.*

menting on another of the murals, pointed out their idealized nature, connecting them to other New Deal and World War II-era art, including the paintings of Norman Rockwell and the photographs of Dorothea Lange, both discussed in earlier classes. He could relate the medium of the mural as well as the significance of Fogel's style of drawing (which he likened to "a way that marble might be sculpted into statues") to the murals' message, their "monumental" representation of the force of family life.\(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\)**OLIVIA:** "The *Industrial life* picture seems to view industrial work in a romanticized light, which contrasts with the way it originally used to be represented. Early in the century, industrial life was seen as unsanitary, dangerous, menial work, fit for only the poor. This picture, however, uses vivid, warm colors, clean cut and clear drawn lines. I think after WWII (this picture was created in 1941) there seemed to be more of a romanticized view of technology and industry and all that can be accomplished. The picture shows 4 types of work being done that are necessary to an industrial society. There's the scientist, the architect, the worker, and I guess the engineer.

"The second picture 'Security of the Family' is supposed to represent family life and roles during the 40s. The woman (the mother) is seen holding a child—obviously meaning that women were expected to be mothers and child rearers. The Father is seen as being more 'intellectual,' sitting down at the table, seeming to have an important air about him. The girl is drawing, to represent that girls are seen as being artistic. The young boy is playing tennis. It shows that girls are supposed to 'act like girls,' being calm and 'cultured.' Boys seem to have more liberties in their manner of behavior."

**ARTHUR:** "Seymour Fogel's painting, 'Security of the Family,' reminds me of Norman Rockwell's paintings, 'The Four Freedoms.' The Rockwell image from that group that comes to mind most immediately is the one where the child is being tucked into bed with the father looking on holding a newspaper containing terrifying headlines.

"Both Rockwell and Fogel are presenting idealized images of American society, but they're different. Fogel is not seeking to portray the warmth and intimacy of the kind that Rockwell seeks to portray. Fogel's figures, drawn in the way that marble might be sculpted into statues, present Family Life as a monumental, larger than life force.

"The sky overhead may be gray and overcast, but the mother—staring out into the undefined future much as the mother in Lange's 'Migrant Mother'—is, like the other members of the family, stolid, sturdy, unwavering in their march forward into the unknown."
Yet, like most other students, Arthur did not raise relevant questions of patronage and audience or muse about the historical “purpose” of the mural project. Henry did attend to placement, but his visual analysis was slim and unconnected to his thematic framework. Even when Olivia and Arthur offered sophisticated understandings of the images, they did not connect their visual readings to text-based course materials—primary and secondary. Even the best students that first year offered separate, unintegrated readings of texts—visual and literary.

Analyzing their efforts, I realized that students needed more scaffolding so that they could learn to move between historical, literary, and visual materials. Perhaps, I thought, I could create an online miniarchive, selecting sources that could enrich the complexity of their readings while helping them keep the context in sight. I wanted their experience in the miniarchive to model how scholars revisit their assumptions in a recursive process of intertextuality, repeatedly moving back and forth among texts and other sources as they weave them together.

My new assignment asked students to look at two 1837 portraits of Indian leaders: Wi-jiun-jon, Pigeon’s Egg Head (The Light) Going To and Returning From Washington by George Catlin and Keokuk: Chief of the Sac by Charles Bird King. Each then wrote “a paragraph or two explaining what you see,” a provisional interpretation the student shared with a partner before moving into a miniarchive containing documents selected to help the students situate the two representations: more portraits; speeches by Keokuk; text from Thomas Loraine McKenney’s History of the Indian Tribes of North America, where the Keokuk portrait appeared; writings by George Catlin about Pigeon’s Egg Head; and two extensive Web sites. From this miniarchive, students selected two documents that they thought added context and meaning to their initial reaction to the portraits.

Students encountering George Catlin’s 1837–1839 portrait of Pigeon’s Egg Head often flatten their readings to fit into what they initially understand as the starkly contrasting choices of accommodation or resistance, sellout or revolt, facing Native American leaders in the early nineteenth century. The visual and textual materials of the miniarchive prodded students to move beyond those dichotomies, developing their historical reasoning and realizing more complex understandings. Using these additional sources to inform her reading of the Catlin portrait, Isadora imaginatively reconstructed the Assiniboines’ response to their leader’s foolish exchange of his “impressive Indian accoutrements” for foppish attire, including his high-heeled boots, fan, and umbrella, and the liquor bottle in his back pocket, interpreting his actions as compromise in the face of overbearing force. When Isadora turned to the Keokuk portrait, she continued to wrestle with the ambiguity of the image:

When looking at this painting of Keokuk, one feels that there is something different about this majestic Indian chief. The feathers and animals’ skins indicate that he is a powerful, typical Indian chief . . . But what makes this Indian chief sort of ambiguous? Why does he convey both Indian pride and strength and the acceptance of whites’ values?

At the City College of New York, David Jaffee asks students to use a miniarchive of documents to assist them in interpreting George Catlin's *Wi-jun-jon, Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light) Going To and Returning From Washington* (1837–1839). Courtesy Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison Jr.

Additional sources, McKenney's *History of the Indian Tribes of North America* and information on the interpretative stance of the painter Charles Bird King, helped her contextualize the portrait:

In fact, Keokuk refused to collaborate with another Sac chief (Black Hawk) to fight against the whites, who were going to take their lands. He accepted to exile with his followers and was therefore much respected by the American government. He succeeded in constantly convincing his people not to join the war because he knew—according to Thomas McKenney, who was commissioner of Indian affairs between 1824 and 1830—that they would be defeated. He is generally depicted as a strong, determined and very tactic person. And [King] clearly depicts this sort of dichotomy that characterizes Keokuk: he was both a typical Indian chief who, with calm and realism, governed and protected his people and a good negotiator who knew how to deal with the whites. That is why he still appears as a majestic, respected chief on the painting, unless the painter, as it was often said about him and his passion for the Indians, idealized the character and improved the reality of the time.

