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Black and White and Color: American Photographs at the Turn of the Century

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So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor. Dat's where Ah wuz s'posed to be, but Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, 'where is me? Ah don't see me.'

Everybody laughed, even Mr. Washburn. Miss Nellie, de Mama of the chillun who come back home after her husband dead, she pointed to de dark one and said, 'Dat's you, Alphabet, don't you know yo' ownself?'

Dey all useter call me Alphabet 'cause so many people had done named me different names. Ah looked at de picture a long time and seen it was mah dress and mah hair so Ah said:

"Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!"

Den dey all laughed real hard. But before Ah seen de picture Ah thought Ah wuz just like de rest.

Janie, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,
by Zora Neale Hurston

The Hampton Album

The reading of the photograph is always historical; it depends on the reader's "knowledge," just as if this were a matter of a real language, intelligible only if one has learned its signs.

Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*

INTRODUCTION

EARLY IN DECEMBER, 1899, an energetic, thirty-five-year-old, white woman photographer named Frances Benjamin Johnston started to work on a commission for the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute

in Hampton, Virginia. Hampton Institute was originally an industrial arts and teachers training school for former slaves. Somewhat later it began an experiment to matriculate American Indians dispossessed of tribal land. It was founded shortly after the Civil War by the charismatic white reformer, Colonel Samuel Chapman Armstrong, former commander of the 8th and 9th U. S. Colored Troops. Armstrong intended to teach Southern blacks (also American Indians by 1878) "how to educate their own race," as well as to "provide them with Christian values, and to equip them with agricultural and mechanical skills by which they could support themselves during the months when school was not in session. They were to abjure politics and concentrate on uplifting their race through hard work, thrift, and the acquisition of property."¹ The school was supported by private Northern philanthropy as well as by government funding, and it enjoyed liberal Quaker support that included the famous abolitionist poet John Greenleaf Whittier, in whose consideration the Hampton militia unit was forbidden to drill with real rifles. Hampton opened its doors in 1868 with two white teachers and fifteen black and female students; but by the time of Miss Johnston's arrival thirty-one years later, it had grown to almost 1,000 students, 135 of them Indians, with about 100 faculty and administration members. By 1880 over 10,000 Southern black children were being taught in schools staffed by Hampton graduates; over ninety percent of Hampton's black graduates taught school, although vastly fewer Indians graduated with similarly usable credentials, since they returned home to reservations where teaching opportunities for native Americans were scarce.²

In 1888 the school authorities braced for an attack by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs on the Indian program as unhealthy and repressive. But Hampton emerged from a subsequent investigation by the Board of Indian Commissioners with renewed prestige that was not to founder seriously until the early years of the next century, when, under a new program for native American policy, Congress withdrew the government subsidy for the Indian school. After the turn of the century, Hampton would also come under extensive attack by national black educators. It was then alleged, by W. E. B. DuBois and others, that the "widespread adoption in the South [of Armstrong's program] by the end of the century helped retard Black achievement in higher education for decades."³

However, when Johnston arrived in 1899, the Hampton Institute was clearly an enormous success by many, if not all, measures. The reputation of the school was then at its most impressive. In his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, published in serial form in *Outlook* magazine in 1900, and thus contemporaneous with Johnston's photographs, Hampton's illustrious graduate Booker T. Washington recalled the electrifying effect of news of the simple existence of the school upon many Southern freedmen, who heard about it through the grapevine.

One day, while at work in the coal-mine, I happened to overhear two miners talking about a great school for coloured

people somewhere in Virginia. This was the first time that I had heard anything about any kind of school or college that was more pretentious than the little coloured school in our town.

As they went on describing the school, it seemed to me that it must be the greatest place on earth, and not even Heaven presented more attractions for me at that time than did the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia, about which these men were talking. I resolved at once to go to that school, although I had no idea where it was, or how many miles away, or how I was going to reach it; I remembered only that I was on fire constantly with one ambition, and that was to go to Hampton. This thought was with me day and night. . . .

Perhaps the thing that touched and pleased me most in connection with my starting for Hampton was the interest that many of the older coloured people took in the matter. They had spent the best days of their lives in slavery, and hardly expected to live to see the time when they would see a member of their race leave home to attend a boarding-school. Some of these older people would give me a nickel, others a quarter, or a handkerchief.⁴

At the other end of the social spectrum Hampton also drew serious attention. There was an "enlightened and liberal"⁵ board of trustees; President James A. Garfield was a backer; so were Dr. Mark Hopkins, and many former abolitionists who succeeded to political and educational positions of influence after the war; beginning in 1873, the Hampton Student Singers, and afterwards the Hampton Quartet, sang and played on fund-raising tours throughout the country, in Steinway Hall in New York, and for President Grant at the White House. In fact, it was to advertise the existence and success of Hampton to an even broader, international, audience that Hollis Burke Frissell, Armstrong's successor, engaged Johnston to take the 1899 set of photographs. Her commission was thus a public relations assignment. The photographs were wanted to make part of an exhibition of contemporary American Negro life, to be shown at the Paris Exposition of 1900. Eventually, they won much acclaim there. Later they were used for fund raising and publicity by the Hampton administration, and as illustrations for articles by Booker T. Washington on black education.

Frances Benjamin Johnston's photographic standing was almost as well established as the educational reputation of the Hampton Institute at the time of her Hampton assignment. Francis Benjamin Johnston was born in West Virginia in 1864 and grew up in New York City, Rochester, and Washington, D.C. After studying drawing, painting, and writing, in Maryland and at the Académie Julien in Paris, she returned to the United States, and in 1889, at the age of twenty-five, she began to use

photographs to enhance the articles she wrote as a correspondent to a New York magazine. In the early 1890s she opened a successful portrait studio in Washington. In 1896 she started contributing highly praised pictorialist photographs to the best of the art photography salon exhibitions. Along with Gertrude Kasebier and Clarence White, she was a member of the jury for the Philadelphia Photographic Society in 1899, and by the same year she was publicly recognized as "the most distinguished of the club women photographers."⁶ Johnston also had a substantial journalistic portfolio and continuing photo-documentary ambitions. For ten years, *Demorest's Family Magazine* had been a source of assignments for her on topics such as the United States Mint, the Pennsylvania coal fields, life in the White House, and Mammoth Cave. *The Ladies Home Journal*, too, was a regular outlet for her work, including a thoughtful 1897 article entitled "What a Woman Can Do with a Camera." Johnston's mother was related to the wife of Grover Cleveland, and during the 1890s Johnston was also able to use the family connections to become the "unofficial 'court' photographer of the White House."⁷

But her most pertinent assignment occurred just seven or eight months before the work at Hampton. In April and May 1899, she photographed the segregated Washington, D.C., school system for the Paris Exposition of 1900, devising ways to transport her heavy and awkward equipment and to handle typical school groupings and settings in a formally pleasing manner. In six weeks on the job she made over 700 6½ by 8½, or 8 by 10" negatives. Undoubtedly, the high quality of those photographs, as well as personal contacts in Washington, helped Johnston to garner the Hampton assignment. In fact, Johnston went on to base a significant portion of her career upon the two school assignments she undertook in 1900. She published the Washington, D.C., school photographs in a series of sixteen booklets on progressive education, entitled *The New Education Illustrated*, and after working at Hampton, she continued to photograph black and Indian education at Tuskegee Institute, similar schools at Snow Hill and Mt. Meigs, and the Carlisle Indian School.⁸

The Hampton images are Johnston's most beautiful and most complex work. It is largely for them that she is known and appreciated currently, although she maintained an active photographic career for another forty years, until she was seventy-six years old. Very much like Walker Evans, then another master image maker of the South, Johnston produced her most significant work in a very short and concentrated span of time.⁹ But as Lincoln Kirstein correctly wrote, the Hampton photographs, although compressed in time, "comprise a body of work almost inexhaustibly revealing."¹⁰ They seem, initially, to open a window on the past, a black and Indian past rare in the record, and, in the words of Pete Daniel and Raymond Smock, "to document the essence of the people and the institution."¹¹ They are also hauntingly beautiful physical objects. The powdery silver winter light of the platinum image translates even into the printed



Figure 1. All photos: Frances Benjamin Johnston. (All photos courtesy of Library of Congress.)

reproductions; and the dignified placement of bodies and buildings echoes, for some viewers, the solemn compositions of Thomas Eakins or Seurat.¹² As if transported by a kind of photographic "You Are There," viewers have been tempted to take this rare peek, the devoted "thusness" of these detailed and stately forms, for an icon of the past. After all, in these images one sees the people who lived it, and standing there are the buildings where the past took place.

And yet, a closer acquaintance with the characteristics of photography as a medium of communication, and with the characteristics of historical evidence generally, implicates the facade of directness and undermines the transparency of the "spirit of fact" that informs this body of work.¹³ The past, while it is undeniably recorded in the Hampton album, is not so straightforwardly legible. The photographs, like most photographs, are disingenuous. They are beautiful objects, but they appear to be artless, in a sense of cunning or craft. It is understandable why a claim of transparency has been staked for them; the photographs, wrote one critic, "radiate such innocence and good hope that they make me want to cry."¹⁴ Yet it requires a far more strenuous reading before one may move from a photographic text to a world gone by. As Alan Trachtenberg has recently written concerning Civil War photographs, "the closer we look . . . the more does their incontrovertibility come into question. They are, we learn, vulnerable to exactly the same obscurities of other forms of evidence. The



Figure 2. All photos: Frances Benjamin Johnston. (All photos courtesy of Library of Congress.)



Figure 4. A Hampton graduate's house.



Figure 3. The old-time cabin.



Figure 5. The old well.

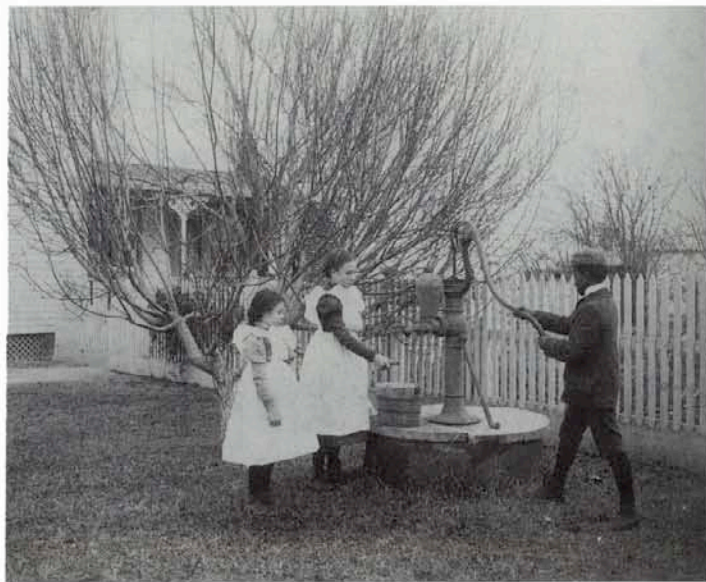


Figure 6. The improved well (three Hampton grandchildren).

simplest documentary questions of who did what, when, where, and why may be impossible to answer. And much more consequential matters of meaning and interpretation, of narrative and ideological tropes, of invisible presences and visible absences, have rarely even been asked.¹⁵ Photographs bury their art in a facade of inevitability. What we learn of the past by looking at photographic documents like the Hampton album is not "the way things were," to use the essentializing phrase. Instead, what they show us of the past is a record of choices. What a photograph represents is a solution to a clash of forces that we must learn to read.

READING THE IMAGES

The first step in reading the Hampton images is to identify and begin to analyze the rhetorical conditions under which their historical revelation and their intimation of surplus, or endlessness (Kirstein's "inexhaustibility"), is staged. Contrary to what many people believe, photographic meaning is a socially constructed form, rather than a naturally lucid essence captured whole from an obliging world. Painting, as Rudolph Arnheim argues in "On the Nature of Photography," has a virtually unlimited vocabulary of shape and color within a semantic field that is

bounded solely by the imagination of the painter.¹⁶ But the photographer is limited to the record of external forms that will register through the action of light on silver crystals. These objects themselves are infinite. But for the collected shadows of these objects to be meaningful, the photographer must bring them into relation to other, publicly legible, semantic structures—myth, ideology, semiotic systems. To be *seen*, photographs must be woven into other languages; otherwise, like the "unexamined life," the "unlinguistic image" will dissolve into an anarchy of unincorporable data. It follows that for photographs to communicate, the viewer must in turn be able to read and interpret them, like other languages. How possible this will be depends upon how smoothly the image has been spliced into its supplementary semantic systems and how resourceful the reader is. If, then, the reader wishes to go further, to become a critic and to comprehend how the meaning in the photograph was produced, examination must turn to the procedures of the splicing itself. The meaning made legible by reading must be unwoven by the critic, to see how the weaving was done.

This unweaving is a two-step process. First, one isolates and releases semantic units from the field of display, and then interrogates their formal relationships. In photographs, these semantic units can be elements of composition such as perspective, focus, framing, grouping, or characteristics of light. They can also be editorial procedures such as cropping or sequencing, or narrative strategies, such as the selection of subject and setting, or a multitude of other things. But whatever is chosen for analysis, the initial question is: What rhetorical principles, and chiefly, what oppositions, operate within and around these units? Second, one displaces the semantic units in question from the mythic, ideological, or semiotic webs that locate and define them. One asks: How are these units substantiated by ideological patterns, and what happens to their meaning when that particular substantiation is withdrawn? This displacement, which imagines the units strung together differently, denaturalizes the meaning of the units by uncovering surplus possibilities. It reveals that their original meaning within the web is a human construction dependent upon the position of insertion, and what surrounds them. It also reveals this meaning as a single choice among other prospects. To analyze such positionings, and the pattern of such choices, is to explore the social and/or unconscious forces at work in the historical mind(s) who executed them. The pattern of adherence of these forces is, in turn, a reliable representation of the living past that we seek in the photographs by reading, the past-as-lived that is the critic's or the historian's desire.

The questions we must ask of the Hampton photographs are, therefore, double—not only (1) "what does the album inscribe of 'American Negro Life'?" but also (2) "what rhetorical structures substantiate this inscription?" And not only (1) "why do these images seem 'inexhaustibly revealing'?" but also (2) "what is there about the systems of meaning



Figure 7. A Hampton Graduate at home.



Figure 8. The Old Folks at Home

upon which these images rely that is in excess of the photographic subject as it is visibly framed?"

A RHETORIC OF FORM

We have no photograph, facsimile, or written description of the way the Hampton Institute photographs appeared in the "Contemporary American Negro Life" exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition, beyond testimony that they were "arranged by subjects and mounted on the movable leaves of a large upright cabinet" and that they won widespread approval.¹⁷ We do not know how they were sequenced, or what text, if any, accompanied them, except that an editorial in Hampton's official journal explained that "It is part of the plan of the exhibit to contrast the new life among the Negroes and Indians with the old, and then show how Hampton has helped to produce change."¹⁸ The Hampton Institute photographs as a group come to us by way of a "plump, anonymous, leatherbound album, old and scuffed,"¹⁹ discovered in a Washington bookshop during World War II by Lincoln Kirstein and donated by him twenty years later to the Department of Photography of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). Of the 159 platinum prints in the album, the museum exhibited forty-four in 1966 and reproduced them in a critical catalogue entitled *The Hampton Album*, edited by Kirstein. The MOMA *Hampton Album*, in turn, is my source for the present essay. Since this is an edited selection, itself excised from an anonymous album about which it is unknown how faithfully it represents the Paris Exposition project, I will refrain from drawing conclusions here that reach beyond the scope of the smaller sample. But although the album, composed, as Kirstein says, "with love and care,"²⁰ may or may not represent the composition of the actual photographic exhibition, it does point to the thoughtfully constructed nature of this entire set of images. The tenacity of overarching organizational principles is legible even in the smaller grouping.

In the original album, each individual print is deposited under a tissue overlay bearing a title. These titles are reproduced in the MOMA edition; they were probably, although not necessarily, provided by Johnston, who was in the habit of captioning her other pictures. They include such pairings as "The old folks at home" and "A Hampton graduate at home," "The old-time cabin" and "A Hampton graduate's home," and single phrases such as "Primary class studying plants. Whittier School," "Class in American history," "Geography. Studying the cathedral towns," "A sketch class at work," "Agriculture. Plant life. Study of plants or a 'plant society,'" "Trade school. Mechanical drawing," and so on. Far from random, or unreflectingly archival, Johnston's Hampton views are amenable to categories of naming, and thereby to groupings or sequences, many of which are still discernible in the smaller edited sample because of their internal coherence. The naming immediately inserts the visual images into a linguistic

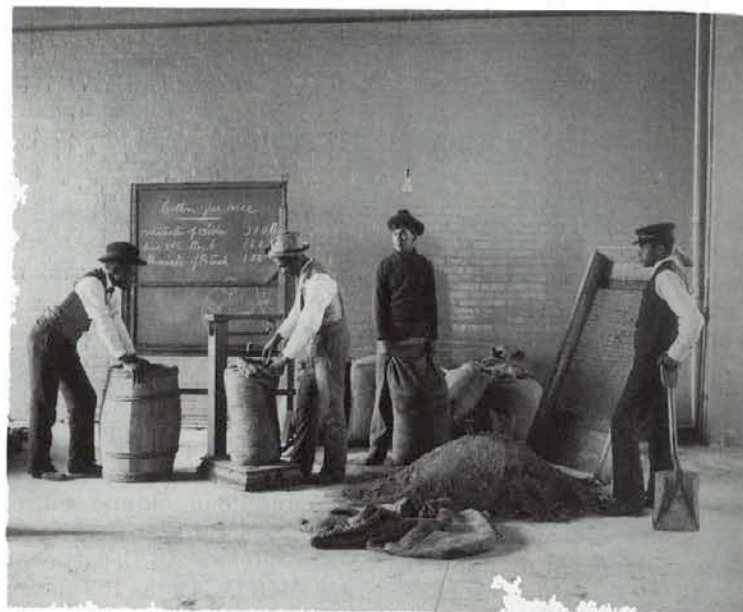


Figure 9. Agriculture. Mixing fertilizer.