Moving beyond conventional accounts that frame Native American choices as either accommodation or resistance, Isadora had begun to tell a far more complex and messy his-
torical story of a leader who had to wend his way through competing native factions and a welter of governmental officials, local and national, as well as deal with the divergent demands of settlers and reformers. She also understood that the sources—both texts and visuals—were not unmediated; the Native American voice—and body—comes down to us through Anglo hands and transcriptions. Yet, looking at the portraits by Catlin and King, she had seen some of the layers of complexities that allowed their subjects to represent themselves through pose and costume rather than merely to be represented by the painter. Like John Singleton Copley’s wealthy merchant subjects, Catlin’s Pigeon’s Egg Head and King’s Keokuk collaborated in constructing their likenesses. Isadora demonstrated how students can learn to read portraits in their historical context, appreciating complexity.¹⁵

Like most students, Isadora had plunged into the miniarchive to select specific texts directly relating to the portraits. Her classmate Judy used the miniarchive differently. She chose sources seemingly distant from the original portraits: an appeal by the Cherokee chief John Ross protesting Indian removal in the 1830s and the exoticized depiction of vanquished Indian leaders on the cover of an early twentieth-century popular periodical. These she deployed to explore the broader topic of the perils of assimilation. Here, she modeled the practice of an expert or professional historian who enters an archive with a series of questions or a tentative hypothesis in search of evidence, pulling apparently unconnected texts into a relationship and then constructing a plausible story.

By yoking portraits and prose together, this exercise moved beyond the mere addition of images as illustrations, instead helping students think visually as historians. In creating the miniarchive, I wanted to push students away from freestanding looking and toward historically contextualized seeing of the visual evidence. Watching Isadora and other students move from examining a single image to comparing two images and then to contextualizing particular portraits within a miniarchive of word and image, I learned how students gain an understanding of the complex strategies that Indian leaders devised in the early nineteenth century. Students discovered for themselves the coexistence of choice and constraint. They came to appreciate how the power and pressure of the new American state limited Pigeon’s Egg Head and Keokuk but how the two leaders nonetheless deployed imaginative strategies to navigate the new political world that they faced.

Like their subjects, historians too face constraints—the use of evidence, modes of documentary analysis, the need to connect the local event to larger themes or topics—that close off possibilities and hem in interpretations. But we also have choices—about what we teach and how we teach. I have used the scholarship of teaching and learning to develop new strategies for integrating visual materials with other sources to help students comprehend context, to develop their understanding in a way not possible using textual sources alone. My intention is to build scaffolding that helps students to see beyond the simple, to formulate provisional questions for inquiry, to encounter new sources, and then to revise their earlier assertions. In this way, I hope to help students learn the process of historical reasoning.

Confronting Prior Visual Knowledge, Beliefs, and Habits: “Seeing” beyond the Surface

Peter Felten

Students enter our classrooms with knowledge, beliefs, and ways of thinking about both past events and the study of history. Although many of our students were born in the late 1980s, prior schooling and popular culture have helped them construct well-defined “cultural memories” of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Vietnam War, and even more ancient history. Indeed, we all bring into the classroom knowledge, beliefs, and habits of thought that shape how we make sense of class material. Older students and faculty who have lived through a historical period being studied cannot rely on personal recollections for an objective version of the past. My scholarship of teaching and learning research explores how visual sources can be used to reveal and disrupt such historical and cognitive assumptions, helping students take necessary steps toward more complex understandings of the past.

The first time I taught a senior seminar on the United States in the 1960s at Vanderbilt University, I came to understand just how powerful cultural memories could be. Most of my fifteen seniors, nearly all history majors, entered the course with a shared and deeply ingrained vision of the decade. The typical student story, which I attributed to the film Forrest Gump, went something like this: The 1960s began with a unified nation (except for some backward white southerners) making bold progress in all endeavors, but the Vietnam War and assassinations tore the country apart, leaving chaos and fragmentation at the end of the decade. That story emerged repeatedly during the semester as many students struggled to reconcile our course work with their prior understandings—and when conflicts emerged, Forrest Gump’s simple narrative often trumped more complex views of the decade. Many white students, for example, regularly shifted the rise of black power to the end of the decade, implicitly assuming that only the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. could have produced such militancy. Throughout the semester, I seemed to repeat: “It’s more complicated than you think.”

The next time I taught the course, I began the semester with an exercise designed to confront student beliefs about the decade. Before we even discussed the syllabus, I gave the students ten primary sources from the 1960s, including excerpts from Richard M. Nixon’s 1969 inaugural address and from King’s “I have a dream” speech and photographs from demonstrations for civil rights and arms control. I also played for them a Janis Joplin song and the 1971 “Hilltop” television advertisement for Coke. I then asked pairs of students to put the sources in chronological order and to explain why they placed each source where they did. After thirty minutes, I called the class together to compare notes. None of the pairs had sequenced the sources correctly, but that was not really the point. Instead, as students talked about each source, they began to see the holes in the

Forrest Gump narrative—and then students began saying, “It’s more complicated than I thought.” Because this experience disrupted knowledge and beliefs about the 1960s that students brought to class, we were able, together, to use the semester to develop new and more complex understandings of the decade. In a little over an hour on the first day of class, the source-sequencing exercise had transformed the course and had taught me how interrogating visual knowledge could disrupt students’ constructed narratives and habits of analysis.

This experience confirmed for me what cognitive scientists have found: that people “come to formal education with a range of prior knowledge, skills, beliefs, and concepts that significantly influence . . . their abilities to remember, reason, solve problems, and acquire new knowledge.” Our students live in a highly visual world, where images are fundamental in shaping their understandings of history before they ever enter our classrooms. I now realized that I must recognize and confront my students’ prior visual knowledge and cultural memories to help them move beyond a Forrest Gump version of history.

The source-sequencing exercise began that pedagogical process, but it also demonstrated that my students often struggled to interpret primary sources, particularly visual ones. To give my students practice making historical sense of complex sources, including images, I interspersed a series of short source-reading exercises through the semester. In each, I provided students with a packet of three or four primary sources (typically including photos and excerpts from newspapers, letters, or speeches). I instructed every student to answer the question “What significant things do you know, and don’t you know, about each source?” I also asked students to rank the items according to their reliability as historical sources and to explain their rankings.

Although I expected these exercises to reveal a range of student capacity to read sources, over multiple semesters I found a troubling consistency in student response to visual images. A few students could offer fairly sophisticated readings of photographs, asking, “Who took these pictures? What is context of the last photo?” and even probing how and why each picture was taken. But most students, including the most sophisticated readers, fell back on cultural assumptions about photographs when asked to assess their dependability as sources. Colin, one of my most capable students, wrote: “These pictures record a moment that clearly happened. Pictures shot candidly tend to not have inherent prejudices, though it is easy to interpret them as you will. Pictures are basically neutral.” Other students echoed this view. Melanie noted that “the Photo Collection is the most trustworthy source—images often speak louder than words.” Jane referred to the photos as “snapshots of what actually happened.” Marvin summarized the typical student analysis when he wrote, “Photos—the almost most objective evidence there is.”