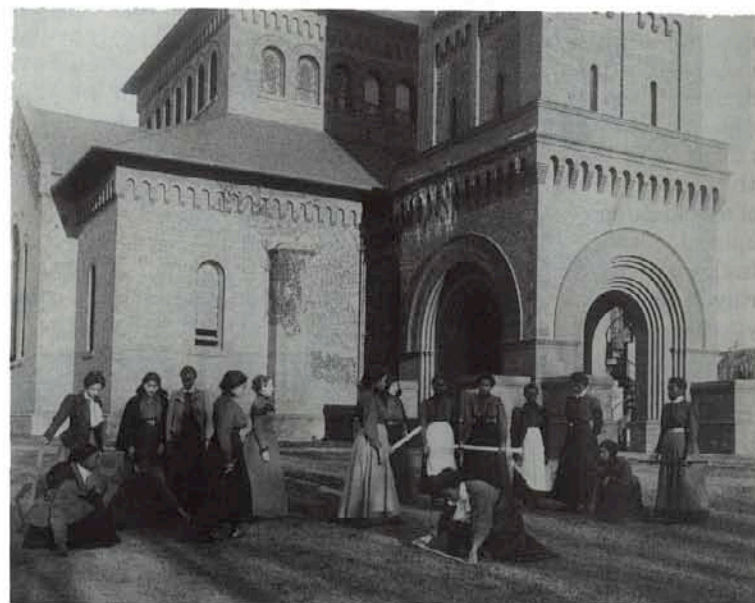


Figure 10. Arithmetic. Measuring and pacing.



Figure 11. Geography. Studying the seasons.

order that reduces the nearly infinite semantic possibilities that the images would have without words. After the naming, we are licensed to read the images in fewer ways. On the other hand, it is this entry into verbal language that makes the images denotative. It means that the rhetoric within which Johnston represents Hampton can be decoded.

The logic of the title sequences, in the order reproduced by MOMA, reads as follows: an initial view of the Hampton campus, introduction to the student body, daily life before and after a Hampton education, continuity through the grandchildren of Hampton graduates at school, the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, field trips, and graduation. As a shooting script, such categories project a particular kind of spatial and temporal plot upon the material. They show the where, the what, and the when of a very concrete, very substantial Hampton. A second characteristic of the shooting script is its explicit hermeneutic of black history as progress initiated by the action of the Hampton Institute and illustrated by the "before" and "after" Hampton shots. As *tableaux vivants* choreographed by the photographer and enacted by a willing body of students and faculty, the images and titles represent material accomplishment and the solidity and measurability of development.

In the accompanying images the people are collected and composed in groups before the shutter opens upon them. In the English class the declamation is well underway, in the trade school the mechanical draw-



Figure 12. Trade school. Mechanical drawing.

ings are begun, and at the greenhouse the culture of plants is already in progress. Such exposures favor the interruption of what is already in place over its preparation and buildup. They privilege achievement over transition, accomplishment over struggle, and the gentler work of elaboration over the brutal labor of beginning. We see nothing of how the things and the people in the pictures got where they are, but we see the substantial, well-equipped air of the uniforms, campus, and classrooms. If the "old folks" are shown to live in crude, 18th-Century style cabins, the graduate of Hampton has leapt into the 19th Century with a clean, scientifically built house, modern plumbing, and a Rocky Mountain landscape oil painting hung over the piano. Once again, the image presents a *fait accompli* and scant information on how it got there, except for the almost magical invocation of the name Hampton.

One recalls that Hampton students were instructed in the trades; perhaps the owner built this excellent house himself. The photograph that MOMA and many subsequent photographic editors have chosen as emblematic of Johnston's work shows Hampton students building a beautiful staircase for the treasurer's house, so, evidently, they were skillful carpenters. But even this scene of work is startling for its stillness. No sawdust, no disorder, no movement accompany the silent builders. Like the other lessons, the staircase is almost finished. Labor, trained at Hampton, these images imply, bears fruit with the ease of a tree in Eden.



Figure 13. Stairway of treasurer's residence. Students at work.



Figure 14. Geography. Studying the cathedral towns.



Figure 15. Saluting the flag at the Whittier Primary School.

In these images, even the Hampton education itself, as an activity, is conceived as occurring in a similarly stolid, full-blown, productive, and domesticated fashion. According to the album, learning happens *in* the classroom, *during* the fieldwork, *at* the lecture, or *in* the extra-curricular activity. It is not to be sought along the hall ways, halfway down the path, or after hours. In part, this, and the previous fixities, may be seen as an effect of the medium. Johnston's camera was so ineffective at capturing motion that it is hardly likely she could have thought in wildly kinetic terms. There are a number of instances in the photographs when something moves too fast for her camera to record it, and it registers as a blur. However, the quietness and cooperativeness of the Hampton she portrays is so exaggerated and entire, even in terms of her equipment, as to be a striking part of her presentation. The photographs are presented as if the work at Hampton were *in medias res*; but the thing itself, the work that is going on at Hampton, is as calm as a "fly in amber."²¹

That this calm, the deepest rhetorical supposition of the Hampton views, is not a *necessary* given, but a *chosen* one, is supported by comparison with some of Miss Johnston's Washington, D.C., school system images, which were nearly contemporaneous with the Hampton views, and were in fact exhibited along with the Hampton views in Paris, where both won major awards. Johnson made the pictures of the Washington school



Figure 16. Stretching and yawning. Second division school.

system on commission also; they were intended to show "The New Education" in practice. As official representations of educational innovation, both the Washington and the Hampton series serve the same interpretive and promotional functions.²²

But the white children in the Washington school system twist and turn in their places; they do "stretching and yawning"²³ exercises at their desks; they ride in a bivy on public transportation; they attend an exhibition of fine prints at the Library of Congress. One can easily imagine a rowdy corridor in those schools. This is not to say that the Washington school system images are not staged. Like the students at Hampton, the students in Washington fairly glisten with well-scrubbed preparation for the lady photographer. They seem arguably conscious of the presence of the photographer in nearly every frame, and many of them look into the camera. Even the purported action image entitled "Boys on their mark at a Central High School boys' track meet" is visibly staged, and the overly dramatic poses of the timekeeper and the man firing the starting gun, as well as the singularly fascinated attention of the onlookers, give this staging away by their exaggeration. On the whole, the students in the Washington school series are younger than the students photographed at Hampton, and perhaps they are more difficult to keep still. But this alone is not sufficient explanation for the different coding of the images, first because Johnston did photograph equally young students at Hampton,

more statically, and second because Johnston did photograph equally old students in Washington, more dynamically. At Hampton almost all eyes, even of the littlest students, are glued up front and concentrate on the teacher or other authority. Also at Hampton, the extent of physical exercise represented for the kindergarten seems to be to go outside and salute the flag, while the grown-up football team (as opposed to the Washington boys' track meet) is not shown in skirmish upon the field but at rest in the quad, in a team picture that looks, but for color, like an illustration for *Dink Stover at Yale*. It is evident that possibilities for other images existed at the school and lay within Miss Johnston's technical compass, but not within the rhetorical repertoire she drew upon for this assignment. The essential point is not that both sets of images were and had to be staged, but *how* they were differently staged. In fact, the Hampton assignment gave scope for a much more animated presentation than Johnston produced precisely because of all the fieldwork and practice of mechanical trades in the curriculum. Johnston focused on this aspect of the school, but in her hands it became a diorama.

Somewhat prior to Michel Foucault's wide-ranging analysis of the functioning of power in modern institutions, the American sociologist Erving Goffman established the existence of multiple loci of private resistances to the official schedule in what he called "total institutions," among them, "institutions purportedly established the better to pursue some worklike task and justifying themselves only on these instrumental grounds: army barracks, ships, boarding schools, work camps, colonial campgrounds, and large mansions from the point of view of those who live in the servants' quarters."²⁴ Goffman termed these patterns of resistance the "underlife" of the institution, and he argued that such resistance was crucial to the maintenance of a sense of humanity in those who were subject to the official agenda. To a great extent, these resistances have to do with an interruption of the predictability of schedules, throwing the *what* that is supposed to happen out of synchrony with the *where* and the *when* it is supposed to happen. These resistances mean that much of the learning that goes on in total institutions like Hampton occurs beyond bounds and out of place. They also mean that Hampton must have provided terribly important instruction in the interstices, during the rush on the way to class, i.e., as well as at one's desk. Yet, none of this kind of learning and of these crucial ways of knowing is included in Johnston's script. The controlling tropes that Johnston uses—of station, stillness, and solidity—disallow it.

Booker T. Washington, on the other hand, recognized how important education "in between" could be. Interestingly, although he felt it necessary to speak about it many times in his autobiography, he never seemed to find an appropriate place to put these recognitions in his text. Although he wanted to mention them, the things he learned "beside the point" were disjunctive with the writing style in which he had been educated, and recording them contributes to the bumpy tone of the autobiography. For example, directly after an encomium to the "Christlike" Gen-

eral Armstrong, who wanted to "assist in lifting up my race,"²⁵ Washington moves to "the matter of having meals at regular hours, of eating on a tablecloth, using a napkin, the use of the bathtub and of the tooth-brush, as well as the use of sheets upon the bed" that were "all new to me."²⁶ "Almost the most valuable lesson I got at the Hampton Institute," he reports, "was in the use and value of the bath."²⁷ The effect of this juxtaposition is maladroit, seeming as if the writer does not recognize a difference in importance between speaking of Armstrong and speaking about learning to take a bath. It might also seem an inability to register the appropriate tone. But I would argue that what the juxtaposition more truly reflects is the difficulty of splicing the heterogeneousness of learning into the profoundly controlled curriculum and ordered sense of persons that Hampton promoted. Even though he cannot make this recognition fit smoothly into his text, the writer insists upon the value of what is "out of place." Given a similar opportunity, Johnston fails to make the corresponding appropriation. What resists a celebratory appeal to the immensely disciplined kind of Victorian temperament that could underwrite the Hampton program of education by "tender violence,"²⁸ as the founder, Armstrong, put it, is neither imaged nor imagined by the photographer. It must resist invisibly. In an ominous, familiar, overdetermined, and claustrophobic formula, the concept of *race* in the Hampton of Johnston's camera is homologous with a principle of *place*.

Time, at Johnston's Hampton, is quiet, too. It seems almost to stand still and wait, with an exquisite tenderness, for the forsaken races to catch up. Various critics who have written on the Hampton photographs have expressed a feeling of the palpability of the minute in these images and a coordinate intimation of redemption. "In them," Kirstein wrote, "hearts beat, breath is held; time ticks. Eyelids barely flutter. Outside of Hampton there is an ogre's world of cruel competition and insensate violence, but while we are here, all the fair words that have been spoken to the outcast and injured are true. Promises are kept. Here is the promised land."²⁹ Booker T. Washington reported a similar sense that in his experience time was pregnant at Hampton. But for Washington, it was thick because it was loaded so full:

Every hour was occupied in study or work. Many [of the students] were as poor as I was, and, besides having to wrestle with their books, they had to struggle with a poverty that prevented their having the necessities of life. Many of them had aged parents who were dependent upon them, and some of them were men who had wives whose support in some way they had to provide for. . . .

And the officers and teachers, what a rare set of human beings they were! They worked for the students night and day, in season and out of season. They seemed happy only when they were helping the students in some manner.³⁰

Washington, in fact, exhibited a truly Franklinesque attitude toward Hamptonian time:

The debating societies at Hampton were a constant source of delight to me. These were held on Saturday evening; and during my whole life at Hampton I do not recall that I missed a single meeting. I not only attended the weekly debating society, but was instrumental in organizing an additional society. I noticed that between the time when supper was over and the time to begin evening study there were about twenty minutes which the young men usually spent in idle gossip. About twenty of us formed a society for the purpose of utilizing this time in debate or in practice in public speaking. Few persons ever derived more happiness or benefit from the use of twenty minutes of time than we did in this way.³¹

The complexity of Washington's tone is not to be underestimated. Irony is refused to the invocation of the burdens under which the students labored; his admiration for the teachers who worked so hard is genuine. Respect for work, he asserts repeatedly throughout the text, is the major thing he learned from his Quaker-inspired education. Yet the creative use of twenty minutes is carefully specified, regarded with wonder, and insisted upon with special pride. What is missing from the passage is any overt class awareness, that it was different, e.g., for the teachers to work so hard than for the students to do so since the work *signified* differently in each case. The working black was "the mule of the South,"³² the working white a prodigy. But implicit within the debating story are the materials for a critique of race and class. The debaters are hungry for time because they are in training to break through the color line. Yet their resources are so few and their desperation so great that they must recycle even twenty wasted minutes in order to compete.

In telling his story, Washington dwells upon the dignity of all the participants. But it is precisely this need to assert dignity, repeated and multiplied all over *Up From Slavery*, that points to the danger that it might be denied. The tone of *Up From Slavery* is so interesting because its attempt to be univocal fails. Washington talks to a white audience in a simplified, subdued manner that represents, evidently, the space he feels he has been offered for discourse and the capacity he believes whites have for listening, much as one shouts in a shorthand code to a hard-of-hearing elderly relative. Yet his own stories resist the monotone of his mask; they are vivid, appalling, pathetic, and sublime in turn and all at once. Out of this complicated richness, they speak with a timbre and an authority that cannot be regulated. The complex voice makes it difficult to know at whose expense the last laugh in the book is to be placed—with the readership who demanded a guileless address, or with the author who was

willing to give it to them. *Up From Slavery* constructs a fragmented, contradictory black subjectivity, from the inside out.

Johnston's images construct a black identity from an external vantage point and portray it as a consistent sensibility—the students appear uniformly eager, virtuous, energetic, and receptive. Unlike Washington, Johnston succeeds in eliciting a unified tone from a series of vignettes that strikes the same progressive note in frame after frame. The fact that she can do this perhaps reflects a greater degree of artistic control and organizational skill. The remarkable continuity of the pastoral mise-en-scène from one image to the next is largely due to her active shaping, selecting, and refining. The Hampton that we see is a Hampton she envisioned. At the same time, however, it is a vision of Hampton that synchronizes extremely well with the official image, and it excellently represents the kind of black identity the school itself was attempting to construct. We know that Johnston's serene photographs pleased the Hampton authorities very much and that they were proudly displayed in the "Contemporary American Negro Life" exhibit. In Paris, too, this vision of Hampton seems to have been eagerly approved, and the series won Johnston a major award. The rationale behind Hampton, and Tuskegee and other sister institutions throughout the South, was to give the students teaching credentials and to teach them scientific agriculture and mechanical trades so that, as small businessmen and members of the *petit bourgeoisie*, they could survive independently and begin to garner a certain level of material solidity that would, in turn, eventually yield them a political place. Johnston's view of Hampton fits into this sanguine plan. Yet the agricultural and industrial world in which the Hampton training was supposed to equip the students to survive and prosper was rapidly industrializing on a massive scale. In the second half of the 19th Century, economic, political, and social structures underwent unprecedented, rapid, and fundamental change. The individualized, small-scale, low-capital, unmechanized operations that Hampton taught—the kind of work that would fit easily into a pastoral setting—was in actuality outmoded almost as soon as it was learned. It was training for a second-class career, at best. At worst, as the thirty years after Johnston made her pictures were savagely to show, black farmers all over the South would lose their land in a rapid downward spiral of tenancy, debt, and depression. Thousands more, migrating north, would find a market for their labor and skills not as independent small businessmen at all, but as an increasingly degraded industrial workforce. Nor did the teacher training received at Hampton enable the graduates to "uplift their race" out of this predicament.