Just as students had brought the Forrest Gump narrative into the classroom, they had also brought beliefs that shaped how they made sense of historical sources. “The myth of photographic truth” overruled what my students had learned in history classes (include-

19 I adapted the ranking question from Wineburg, Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts, 75; and Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life (New York, 1998), 91. For a detailed explanation of both the source-sequencing exercise and its results, see Peter Felten, “Photos—The Almost Most Objective Evidence There Is: Reading Words and Images of the 1960s,” Reader, 52 (Spring 2005), 77–94.
ing mine) about the constructed nature of any source. At the same time, many students spent far less time evaluating visual sources than textual ones, resulting in facile readings that typically ignored aspects of analysis they routinely applied to texts. In one class exercise, for instance, Jill began her close reading of two textual sources with comments on the author and audience. But she failed to consider such issues when examining two photographs; instead, she performed a quick reading of the people depicted in the photographs, concluding, “You know the man pictured [Bobby Seale] must be at least slightly liberal by his hairstyle.” Jill, it seemed, read the photographic sources as she might read a pictorial spread in a magazine, rather than transferring the analytical techniques for reading primary texts that she had developed in history classes.

Yet the same source-reading exercises that raised troubling questions about students’ understanding of photographs as constructed sources demonstrated that they could perform sophisticated analysis of documentary film footage. Student readings of video-based sources often paid particular attention to the ways moving images are edited and produced. Angela, who struggled with photo analysis, performed expertly with one video excerpt.

Don’t know context—setting of events also unclear. Don’t know who filmed or what was purpose of film. Don’t get to hear from anyone being filmed . . . so don’t know their intentions. Don’t know how film has been edited—what it doesn’t show—only a few minutes excerpted from several days. Can get more of an idea of state of mind of protestors by watching body language than through other sources which rely on description—give good feel.

Other students identified similar issues. Lilly noted that “[I] don’t know the persons or organizations responsible for the film and any biases they may have.” Mark wondered, “Who directed it? What were the judging criteria for what clips made the video? Is there other footage which might have contradicted the video’s overall theme?” Colin asked similar questions about the video production (“Who shot it? Who compiled it?”), but he took his analysis one step further: “Does [the video] have legitimate claim to the omniscient tone with which it narrates events?”

In marked contrast with readings of photographs, then, students consistently noticed the constructed nature of the documentary film source, asking how both the video images themselves and the video editing shaped the source. Maria highlighted what appeared to be the central distinction for most students: “Video [is] similar in content to photos but editing . . . can put a spin on images.” Marvin echoed this view: “The clip is an edited representation of those events and even though the footage may be authentic, the editing [is] not.” For Marvin and many of his peers, the constructed nature of the video robbed the images it contained of the inherent objectivity of stand-alone photographs. The editing process corrupted the fundamental “photographic truth” of video.


21 This aligns with Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen’s findings that films and television are widely considered to be untrustworthy sources of historical knowledge. See Rosenzweig and Thelen, Presence of the Past, 91, 97–101. It seems, however, that some people may internalize a historical narrative presented on film or tv (such as Forrest Gump) even though they tell researchers and teachers that such video sources are of dubious historical value. Emphasis added.
By understanding the rich but problematic visual knowledge, beliefs, and habits that students bring to the history classroom, we can develop new and more effective strategies to help students learn historical content and reasoning. In my class, I have tried both to work with students' visual liabilities, using images to confront the popular but flawed history they bring into the classroom, and to build on their visual assets, helping students transfer techniques for reading moving images to the analysis of still ones. Thus, the scholarship of teaching and learning offers us an opportunity to attend systematically to the prior visual understandings and the habits of looking that students bring to our classrooms. In my own work, I will continue to collect and analyze evidence of how students read and reason from visual sources and use such evidence to help them develop more critical and contextualized visions of history.

**What's the Problem? Connecting Scholarship, Interpretation, and Evidence in Telling Stories about Race and Slavery**

Tracey Weis

For years students seemed to come to my African American history course with the *Gone with the Wind* interpretation of slavery that collapses four centuries of history on four continents into the plantation production of cotton in the Deep South in the late antebellum period. I want them to comprehend how slavery "worked" in different places and times and to understand the role of slavery in the making of America. I knew I could use the traditional lecture format to tell them about the complexity of the peculiar institution. Even so, I wondered if they could show me how they navigated between their prior knowledge and beliefs about slavery and the new forms of evidence and scholarship they would encounter in my course. The scholarship of teaching and learning has helped me address two persistently pressing pedagogical concerns: (1) how to get students to see beyond their visions of slavery as monolithic and (2) how to make the process of historical interpretation and narrative construction more visible for myself and for novice historians such as my students. It has guided me in developing multimedia exercises for students that combine text, image, and narration in ways that make visible to them the complexity of historical research and the knowledge it produces.

My interest in having students broaden and complicate their narratives of slavery led me to devise "Telling Stories about Slavery at America's Historic Sites," a three-week unit that culminates in student PowerPoint slide shows based on their assessments of how the Web sites of Monticello, Mount Vernon, Colonial Williamsburg, and the National Park Service interpret slavery and race. Small groups of students work together to combine their readings of the Web sites with other relevant visual and text sources; they then produce a research report consisting of fifteen to twenty PowerPoint slides accompanied by a narrative—a script—for class presentation. Functioning as visual paragraphs, the slides show the relationships between the evidence students select from the Web sites, the historiography they locate in the *America: History and Life* database, and the arguments about slavery they develop as they maneuver back and forth among the sources. The deliberate

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juxtaposition of historical incidents, types of evidence, and scholarly analyses helps them grasp the complexity of slavery and its interpretation. Contrasting four colonial-era historic sites would, I hoped, allow students to see how they had privileged antebellum cotton plantations as the singular sites of slavery.23

I first introduced the unit in fall 2001. In reviewing the initial round of presentations, I realized I did not know how to assess the messy complexity of what students were learning about slavery as they researched, produced, and presented their multimedia narratives. Yet, within six months, collaborative work with colleagues in the Visible Knowledge Project who shared my interest in multimedia student authoring resulted in the development of a common framework for evaluating multimedia projects.24 With a better understanding of how to evaluate narrative organization, thoughtfulness in the use of images, and the process of multimedia authoring, I was ready to try again.