The utopian quality of the Hampton album thus reflects not only an artist's individual expertise, but also a commonly held perspective, i.e., an ideology. "It cannot be exaggerated, the degree to which we believed in the innocence of the United States," wrote Rebecca West of the European view of the United States in 1900. "We fondly believed that the black

man's sufferings were over now that the North had won the Civil War, and that the Red Indian was still better off if he were in tutelage to the white man."³³ Here is not so much a picture of the state of American race relations as it is the record of an emotional and intellectual tropism to a past gone by, presented as a vision of social progress. Like William Morris's program of medieval crafts, the curriculum at Hampton was an exercise in seductive nostalgia, a gorgeous veil that helps account, I would argue, both for the remarkable quiet radiance of Johnston's views and for the admiration with which they were received. "The 1900 Paris Universal Exposition contained many signs of the new technological age to come," Rebecca West recalled. "For the first time the public were shown such new inventions as X-ray photography, wireless telegraphy and automobiles, then about five years old. The entire exhibition was run by electricity and visitors toured the site on an electrically powered moving platform with three tiers, each rolling at a different speed. In contrast, much of the arts on display looked backwards rather than forwards."³⁴ Johnston's photographs are consonant with the tone of the entire arts exhibition as West described it. The new technology, and the new social and labor relations that came with it, are nowhere in evidence in the images. At Hampton Johnston photographed a myth on the eve of its explosion. Johnston, the school officials, the students, and the international audience at Paris were all complicit, to varying extents, in creating and accepting the particular thrust of this representation. This fact should be seen partly as an index to the horror of what the myth repressed. A generation after the Civil War, it was evidently much more attractive for both the Europeans and the Americans to believe that contemporary black life was like life at Hampton than to attend to evidence of catastrophic social disintegration such as the rising incidence of lynching and other racial violence during and after the Reconstruction era, the period in which Johnston, the school authorities, those who are pictured in the Hampton photographs, and their audience actually came of age. Black children the age of children pictured in the Hampton album grew up to journey to France to die in the trenches of the First World War.

Francis Benjamin Johnston was a creative, hardworking woman who supported herself on her income from photojournalism and lecturing, the kind of successful entrepreneur that Hampton itself was eager to nourish. Perhaps her well-known respect for work was even one of the things that recommended her to the authorities of a Quaker-backed school to represent their institution. Yet knowing work as well as she did, and a kind of work that, as she herself emphasized, was a rare accomplishment for a woman, she was still capable of seeing the Hampton labor as chiefly bucolic. On the other side of her camera, Booker T. Washington knew work from a different point of view. He had, after all, first heard of Hampton while working in a mine, while she had been invited to the campus as the official photographer chosen to represent the school in an international exhibition. Washington remembered the students' frantic struggle

before class to get all the shoes shined, all the buttons buttoned, all the many pieces and parts of the Victorian costume presentably assembled—sometimes even to get the shoes to wear and the buttons to button in the first place, while "struggling with a poverty that prevented their having the necessities of life." It is this knowledge that seeps through the cracks in Washington's address and so often heaves his sentences awry. But Johnston's camera shows nothing of such exertion except its outcome. She portrays the scene that she enters as already fundamentally composed. Her task, which was certainly hard, was to arrange the students in orderly rows and graceful groups. Their task, which was infinitely harder, was to present themselves in the first place in such a way that she would be able to arrange them.

The difference between the outward representation and the inner experience of effort in these tableaux may not be ascribed to technical limitations, the age of the students, the official character of the commission, or a fundamental inability to imagine alternatives. It is most usefully attributed to the blindness of selective attention that results from the schisms of race, class, and gender. In a sense, while Johnston's beautifully controlled camera records her wishes, it also betrays her. In learning to read the conscious rhetoric of the Hampton album as a record of choices that ignores certain possibilities and presents others, what we are analyzing is the warp and woof of the social, political, and economic fabric that underlay the image of Hampton, and Hampton itself, making them both possible. In decoding the place and the scope of action allowed to the students in Johnston's photographs, we are decoding at the same time a representation of the dominant ideology of racial place and scope: blacks and Native Americans might have a circumscribed place and accomplish some movement, but not too fast. In other words, what the images present is not Hampton "as it was" (an impossibility), but Hampton as it had meaning for the culture. In analyzing the configuration of what wins and what loses out in Johnston's images, what we are reading are traces of the conflicts that were responsible for the way the past was lived and a record of the ways in which the late-19th-Century mind applied ideology to life.

READING THE EXCESS

It is clear that in at least three ways Johnston intentionally adopted what can be called a patriarchal stance toward both Hampton and photography. White paternalism was the recognized *modus operandi* of the school. At the Hampton of this era, mutuality meant that the whites had to stoop and the blacks and Indians had to stretch. "No white American," Booker T. Washington wrote that he learned there, "ever thinks that any other race is wholly civilized until he wears the white man's clothes, eats the white man's food, speaks the white man's language, and professes the

white man's religion."³⁵ Johnston had no problem with the official view of the function of the school, with the school authorities, or with the propagandistic aspect of her assignment. As we have seen, she succeeded to an extraordinary degree in making even the deep-lying rhetorical structures of her Hampton images coincide with the dominant narrative.

Johnston was also a photographer for hire. She had not sought to photograph Hampton out of a personal expressive need, but had won the opportunity in a competitive professional world. Her profession was overwhelmingly dominated by males, and, although Johnston was always proudly vocal about succeeding as a woman within the professional infrastructure, that structure was not one that she ever challenged in any direct way. The photographs themselves present the lucid, coherent, seamless kind of surface that is said to be congruent with patriarchal discourse.³⁶ Although the tableaux are obviously staged, the medium within which they appear to us is coded as a transparent window on the past. The fixity of motion within the scenes is replicated by the determined fixity of the camera, which, except in a few important instances to be discussed later, always takes a middle distance, head-on, straightforward, comprehensively wide-angled, controlled, and predictable position that is also characteristic of the established symbolic order.

This very same transparent, uniform, and reliable representation, however, reveals the ideological orientation that underwrites Johnston's practice of the medium. Such a revelation does not occur because a uniformity of technical style is *male*; Johnston is obviously a woman photographer, highly competent in mechanical technique and the creation of a flawless surface. Nor does this revelation occur because Johnston is trying somehow to undermine the patriarchy of her time in favor of some maternal text. It is most likely that such an idea would have been anathema to this never-married, competitive, self-styled "greatest woman photographer in the world."³⁷ It occurs because such a perfect surface, as a sign, *per se*, colludes with the established patriarchal style, the mode of uniformly predictable social discourse within which both men and women make culture; and because the dominion of this mode, which claims universal representation, cannot be complete. In Johnston's photographs, the semiotic resists her. Once the edges of the ideology are glimpsed, however momentarily, as a style, it can no longer be believed to be inevitable, even despite her own intentions.

There is not the slightest reason to believe that Johnston had any antithetical purposes in mind when she photographed at Hampton. By working as a photographer and by accepting the assignment to Hampton, she was considerably enlarging the upper-middle-class white woman's sphere of action. But such dilation from within of the woman's place had been long accepted and was a major pattern of female behavior in the post-Civil War decades, amply represented in the club movements and in the leadership of women in social welfare reform as "housekeepers"³⁸ to the world. Along with the articles Johnston published in *The Ladies' Home*

Journal in the 1890s were published numerous accounts by determined and philanthropical women on prisons and slums, reporting "where I went, and what I saw" to the publication's domestic readership. Socially speaking, Johnston, unofficial "court photographer"³⁹ of the White House, was and wished to remain a lady.

But because it *was* as a lady that Johnston wielded her camera, Johnston's situation vis-à-vis Hampton and her subjects' relation to her reproduce an especially dense intersection of racial, class, and gender issues. The act of photographing made possible a social moment in which the photographer's representation of the school, the self-representation of the students and faculty, and the self-representation of the photographer could give form not only to dominant, but also to repressed and schismatic truths. Simply in going to see, organizing what she saw, and recording what she orchestrated, Johnston became a witness beyond herself.

The Hampton album, in fact, is especially rich in localized spots of resistance to the organizing narrative. These multiple *puncti* signal a high level of semiotic presence that accounts for the perception by Kirstein and others that the photographs are "inexhaustibly revealing." They are, precisely, "inexhaustible" because they use up the semantic systems before those systems use them up; and they are "revealing" because like parapraxes they uncover the boundaries of the social construct that underlies them. What is left in excess of hegemonic meaning in the images is painful, plentiful, anarchic, and exhilarating. Reading this excess is particularly valuable for the critic and the historian because as "another way of telling" to use John Berger's phrase,⁴⁰ it uncovers alternatives to the dominant line. In an important sense, what this kind of reading does is to establish the photographic text as a locus of ideological resistance, as well as a mode of ideological transmission, such as we earlier saw. The photographer's *mise-en-scène*, choice of group arrangements and camera angles, and the body language and self-presentation of the photographed subjects construct a submerged text that is analogous to the unconscious in Freudian theory, or to maternal language in Kristevian semiotics, in the challenge it may mount to the dominant story.

Johnston's photograph, "Literature—lesson on Whittier. Middle class. 1899," shows a small English class in the midst of a student presentation on John Greenleaf Whittier, one of the sponsors of Hampton. On the right-hand side of the picture frame, nine young men sit in rapt but relaxed attention in chairs that have been moved to the edge of the classroom to make a grouping that is more informal than the ordinary arrangement. Standing behind them are three more students and two white teachers, a woman and a man. All the students wear military dress. The shiny buttons, the high, white collars, and the stripes on the legs of their trousers make a series of upside-down exclamation points standing under columns of dots that emphasize the straightness of torsos and the precision of coordinated postures. A single student on the left- and side of the

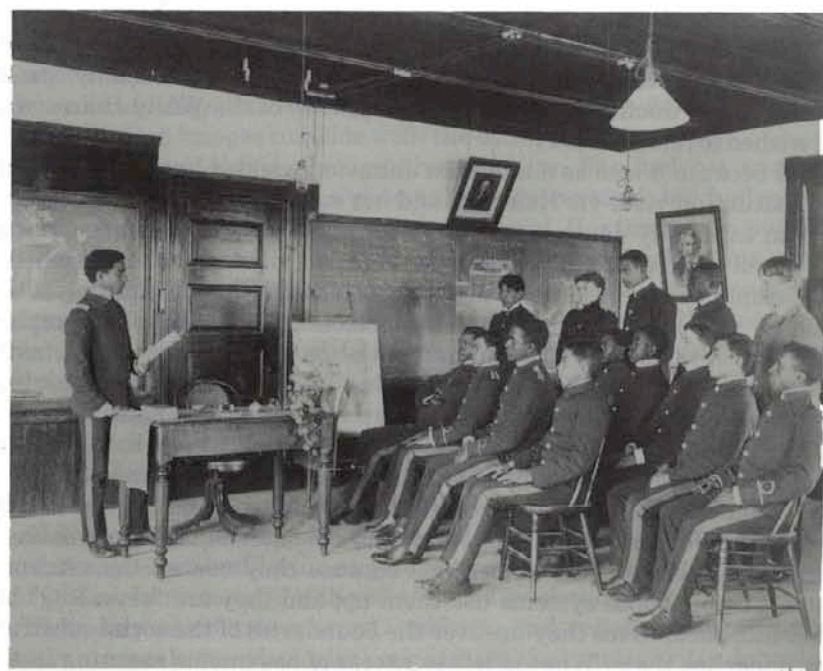


Figure 17. Literature—lesson on Whittier. Middle class 1899.

picture frame stands behind the teacher's table at the front of the class and reads his report. The legs with stripes, the buttons, the collars, and the eyes all point to him. At the back of the room, the tallest student inclines his head and shoulders forward, as if to better hear what his classmate is saying. In the center of the classroom a portrait of Whittier stands on an easel. Above him, slightly to the right, is a portrait of George Washington, nearly ubiquitous in the rooms at Hampton. These three figures are related metonymously, by proximity, in a chain of associations that reads: student, poet, father. At the extreme right and left boundaries of the group, two students tip their heads to one side in a slight but discernible pantomime of abandoned and pleasurable attention. They enclose the student group within this sign. The disruption of the ordinary classroom seating plan, and the student who reads in the teacher's place, strongly suggest a break in discipline. The explanation the image offers for this release is the fact that they study a poet. In this class it is the skills of culture, rather than those of earning a living, that are being exchanged. The atmosphere is manly. There are no women students in the class, and the presence of a (predictably) female English teacher is carefully balanced by a male faculty member. The suggestion is that along with geography, arithmetic, and agriculture, at Hampton they know that culture, too, is very important. The listeners certainly look as

though they give poetry its due. But while intensity and seriousness have their place, they are evidently to take a more genteel, leisured, almost clubby, form than they do in other classes—the imagined internalized shape, perhaps, of literary culture itself. Except for the uniforms and furnishings, a literary paper being read before gentlemen in a private drawing room would not look very different from this scene; the class is a practice for such opportunities. All this, they are exhibiting expressly for the camera.

Yet the chosen poet is Whittier, for whom few would now claim a place in the first rank. His personal connection with Hampton partly explains his presence. Because of that, Whittier must have seemed a kind of poetry mascot for the school—almost, perhaps, their very own poet. An anonymous review published in 1891 exemplifies what his fans of the era believed.

Whittier is what he is by means of his unmatched power to touch at the depths and stir to the heights man's and woman's spiritual nature. He is the poet of the purest affections, the sublimest aspirations. He is the poet of the conscience. He is the poet of divine fatherhood and human brotherhood. He has made the family fireside glorious. He has inscribed on many a page of this work-a-day life of ours errata which, spelled out as seen through tear-dimmed eyes, take shape as follows: "For 'home,' read 'heaven.'" ⁴¹

The message that home is heaven was perfectly aligned with what Hampton was trying to teach.

Yet the virtues of private life and domesticity had not been Whittier's only message. It has been estimated that perhaps a third of Whittier's poems are concerned in some way with slavery. In the collected works there are ninety-three poems under the title "Anti-Slavery" alone and many more that make distinct reference to slavery. For a period of more than twenty years, Whittier was a vastly successful propagandist for abolition who "affected thousands of common readers who were rarely touched by sermons or newspaper editorials." Early on in his abolitionist career, he appealed directly to the most primal level of revulsion against slavery in "The Slave-Ships":

Hark! From the ship's dark bosom,
The very sounds of hell!
The ringing clack of iron,
The maniac's short, sharp yell!
The hoarse, low curse, throat-stifled;
The starving infant's moan,
The horror of a breaking heart
Poured through a mother's groan.⁴²

By 1843, he was writing:

A Christian! going, gone!
Who bids for God's own image? for his grace,
Which that poor victim of the market-place
Hath in her suffering won?

My God! Can such things be?
Hast Thou not said that whatsoe'er is done
Unto Thy weakest and Thy humblest one
Is even done to Thee?⁴³

Soon the threat in his poems was no longer veiled, even through negation:

The blast from Freedom's Northern hills, upon its
Southern way,
Bears greeting to Virginia from Massachusetts
Bay:
No word of haughty challenging, nor battle bugle's
peal,
Nor steady tread of marching files, nor clang of
horsemen's steel.
No trains of deep-mouthed cannon along our high-
ways go;
Around our silent arsenals untrodden lies the snow;
And to the land-breeze of our ports, upon their
errands far,
A thousand sails of commerce swell, but none are
spread for war.⁴⁴

And, despite his Quaker pacifism, Whittier exhorted his readers in "The Sentence of John L. Brown":

Speak out in acts. The time for words
has passed, and deeds suffice alone;
In vain against the clang of swords
the wailing pipe is blown!
Act, act in God's name, while ye may!
Smite from the church her leprous limb!
Throw open to the light of day
The bondman's cell, and break away
The chains the state has bound on him!⁴⁵

Southerner Robert Penn Warren later wrote, "Whittier was without much natural taste and almost totally devoid of critical judgment," and that "in poetry he could only pile up words as a mason piles up bricks; he

could only repeat, compulsively, the dreary clichés; his meter-making machine ground on, and nothing that came out was, he knew, real."⁴⁶ But Whittier did place his "meter-making machine" in the service of political action, and what resulted, the end of slavery, was real enough. Aside from their mutual study of masonry, then, Whittier and the Hampton students also had in common a general pro-black political positioning and a recent history that was deeply implicated in social violence.

That radical voice, however, in relation to the ongoing evidence of how slavery touched Hampton, was not the Whittier or the Hampton that Johnston intended to depict. Johnston portrays a Hampton where the black man's troubles are essentially over, and the only thing left to do is to catch up. Here is a Hampton where the unmodulated, raw emotions of war are faded history. The students she photographs are the sons and daughters of "freedom's first generation," but nothing about their appearance reveals this fact. Instead, the invisibility of the marks of slavery seems to be part of the point. Only one of the images of the Hampton album refers directly to the war, and in that photograph a group of well-dressed black ladies and gentlemen, who look as though they might be on a picnic, gather curiously around a cannon at Fort Monroe as if they are staring at a side-show freak.

On the blackboard in the English class, elaborate chalk drawings of domestic scenes accompany lines inscribed from two of Whittier's poems. I have been unable to identify one of the poems. Under a magnifying glass the title looks like "Memory Lane," but there is no poem by that title in Whittier's collected works. The other poem is the famous "In School-Days." Chalk drawings were probably an ordinary feature of the 19th-Century classroom, not a special display for Johnston. But the particular choice of poems they illustrate was made for the day she came to photograph and has a representative function. The teachers chose from the body of Whittier's work these two poems to indicate in the photograph for Paris what their classroom was about. The text of "In School-Days" reads as follows:

Still sits the school-house by the road,
A ragged beggar sunning;
Around it still the sumachs grow,
And blackberry-vines are running.
Within, the master's desk is seen,
Deep scarred by raps official;
The warping floor, the battered seats,
The jack-knife's carved initial;
The charcoal frescos on its wall;
Its door's worn sill, betraying
The feet that, creeping slow to school,
Went storming out to playing!