The following fall I tried to map student presentations frame by frame so that I could see how students were assembling primary and secondary texts, images, scripts, and audio narration into narratives. A close reading of their work helped me recognize that students had begun to grasp the need to create a contextualized narrative that acknowledged both the existence of many stories about slavery and, to quote the historian Ira Berlin, the complicated and protracted ways "Americans have situated their own history in terms of the struggle between freedom and slavery—and freedom's triumph."25 Nonetheless, their capacities for incorporating visual evidence into their historical explanations were uneven and at best generally at the novice stage. Below, I discuss what I learned from one presentation that analyzed the Web site of Colonial Williamsburg.

The substance of the student presentation began with a slide that contained three elements: an image of shackles, a photograph of a contemporary historical interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg, and a reference to a required course reading by the historian James Oliver Horton. But the script that the student had created as narration referred to neither of the images; instead, it summarized Horton's argument that "historic places give concrete meaning to our history and our lives as no spoken or written word alone can do," a claim that served as a compass for my students as we tacked back and forth between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the local and the national, in our efforts to situate and to scrutinize slavery. Surprisingly, the presentation did not include or interrogate the


24 We drew on several resources to develop our rubric for assessing multimedia narratives. For the elements that make a "good story," see the Cookbook from the Center for Digital Storytelling <http://www.storycenter.org/remvoice/pages/cookbook.html> (Sept. 20, 2005). For the components of effective historical narratives, see the National History Standards <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards> (Sept. 20, 2005). For guidance in using images in a historical interpretation, see Martinez, in "Imaging the Past" 21–45. For rubrics of narrative construction, see "Digital Storytelling: Some Selected Online Resources," VPK Community Newsletter (Sept. 2002) <http://crossroads.georgetown.edu/vknp/newsletter/0902/resources.htm> (Sept. 20, 2005).

A student in Tracey Weis’s class at Millersville University used a 1993 image of Robert Watson Jr. as Old Paris, a first-person interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg, in order to analyze contemporary reenactments of slavery. *Courtesy Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.*

caption of the photograph from the Web site: “Old Paris, played by Robert C. Watson, awes with tales that teach.” While an expert historian might have chosen to juxtapose the harshness of the shackles and the benign image of a grandfatherly storyteller to raise questions about the contradiction between the brutality of punishment and the benevolence of paternalism, the novice historian seemed unable to exploit the interpretative potential of the juxtaposition.26

Similarly, the student author of the next slide used a photograph of the reconstructed slave quarters at Carter’s Grove plantation, run by Colonial Williamsburg, to illustrate her evaluation of the organization’s Web site. Although she had probably read “Representing Slavery: A Roundtable Discussion” in the issue of the online journal *Common-Place* that included the photograph, her script did not refer to it directly. The accompanying narration—“the Williamsburg site gives us the impression of a quaint, small, harmless slave community without all the cruelties that were experienced”—only obliquely pointed back to the discussion, in an article in the round table, of the daily challenge African American interpreters face in trying to “strike a balance between being truthful and being tasteful.” Yet the student’s assessment did acknowledge the contradictions between Colonial Williamsburg’s visual representation of master-slave relations and the scholarship on the subject. Labeling her argument, “The Good, the Bad, and Pretty Ugly,” she identified as positive the site’s insertion of information about the working lives of

Slavery, in the eyes of whites, was glossed over. Not everyone agreed with slavery, but the ones who did made slavery out to be a pleasant experience. White people would make comments such as "they were fed and sheltered, what more did they want?"

For students in Tracey Weis's class at Millersville University, the task of contextualizing Jean-Baptiste Le Paon's Portrait of General Lafayette Accompanied by His Orderly, James Armistead (1783) illustrated the challenges of interpreting images of slavery. Courtesy Lafayette College Art Collection, Easton, Pa. Gift of Mrs. John Hubbard.

slaves. This inclusion of African American presence was undercut, however, by the Web site's misrepresentation and omission, termed the "Bad" and the "Pretty Ugly" by the student critic. The student pointed out how the Web site "completely glossed over" the brutality of slavery and "the mistreatment of human life that occurred there." These contradictions prompted other members of the class to ask whether the images and text on the Colonial Williamsburg Web site reflected the content and tone of the living-history presentations.

In the next two slides, a new author explicitly juxtaposed scholarship and visual evidence to advance critical interpretations. Tellingly she titled her two companion slides "Slavery through the Eyes of Whites" and "Slavery through the Eyes of Slaves." In the former, she set Jean-Baptiste Le Paon's 1783 portrait of General Lafayette accompanied by his orderly James Armistead against a rather lengthy caption: "Slavery, in the eyes of whites, was glossed over. Not everyone agreed with slavery, but the ones who did made slavery out to be a pleasant experience. White people would make comments such as 'they were fed and sheltered, what more did they want?'"

Her skepticism of the benevolent paternalism that the portrait announced was evident. But, I wondered, had she brought that wariness, informed by her own experiences as a


young African American woman, into the classroom at the beginning of the semester? Or had she refined her understanding based on her consideration of the experience of the first-person interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg? In any event, her conclusion that the visual evidence misrepresented James Armistead included an awareness of authorial intent: “This picture portrays the idea of noble savage. Whites who did not want to believe that slavery was wrong called African Americans noble servants rather than slaves. This picture gives a false image of how slaves dressed. When looking at this picture one might believe that African Americans were treated equal to whites when in reality that was not the case.”

In the next slide, this same student author offered a bulleted summary of some of the harsh aspects of slavery in visual juxtaposition to The Old Plantation, an undated and unsigned (perhaps late eighteenth-century) picture found in Columbia, South Carolina, that depicts playful slave leisure:

- Taken from their home only to be forced to do laborious work for white men
- Treated as if they had no soul
- Torn apart from their families

The student’s narration for this slide included quotations from several scholars speaking to the difficulty of African American survival in the face of the brutality of slavery. After featuring an analysis of slavery in the antebellum period, she turned next to the words of a freedman extracted from a secondary source on Reconstruction: “We haven’t got our rights yet, but I expect we’re go’n to have ’em soon. . . . we’re men now, but when our masters had us we was only change in their pockets.” She then invoked Frederick Douglass to conclude her analysis: “A man’s troubles are always half disposed of when he finds endurance the only alternative. I found myself here; not getting away; and naught remained for me but to make the best of it.” Once more she used scholarship and textual sources to challenge visual evidence that portrayed master-slave relations as benevolent. Yet, although her slides were conceptually rich and interpretatively sharp, the student seemed untroubled that they were analytic collages comprising visual and textual “traces” from different historical eras and places.

Taken together, these excerpts from the Colonial Williamsburg presentation illustrate both the increasing complexity of students’ understandings of slavery and the persisting unevenness of their analyses. Looking back on the evidence I collected, I can identify three distinct moments when students’ understandings faltered and suggest what I learned about intervening in those episodes:

First, students unaccustomed to critically evaluating visual historical evidence tended to employ a cut-and-paste approach to images. They either extracted an image as a free-
standing item devoid of context or pulled an image and its accompanying scholarly commentary as a unified and coherent item. This, I learned, reflected their inexperience in working with primary sources of any kind. I needed to help them develop their understanding of how—and why—expert historians attend to context and authorial intent. Then these young scholars could apply their newfound skepticism about veracity and motive to subsequent analyses of all primary sources.

Second, neither my students nor I had begun the class with an understanding of how contemporary culture shaped the knowledge of slavery that they brought with them. My presumption that they shared the *Gone with the Wind* interpretation worked against making their prior knowledge and beliefs about slavery visible. Nor had I considered the images of slavery they carried with them from such films as *Amistad* or from illustrations in high school textbooks. Moreover, references to “White America” and “White people” in the slides had alerted me to the necessity of making students’ prior knowledge and beliefs about *race* more explicit in the classroom so that we could all see how these interrupted our analytic efforts to “compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions” in the past. Recognizing that images evoked both cognitive and affective responses from students led to the realization that exploring students’ prior beliefs meant encouraging them to articulate desires, fantasies, and fears as well as rational reactions—a daunting challenge indeed, but one I found necessary if our learning were to proceed.

Third, students displayed particular historical-thinking skills when they undertook particular tasks in their analyses of slavery, but they seemed unable to bring their multiple competencies together. As a result, their efforts to move beyond novice interpretative strategies were haphazard rather than systematic and often generated collages rather than narratives. Yet, by bringing together the content of historical interpretations on the one hand and the organization and form of the analysis on the other, they had taken important steps toward understanding the complexity of historical representation. When they constructed their individual slides, they understood the tension between showing (demonstrating) and telling (narrating). Peer-review discussions of the presentations pushed this learning even further, as students asked each other to justify their selections of images and texts: *Why* did you select *this* image? *What point* were you trying to make? *How does that image* relate to *this excerpt* from a primary document? The students were demonstrating how the technique of juxtaposition enhanced their understanding of how historical narratives are constructed. By gaining competencies in composing the individual “visual paragraph” for each slide, students were preparing to take the next step in narrative construction: creating more coherent and more comprehensive explanations of causation and consequence.

Inspired by the scholarship of teaching and learning to contemplate students’ work more closely and more carefully, I am challenged to refine my strategies for helping students develop the skills and dispositions of historical inquiry. The multimedia format of

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52 Additionally, as the National Standards for History urge, students must develop competencies to interrogate “a variety of visual sources such as historical photographs, political cartoons, paintings, and architecture in order to clarify, illustrate, or elaborate upon the information presented” in written narratives. National Center for History in the Schools, *National Standards for History* (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/thinking5-12-2.html>) (Sept. 20, 2005).

the historic site reviews made the problems and possibilities of historical argumentation and narrative visible even as the collaborative review of the multimedia interpretations put the process of historical interpretation on display. Evaluating students' efforts to incorporate visual evidence into their analyses, however, is making me rethink the limits of writing as a way of representing historical knowledge. Like David Jaffee and Peter Felten, I recognize that many students need more practice in reading visual sources with skill before they can effectively use them to present compelling and coherent historical interpretations. Nonetheless, like Michael Coventry and Cecilia O'Leary, I am excited by the new forms of historical argumentation emerging in multimedia narratives. I am optimistic that working together, as scholars and educators, we can continue to build our knowledge of teaching and learning in ways that will advance both the pedagogical and professional practice of history.

Moving beyond "the Essay": Evaluating Historical Analysis and Argument in Multimedia Presentations

Michael Coventry

What might it look like if our media-savvy students expressed their historical analysis through new media? What can we learn about how historical knowledge is created by watching students make and present their work in new-media forms? Because at times written description has seemed inadequate to communicate the richness of the visual and aural record of popular culture, my students and I experiment with creating short multimedia narratives as a way of exploring those questions. In these projects, students intermingle images, music, and voice narration to form a multimedia, multidimensional critique. Becoming interpreters and explainers of the cultural past and present, they analyze their objects of study and create multimedia projects in order to tell interpretative stories, to show the viewer examples and evidence to support their interpretations, and to connect their stories to larger themes in culture and history studies. In this essay I use tools from the scholarship of teaching and learning to describe my students' learning and some of its constituent features through an examination of student multimedia experiments.34

As the only historian teaching in an interdisciplinary media, technology, and culture studies M.A. program, I introduce my discipline and its habits of thought to students. My students come from a variety of backgrounds, possessing bachelor's degrees in journalism, accountancy, cognitive science, computer studies, English, history, journalism, and communication. They enter the program with different aims and perspectives, but they share a passion for digital media. They expect the program to help them develop a strong command of both oral and written communication, to provide them with opportunities to work collaboratively with students from other disciplines, and to equip them with the skills they will need to succeed in a rapidly changing media environment.

film studies, political science, or business, to name just a few possibilities. Their degree program exposes them to a broad range of issues raised by networked technologies and new media. Most come into my courses with intricate frameworks for understanding media, and they eagerly embrace opportunities to think about how to interpret and analyze in formats that move beyond writing.

Using evidence of various sorts—digitized film or video footage, images, photographs, music—my students build multimedia analysis by the juxtaposition of this historical evidence with their own analytic voices presented in recorded narration or titles. In written narratives, historians present textual evidence through quotations, numeric evidence through tables, and visual evidence through reproductions of photographs, maps, or cartoons. We surround this evidence with interpretation, placing quotations among our statements or directing our reader’s eye to images or tables reproduced above or beside our analysis. But too often—and this is most apparent in the case of video or music—we are forced to represent visual evidence and pinpoint our analysis to specific parts of it through written description. Multimedia allows audiences to see or hear moving pictures or songs; it allows authors to show multiple examples quickly with narration over them or to guide viewers over specific parts of an image and show analysis directly beside or over a specific point.35 When projects are successful, they engage in the sort of insightful, carefully considered argument we expect from written work, but the means of expression can be very different. Multimedia allows my students to show their subjects as they analyze them. Such work thus illustrates both the possibilities—and some of the limits—of multimedia authoring for academic work.