Long years ago a winter sun
 Shone over it at setting;
 Lit up its western window-panes,
 And low eaves' icy fretting.

It touched the tangled golden curls,
 And brown eyes full of grieving,
 Of one who still her steps delayed
 When all the school were leaving.

For near her stood the little boy
 Her childish favor singled:
 His cap pulled low upon a face
 Where pride and shame were mingled.

Pushing with restless feet the snow
 To right and left, he lingered; –
 As restlessly her tiny hands
 The blue-checked apron fingered.

He saw her lift her eyes; he felt
 The soft hand's light caressing.
 And heard the tremble of her voice,
 As if a fault confessing.

"I'm sorry that I spelt the word:
 I hate to go above you,
 Because," – the brown eyes lower fell, –
 "Because you see, I love you!"

Still memory to a gray-haired man
 That sweet child-face is showing.
 Dear girl! the grasses on her grave
 Have forty years been growing!

He lives to learn, in life's hard school,
 How few who pass above him
 Lament their triumph and his loss,
 Like her, – because they love him.⁴⁷

On one level, the teacher's choice is marvelously apt. The Hampton that we have seen represented by Johnston is perfectly in tune with what is expressed in such a poem. The poem is a virtual mirror of Hampton. In it the regularity of timing, and the punctuality of rhyme, reproduce that whole sense of beneficent schoolroom discipline that has been shown to be central to the Hampton program. The nostalgic haze that is imminent in the Hampton images is also made explicit in the poem; in both we can see that the best and dearest things in life are going on at school. At school, the Hampton students are studying a poem that tells them all this that

they already know about school. Even the "winter sun" in the two settings is the same. It glows and caresses objects in the real-life room, like the varnish on the door, the rim of the teacher's seat, and the legs of the students' chairs in the same way it touches and transfigures the schoolroom in the poem. Whittier's vision and the Hampton classroom shade into one another. The listening students themselves will go forth from this classroom to become gray-haired men like the man in the poem, who struggles for a place in the world. Like the speaker in the poem, they will remember that in their youth a gentle love touched them, which came from those who did not want to "go above" them. In the future they will win and lose in the competition of life, and unloving people may surpass them. But the memory of school days, perhaps even the memory of the Whittier poem itself, transfigured by hindsight into something powerful and holy, will keep them, like the speaker, loved and safe. Hampton and the poem promise that everything will be fine.

The poem, however, does not read entirely in good faith. Whereas the "grey-haired man" invokes the "tangled golden curls," the "brown eyes full of grieving," and the "blue-checked apron" of the girl as uncorrupted, replayable shards of a sacred past that "memory still shows" him, at the same time, he condescends to the image of the girl. He projects the scene for us from his "memory" in which he still stands before her in all his boyhood innocence, "his cap pulled low upon a face / where pride and shame were mingled." But inappropriately, during the replay, he refers to "her tiny hands." To neither child would those hands have seemed small, only to a belittling old man. "Dear girl!" he calls her, from a position of assumed superiority that comes only partly from the fact he is still alive while she lies in her grave. Even more, it comes from the fact that he is uncomfortable with the girlish love she offered and he longed for, and that turned out to be surprisingly important to him who sacrificed it. It is difficult for him to know what tone to take toward the girl.

Unlike the girl, he tells us, he has "lived" and "learned" and been at "life's hard school," to which he refers parenthetically, in a rapid phrase that rather meaninglessly finishes out the meter but sounds wise. Sadly, with great self-satisfaction, he tells us "how few who pass above him / lament their triumph, and his loss, / Like her, – because they love him." Yet the singsong closure of the final stanza diminishes his real confusion, which is what to think about that girl. The "I'm up and you're down" momentum within which he envisions the world is not inevitable. It had been significantly balked, although he does not catch this aspect of his own memory, by the counter force of a girl who "delayed / when all the school were leaving," who went against the current. The very immobility of this memory of her, and the fact that he cannot place it satisfactorily in the seesaw of status, point to her real meaning for him. She signifies an alternative, antihydraulic vision of human relations, a vision he remains unconscious and incapable of. In the purity of her capacity directly to love, she is still "above" him, and he is still forsaking her even as he memorializes her.

The poem from this perspective is not so simple, and the Victorian pieties that Whittier expresses about how life is arranged can newly be seen as having a contradictory and challenging aspect. Yet it is quite evident that this complex reading is not what the students in the Johnston photograph are listening to. They are too much at ease, too obviously uplifted. They too, like the speaker, are learning to climb, to be climbed upon, and perhaps to condescend to girls, who have not even been admitted to the classroom. The poem contains one of Whittier's most well known and often quoted stanzas: "I'm sorry that I spelt the word: / I hate to go above you, / Because," – the brown eyes lower fell, – / "Because you see, I love you!" By 1900, this single stanza had the energy to break free of the rest of the poem; many people who did not know the whole poem could quote these lines. If we consider these lines in relation to race, as the Hampton setting seems to require, it becomes evident that the stanza addresses race relations as much as it does class and gender. What presents itself as a meditation on love is also a reflection on the seemingly unstable but practically unchangeable social hierarchies that are reflected and imposed from men to women, from the educated to the uneducated, and by analogy from the white race to the black race. In all these contexts, the poem affirms that the familiar rule obtains: Someone is on the top, and someone is on the bottom. People may "hate to go above" you, but they will anyway; others will happily do so. Because the world they must enter is like this, the Hampton students themselves are justified in "going above" whomever they can. The figure of a girl who wants to abstain is totally unviable in this universe. In the poem, she dies. In the photograph, she is not even present. The only possible reference to her is the grown-up English teacher, that quintessential spelling-bee winner, who is already impossibly far "above." It should be noted that "home" can never be "heaven" when gender relations are so confused.

The angry voice of the abolitionist poems is so completely excluded from the classroom that if one did not know it existed, one could not learn it from the picture. The complex underside of the domestic Whittier is visibly denied by the students' genteel postures, in favor of paternalist conformity to an ideal of Victorian culture and social competition. The mimicry of the classroom in the poem on the blackboard sets up a mirroring relation that reveals both the poem and the classroom as delimited, overdetermined social patterns. These coordinates establish the basis for the negativity of this image. Its unified, coherent, finished surface shatters as we recognize and then supply what they conceal or indicate. Recognizing these absences and breaking through the mirror, we disclose a partialness in the classroom that Johnston never meant to show, but nonetheless recorded. We see past the edges of what the Hampton faculty and administration knew or would say. We see into the students' desire, and what they, too, don't want to recognize. We see the triumph and the cost of the Hampton experiment, the kinds of choices that had to be made, the kinds of adaptations that are required. We see endlessly into and



Figure 18. Frances Benjamin Johnston.

beyond the frame, because we see what it contains as a product of decisions that might have been made otherwise. Small signs on the edge of rhetoric, but dependent upon it dialectically, alert us to meaning that the framing devices of language and ideology can never completely encode.

THE MATTER OF GENDER

The question arises how deliberately Johnston might have intended the possibility of a critique embedded in her self-portrait photograph. While I think it is beyond doubt that her intention was to supply only



Figure 19. Frances Benjamin Johnston.

supportive readings of Hampton, I think that there exists evidence that her own attitude toward Hampton could not have been so straightforward. In a self-portrait made in 1896, only three years before she worked at Hampton, Johnston presented herself in an attitude of rebellion toward much that Hampton stood for. In the self-portrait she sits cross-legged wearing a man's cap, surrounded by the bric-a-brac in her own studio, drinking beer and smoking a cigarette, with her skirts pulled up above her knees to reveal some very pretty legs and elegant shoes. Just as in the Hampton photographs, the pose is tendentious, rather than candid. She would not have actually sat that way and done all of those things at one time, but she wishes to signify a plenitude of rebellion against Victorian social conventions. The photograph states that as an artist, Johnston is not, and does not wish to be, ladylike. A second, undated self-portrait that was evidently made at around the same time pictures Johnston dressed to kill as the Victorian lady *par excellence*. She sits languidly in a heavily carved armchair and stares seductively at the viewer. She is wrapped in a heavy fur stole, her chin rests upon her carefully gloved hand, the ornate high collar of her blouse tickles her chin, and on her head she sports a ridiculously elaborate hat with double plumes that resemble a bifurcated eruption of Old Faithful. Both self-portraits are sport; both have their roots in social identities that Johnston lived but wished not to assume in

strict permanence. The portraits mock exactly what the Hampton images celebrate—the fully pious placing of the social self in one or another niche, class, or role. Johnston's Hampton photographs and her self-portraits are both about mobility. But for Hampton, mobility means a cumbersome, slow climb to the same middle-class way of life that Johnston was trying to escape. For Johnston, mobility means the quicksilver switch of identity that could be hers by right of class privilege and artistic talent, and that must not seem to cost her much.