Looking closely at my students’ projects reveals that multimedia work in history depends on the relationship of two key techniques: (1) the compression of argument and (2) the use of simplistic cultural memories for complicated ends. The multichanneled, multilayered nature of multimedia authoring allows—indeed relies on—compression of argument, conveying a great deal of information quickly and by a variety of means. Compression intentionally invokes simplistic cultural memories to make its argument. It occurs in all forms of communication, including writing, but multimedia authoring brings compression to the fore: the viewer must recognize an era or associate a sound with a particular cultural milieu. The best multimedia authoring projects will then explain, clarify, or challenge the cultural memory in question.

Two student multimedia projects showed me how the two interrelated techniques are central to the presentation of historical analysis in new-media narrative forms. Allyson Hurt’s digital story revealed the historical construction of simplistic cultural memories, while deploying compression to show that the very cultural knowledge she invokes as evidence is historically contingent. Malgorzata Rymsza-Pawlowska used a period style of filmmaking to evoke, through compression, an entire era. She then mixed evidence and argument to read her subject outward, into a larger historical argument.

Allyson Hurt’s digital story explored a contemporary television program starring actor Ben Sander in drag as Brini Maxwell, a “domestic goddess” who guides viewers to per-

fect home life through exemplary cooking, cleaning, and decorating. Hurt's story used multimedia capabilities to establish a historical context for her subject. Hurt illustrated the continuity of domestic goddess ideals in American culture with a montage of 1950s and 1960s photos and TV footage of Donna Reed—an actress famous for her popular television portrayal of a perfect housewife—and similar TV and magazine images of the 1990s celebrity domestic expert Martha Stewart. Hurt then introduced Maxwell, a cross-dressing television personality whose use of the domestic diva tradition helps show the historical construction of gender, particularly the performance of housewife and domestic goddess. Working in new media, Hurt could accentuate the ways Maxwell self-consciously performs and destabilizes the domestic diva tradition. Maxwell's clothing and sets exist in a no-man's-land between contemporary style and the aesthetic of the late 1950s—early 1960s, when Reed's show was popular. This is intentional: according to Hurt, “Maxwell cites Reed as one of her biggest inspirations.” The connection to Martha Stewart is effected through Maxwell's blonde wig and statuesque height. While both connections could be conveyed in writing (as I have just done), multimedia allowed Hurt to demonstrate her point more vividly. Viewers could see in chronological order the domestic icons from whom Maxwell creates her satirical performance. In this sense, multimedia provided the cultural evidence alongside Hurt's analytic voice.

Just as she simultaneously showed Maxwell performing a particular femininity and documented its construction, Hurt used the show's intentionally simplistic cultural memory of the history of femininity to demonstrate that memory's instability. As she wrote in her reflective essay, the show “both celebrates and satirizes these ‘old-school’ values. Brini's sensibility seems intentionally anachronistic, provoking dissonance between Brini and the perceived sensibilities of ‘modern’ women and further underscoring the fact that Brini is a constructed persona.” Throughout the project, Hurt relied on this dissonance between the viewer's sensibilities, the mythical womanhood Maxwell portrayed, and Maxwell's outrageous and self-referential performance in order to make a critique. Hurt assumed that the viewer would recognize the satire in Maxwell's performance. In this sense, Hurt was working with key features of new-media argument: the multimedia author relies on the viewer's store of cultural knowledge and uses images, music, or other keys to evoke that knowledge and to show complex juxtapositions of meaning. Yet compression works only if viewers possess the cultural knowledge needed to give a story the intellectual and emotional effects the author intends. Compression functions paradoxically as a limitation and strength of multimedia: when Hurt “reveals” her subject's “true” gender, we are forced to question all the assumptions we have brought to bear in viewing the entire piece.

In her multimedia project, Rymisz-Pawlowska used the style of a silent newsreel to evoke the 1920s. She interwove still images, clips from period movies, and full screens of text (intertitles) to present her analysis of smoking as a symbol of women's modernity and relative freedom in 1920s popular culture. Her choice of genre allowed her to present...
Michael Coventry's student Małgorzata Rymsza-Pawlowska evokes the 1920s by mixing her own intertitles with historical film clips and accompanying them with period music. She connects women, smoking, and female performances of modernity and independence.


evidence and analysis together. “The film clips and advertising stills speak for themselves,” she reflected, “and with the help of the intertitles, indicate a strong case” for historical change. She chose the “gushing style” of the newsreel as a way of “conveying the excitement of the modernity that was very much a feature of the decade.” Through the creative use of the newsreel format, Rymsza-Pawlowska both evoked the era and made her argument seem to come from within that very era.

Like Hurt, Rymsza-Pawlowska opened her piece with a rapid montage of images: a headline about woman suffrage, a headline about shortening skirts, and a clip of women typing in an office, signaling some of the “large-scale socio-economic and political transformations that would profoundly affect the lives of American women” in the early twentieth century. Thus she set the stage for her overall argument: the connections between smoking in popular culture as a symbol of women’s independence and the real changes in women’s lives in the 1900s–1920s. Again like Hurt, Rymsza-Pawlowska used compression in her opening montage to establish context. But while Hurt sought to establish a lineage showing the ways gender is a historical construct, Rymsza-Pawlowska evoked and established multiple historical factors using artifacts from a single period. She then placed her subject—smoking—in this context as a symbol and expression of white middle-class women’s “new freedoms” in the decade.


lowska showed how smoking signaled the flapper's freedom while symbolizing more significant developments. She used images of a variety of women engaged in relatively new public leisure activities (with and without men) while smoking to help us understand the broader reach of this symbol beyond the flapper stereotype. But unlike Hurt, who, reading inward or deeply, focused on one subject in detail over time, Rymsza-Pawlowska read one subject (modern woman/flapper/female smoker) outward through advertisements, still images, and movie clips. She connected her subject to a variety of discourses to show that subject's ubiquity and the force of its meaning across 1920s culture.

Both Hurt and Rymsza-Pawlowska relied on compression of argument, and both evoked cultural memories and stereotypes to produce their historical analyses. Yet, to most historians, those very moves might at first glance seem to flatten intellectual complexity. How do we know that accounts are critiquing, not replicating, the simplistic cultural memories they invoke when they undertake compression? How can we tell when stereotypical images reproduce old interpretations or when they instead open interpretative possibilities? To answer those questions, historians can turn to the scholarship of teaching and learning for methods that help us watch carefully as students make choices about bringing together video clips, images, narration, and music to build their arguments. Due to the very compression of the form, we might at first glance miss the deep complexity of the arguments. It is easy for those of us trained to argue using words to focus solely on the narration of a digital story, without paying attention to the ways the words work with, over, and against the visual narrative constructed by the student. We need to learn to read new-media forms so that we can recognize the intended argument within them. In addition to strengthening our own knowledge of multimedia communication, another way to ascertain complexity is to ask students to reflect on their own intentions, whether in written proposals for projects, post-project reflective papers, or video- or audiotaped reflections. Like a successful research paper, a successful multimedia narrative project in history is based on solid research and analysis and is the product of multiple drafts and revisions. Asking students to share draft scripts with the professor, to turn in bibliographies, or to write reflections—all are ways of increasing our understanding of student intentions, sophistication of argument, and (relative) success in their projects. The standards of argument are the same, but the possibilities for making them are decidedly different.

Connecting to the Public: Using New Media to Engage Students in the Iterative Process of History

Cecila O'Leary

As a cultural historian in an interdisciplinary department—New Humanities for Social Justice—at California State University, Monterey Bay, I continually grapple with what to emphasize in the one required history course for majors. At the Visible Knowledge Project Summer Institute in 2000, colleagues encouraged me to foreground the digital turn in history by linking new media with my longtime goal of inspiring students to become citizen historians.

This collage is the logo for Cecilia O'Leary's course Multicultural History in the New Media Classroom at California State University, Monterey Bay. O'Leary's student Yael Maayani designed the collage in 2000, using the artist Rini Templeton's drawings. Templeton created the drawings between 1974 and 1986 for public use by activists in Mexico and the United States. Courtesy Betita Martinez.

Citizen historians understand their right both to learn and to make history: they assume responsibility for contributing to the ongoing project of uncovering the diversity of our past and expressing that historical knowledge in a public forum. In Multicultural History in the New Media Classroom, I combine traditional approaches to reading and writing with an assignment that requires students to present their research projects in new-media forms. Students are involved in authentic tasks—that is, the kind of work undertaken by historians, including complex inquiry and analytical thinking—and accept accountability for the “public dimension of academic knowledge.”

Self-consciously applying the scholarship of teaching and learning to evaluate my course and its outcomes, I have been able to document how digital history assignments helped my students develop two key historical-thinking skills. First, my students developed the ability to place themselves in history; this is an especially significant achievement since many of them are working-class and first-generation college students from migrant

families who work in the fields surrounding my university. Although such students are too often seen only as hampered by deficits associated with inadequate preparation, my students in fact bring critical assets to the classroom—family and community experiences that help them write narratives of social change and move those stories from the margins into the mainstream of history. Second, my students discovered the iterative nature of historical knowledge—that is, the need for historians to revise their findings in light of the knowledge they discover in the process of research and presentation. In their own efforts to stitch together the patchwork of evidence they have collected, they learned how to refocus, rewrite, and rethink the stories they tell.

Making digital histories presents students with daunting technical challenges. But these new-media narratives also foster student learning in large part because of the real stakes in presenting history to a wider audience. As deadlines approach, students try to fill holes in their research and to comprehend whether new information strengthens their original interpretation or raises new directions. The very act of going back over the evidence they have collected involves them in the pattern of recursive iterations that "separates good historians from not very good historians."43

The particular historical period or pedagogical approach I take varies each year as I incorporate lessons garnered from evidence of student learning from the previous semester. Recently, in spring 2005, I decided to create my own course reader so that students could have models of how both academic and nonacademic writers combine personal approaches with the telling of history. Each section contained articles that took students on an intellectual journey from "Theory: Framing Identities and Histories" to "Practice: Storytelling and History-making" and finally to "Visions: What Are You Going to Do to Make History?" Articles included excerpts from Raymond Barrio's The Plum, Plum Pickers, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's "Invasion of the Americas and the Making of the Mestizocoyote Nation," and Paul Takagi's "Growing Up as a Japanese Boy in Sacramento County."

Learning the different ways historians portray the past is an important part of the scaffolding—instructional support—students need to author their own history. They choose their own research topics, often from their lived experiences or out of a commitment to social justice or a desire to learn about struggles for equality ignored or minimized by their high school history textbooks. They are required to write an abbreviated research prospectus that describes the topic, takes a metacognitive look at initial assumptions, details research questions, and lists sources. They explore the campus library, online archives, and resources in surrounding communities. I encourage them to look at a range of possibilities for primary materials: published and unpublished sources such as newspapers

42 What students bring into the history classroom is a crucial area for future research on student learning. See Pace, "Amateur in the Operating Room." On assets-based approaches to multicultural learning, see the special issue "Pedagogies for Social Change," ed. Susan Roberta Katz and Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary. Social Justice, 29 (Winter 2002), 1–197.

43 In approaching documents, students enact processes similar to those of historians. See Wineburg, Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts.


In 1970, when California vegetable growers refused to recognize the United Farm Workers (UFW) union, the workers went on strike, and their leader, César Chávez, called for a nationwide boycott of lettuce and in consequence was jailed. Cecilia O’Leary’s student Marisa Jimenez searched the local history room of the Steinbeck Library in Salinas, California, and found a December 1970 clipping of her grandfather Antonio Margarito supporting the boycott. She included it in a media presentation for O’Leary’s course Multicultural History in the New Media Classroom. Slide from “The Life of Antonio Margarito: The Bracero Program,” California State University, Monterey Bay, fall semester, 2002. Courtesy Marisa Jimenez.

and diaries; visual records found in photo albums and films; everyday artifacts including family cookbooks and clothing; evidence from the built environment seen at local cemeteries and in memorials; and aural sources encompassing oral histories as well as music.

I involve my students in a cognitive apprenticeship by making visible and explicit to them my own thinking about the construction of historical narratives. I explain how I decide which sources to use, question evidence, and analyze findings. I work with students to unwrap the art of storytelling and the discipline of critical thinking while my education technology assistant demystifies how to create computer-generated short films. As they might in drafting an outline of a paper, but working with multiple layers of evidence, students juxtapose images, text, special effects, and sound in what video makers call a storyboard. Students also write a reflection on the reasoning behind their choices. As these storyboards change during the course of the semester, I collect evidence of how students are learning the iterative nature of historical knowledge as they undertake successive edits of their digital narratives, visually rearranging the elements on their storyboards.

What follows are three short examples of how students grow into their roles as citizen historians, learning to place themselves in history, and to present their narratives to a wider public, including fellow students, their families, and communities.

“Look what I have found!” declared one of my students, the daughter of farmhands who work in the fields surrounding California State University, Monterey Bay. Proudly,
Marisa produced a picture of her grandfather marching with César Chávez, her little sister in his arms. After many hours of researching the United Farm Workers (UFW) movement at the local library, she had found the photograph buried in the newspaper archive. With this discovery, Marisa now felt confident that she could document her family's connection to making history. The subsequent revision in her research focus, from abstract to personal, informed her choice to create a bilingual, bicultural film, using both Spanish and English audio narration, Latino and Anglo visual representations, and music from both cultures. Her film presented the photo of her grandfather surrounded by the red and black colors of the United Farm Workers while other clips featured compelling images drawn from magazines, newspapers, and family photo albums. Marisa had succeeded in weaving her family's personal experiences into a broader social history—one that made sense to her and to her community.

Another project, "A Place to Remember," told the history of a nine-year battle in San Francisco to keep the International Hotel (I-Hotel), home to Filipino seniors, from being torn down. It opened with a full-screen image of an empty lot filled with weeds and remnants of a concrete foundation while Megan, the film's narrator, asked, "What does an address mean? Whose lives and what histories lay behind the numbers?" The film later cuts to images of thousands of protesters juxtaposed to scenes of Filipino elders being dragged out of the I-Hotel by deputy sheriffs. The audience hears Megan's voice reading an excerpt from an interview: "It filled my heart with anger, I hated how the city let something like this happen. If they were white it probably wouldn't have happened." Taken by surprise, the audience learns that those are the words of her father, Rey Mojica, "one of the thousands of protesters there that morning." Part Filipina, the student producer had embarked on her research because she had wanted to find out more about her heritage. In her research Megan found out that her own father had been one of the protesters. That discovery enabled her to revise her understanding of her connection to the struggle and to place herself and her family within it. At the close of the semester, she planned to give copies of her film to the International Hotel Senior Housing Organization and to share it with her parents, hoping her project "touches my father as much as it has touched me."

In a third project, Nicole chose to focus her digital history on an aspect of Italian culture in San Jose. Enthusiastic about the film she had created, she showed it to her large extended family. Everyone crowded around the television, taking great pride in seeing how Nicole's grandfather, a high school dropout, became a leading figure in bringing Italian accordion music to California's Bay Area. Images from scrapbooks, newspapers, wedding invitations, and community programs moved across the screen. At the end Nicole had included a clip of accordion music, but to her surprise, instead of applause, a heated debate erupted. The family demanded to know why she had used "Sicilian" rather than "Italian" music to conclude her film. Until that moment, Nicole had not realized the two were significantly different. Her family's enthusiasm for making sure the evidence she used was right made the reciprocal nature of constructing historical knowledge possible and visible in her very own living room. Their heated response spurred her to want to revise her digital history and get it right—although our class had already ended.

Going public can involve risks, as in Nicole's case. But the public presentation of the digital history increases students' excitement about the relevance of the past as they see themselves as citizen historians imparting knowledge to others. After close readings of student evidence culled from over three semesters of collecting digital histories, student
reflections, and videoed exit interviews, I am confident that my students leave my classes with the ability to contextualize themselves in history. They are aware of the reciprocal nature of constructing historical knowledge and the iterative process in which new evidence constantly reshapes ideas and interpretations. They can, in the words of one student, not only "dialogue with books and communicate with primary sources from the past" but also integrate words, sounds, and visuals in the public representation and narration of history.  

Conclusion

"Insofar as knowledge about teaching is anecdotally conveyed, it cannot be systematically traced... neither can it be systematically built on, since it cannot be accurately retrieved," Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori has argued. In short, an anecdotal approach to teaching "does not conform to most commonly accepted criteria of traditional scholarship." In order to build our knowledge of teaching and learning in our own field, we realized that we had to engage the growing literature about the scholarship of teaching and learning being developed by historians with zeal and with a collective rather than an individual gaze.

Our intense collaboration has brought us together in electronic networks, conferences, and VKP writing residencies, where we have shared and critiqued each other's ideas and drafts. We have wrestled with questions of what constitutes historical understanding and how to present history in the classroom. We have together explored the openness and uncertainty of interpreting visual materials—recognizing in our work the complexity of the past and the challenge to our prior knowledge—an exploration that we now think essential for our students as they strive to acquire historical understanding. Our evidence has enabled us to see that process better.

What does it mean to think historically? That question has been central to us. As numerous recent critics have argued, history has traditionally been reluctant to engage in reflection on its own practice. But we believe that these theoretical and philosophical problems are empirical issues for exploration in our own classrooms. Through careful attention to how students learn, we have come to fresh insight into our own practice as both researchers and teachers of history. Watching novice historians develop historical skills forces us—the expert practitioners—to uncover and articulate those skills and practices that we have internalized over time.

Our VKP work in the scholarship of teaching and learning has made us conscious that engagement is the first step in historical inquiry; that historians read both visual and traditional texts with attention to context and heuristic sourcing; that juxtapositional comp-

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plexity enhances and deepens our understanding of history. We are learning from and with our students to be self-conscious about the intricate choices we make when constructing historical narratives, and the compression we use when we invoke visual or textual representations involves intricate choices. We study our students as they reenact our iterative processes of research and revision; and we struggle with them to make meaning with and for a larger public.

Whether as readers or researchers, our observations of students making meaning with visual and written sources now inform our own scholarly practice. Curriculum specialists often deliberate over how to ensure the transferability of skills from one class to another as a student moves through a curriculum. Analogously, we ask whether our scholarship of teaching and learning after the pictorial and digital turns transfers not only to the next class we teach but also to our more traditional scholarship as historians of particular countries, eras, and topics. These case studies push us to move beyond our opening question: Why do we use visual approaches in our teaching? to ask the disciplinary question: Why are we not using visual evidence and visual modes in the presentation of our own practice and research? How can visual evidence inform, or provide alternative perspectives to, our traditional research practices? What kinds of historical narratives can we visualize, construct, and present within our field and to a larger public?

We conclude that the pedagogical-visual-digital turn offers an alternative perspective for historical understanding and historical presentation. As we explore how historical meaning is constructed from new, relatively unfamiliar types of sources and presented to a public increasingly accustomed to visual communication, we grow in understanding of our own often-unexamined disciplinary practices. The scholarship of teaching and learning offers a new way for historians to see their discipline—to think, write, and communicate about history, in the classroom and beyond.