Picturing herself in this way, she could not have given the kind of education she saw at Hampton her unreserved approbation. In order to comply with the demands of the assignment to picture Hampton in its most flattering light, Johnston could only have distanced the black and Indian students she saw from her sense of herself. If she and they had differing needs, it must be because she and they were fundamentally different on the grounds of race and class. Hampton might be all right for them, but not for her.

Yet, as a woman and an artist in conflict with the strictures of her own position, striving to loosen her own bonds, she may not have been unaware of an analogy, however tenuous, between her desire for freedom and theirs. The white, Victorian, unmarried woman artist was conscious of being caught in a greater density of feminine proscriptions than usual. The social construction of gender is important in such a situation far beyond the internal psychological issues it raises, because, as Hazel Carby observes, "a dominant sexual ideology will offer the women of the dominant class a gendered definition that reinforces and is the medium through which they live their class relations."⁴⁸ What this means is that, for women like Johnston, the significance of class and race position is made palpable primarily by means of the social experience of gender. With conformity to social custom comes "natural feminine superiority," but a dangerous consequence of rebellion is the loss of the privileged status of "womanhood." Since it is as a white upper-class woman that such a woman as Johnston is expected, and comes to expect, to read herself in every relation to others, her feminine self-definition is inextricable from her social consciousness. But if and when convention becomes intolerably constricting, as it did for Johnston and other women artists, the pressure for greater freedom of action will lead to an extension of her social imagination. As the boundary of what is ladylike gives way, so will the definition of the social world expand, leading to an enlargement of the possibility of empathy.

In open rebellion against her own domination as a woman, Johnston may therefore have been personally interested in what she could learn from the men and women she photographed, who were of races and classes different from hers, but subordinate to the same white, patriarchal power. In an unmapped, subterranean sort of way, the young photographer may have begun to formulate a sense of community with the newly freed subjects of her photographs. Perhaps the setting of a school

was even especially suited to bring such feelings of identification forward. For a school is an institution that both exaggerates and intensifies dependency (especially for Hampton's adult enrollment) and at the same time legitimates and normalizes the desire for power, escape, and transcendence. It may be easier to empathize with the aspirations of others in a school than to feel the same bond on more open ground. In school, after all, everyone of any race or class or gender is expected to aspire; and in school, as everyone recalls from his or her own childhood, the pain of failure is ever present and visible on the surface.

If this thesis is true, the critique of Hampton that took shape before Johnston's lens in the English class must have slipped by in a not unconscious, although not quite intentional, manner. Any moment in time is heterogeneous. It holds evidence of the success *and* the failure of our worldview, our ideology, to fit the facts of our lives as they are lived. This is why the making of a photograph out of a social moment can and does contain contradictory signs. Since our lives are contradictory, the photograph will record those contradictions. In so far as these documentary photographs are powerful as art, I think, one explanation for their power lies in the use of the situation by the photographer as a stage for the projection of a deeply hidden protest at the way things were supposed to be.

One must be very careful, however, in how one applies the reasonable assumption of the existence of such a critique to an analysis of Johnston's work. As with most 19th-Century women pioneers in the professions, what looked to her like women's issues and their answers are not necessarily where emphasis now is placed and vice versa. One must guard against creating an image of Johnston that mirrors late-20th-Century styles of feminism. On the other hand, it would be equally misleading to overlook the statements she *was* making, and it would impoverish the reading of the photographs.

We know that Johnston was interested enough in the women's suffrage movement in 1900 (the same year she made the Hampton photographs) to travel to the home of the eighty-year-old crusader Susan B. Anthony, and photograph her in her study. These photographs were later published and widely distributed on the *Anthony Calendar* of 1901, a calendar that commemorated the equal rights struggle for American women. Pete Daniel and Raymond Smock call the Anthony portraits "the most interesting study Johnston did of an American woman,"⁴⁹ and their judgment is borne out, I believe, by the enormous presence that Johnston's image underwrites for Anthony. But they are also fascinating specifically for what they help us to piece together about Johnston's attitude toward Anthony. In the portrait entitled, "Susan B. Anthony in her study," Anthony sits in profile at a beloved desk crammed full of papers and memorabilia. Covering the walls, the desktop, and the writing surface itself are photographs of women, many of them autographed, all of them obviously cherished. These women—friends, associates, and heroes—are those who have figured in the



Figure 20. Susan B. Anthony.

great struggle for which Anthony's study is now a shrine. As the elderly leader sits for her portrait, a sense of history, the pride of achievement, and the urgency of what is yet undone contend with one another in her portrayal of a self that is posed between the multivolume *History of Woman Suffrage* on the one hand and the week's unrelenting correspondence on the other. Sitting in this fashion, Anthony is absorbed into the ramifications of her own vitality; the picture enacts Anthony's powerful consciousness of history being made.

The photographer seems aware that Anthony must soon be translated from life to image herself, and she conspires to make a perfectly remarkably pictorial statement of Anthony's own place in the gallery of women. She has draped a black cloth over a wooden structure behind Anthony's head. Formally, this black background places Anthony's side-lighted profile and white lace collar into brilliant relief; it is the aesthetic center of the image. But semantically it has another function. It takes the high-lighted portrait of Anthony and makes a visual analogy between her photograph and the score of other photographs of women with whom it is in line along the wall. By flattening out the planes it produces the visual illusion of Anthony's portrait as one more, and the largest, among them. In Johnston's photograph, Anthony is metamorphosed into a photograph on her own wall before she has ceased to be a living woman seated at her desk. She takes her place in history as Johnston takes her picture—not



Figure 21. The New Woman.

just *because* of Johnston's picture, which is, of course, of historical importance, but because of *the way* Johnston envisions her.

This respectful attitude is, arguably, quite purposeful, for it is unlikely that the posing and the framing would have occurred the way they do without choice. Perhaps even the black cloth itself, the symbol of the photographer and an indispensable element of her equipment, was Johnston's own. Here, it stands in for Johnston, being a sign that she, a photographer, has rearranged things. Because of this black cloth, Johnston is more apparent in this image than in nearly any other, except for her self-portraits. For whatever reason, she is unusually willing to have traces of herself represented in her portrait of Anthony.

The presentation of Anthony in her study interestingly compares with Johnston's photographs of herself in her own working environment, the studio she built for herself in back of her parents' house in Washington. There, like Anthony in her study, she sits at a desk surrounded by images. There are photographs, presumably of friends, associates, and heroes, and current posters whose fashionable graphics display images of the new woman. Johnston's pose is assertive and businesslike; she holds a pen and correspondence in her hands. In all, the two images seem remarkably similar, perhaps even intentionally so. Yet, one eloquent distinction is to be made. The photographs with which Anthony surrounds herself are chiefly of women; those in Johnston's studio are chiefly of men.

RECOGNIZING CHOICES

The formal ambiguity of photographs and the photographer's lack of complete control is sometimes offered as an argument against putting much historical weight upon the interpretation of photographic evidence. It is as if because photographs can mean more than one thing, they must mean nothing. And yet, critics and historians do have another choice, which is to bring to photographs the same wary sifting and comparing of detail that is habitual with other forms of evidence. The presence of contradiction in photographs, as in more traditional historical documents, does not mean the absence of meaning—potentially, quite the opposite. As in the writing of history, in the close reading of photographs, it is necessary to learn a method of logical extension of such contradictions—to bring them out rather than to cover them up. History, human life, is inconsistent; the photography that records it cannot hope to be otherwise. In fact, as I have been arguing, it is only through understanding the choices that have been made between alternatives, through learning what won out, what was lost, how it happened, and at what cost, that the meaning of the past can appear. From this perspective, the fact that Johnston's images are contradictory and that her camera can record more complexly than she directs is the key, not the barrier, to their usefulness for understanding the past. Since they allow her to show more than she is able or willing to express in words, they give us an invaluable opportunity to compare what she felt was appropriate for public exhibition with what she felt she needed to deemphasize, and with what she apparently never saw.

Let us consider at some length the well-known image, "Class in American history." Of this image, Lincoln Kirstein wrote, unforgettably,

We behold a live Indian in full tribal regalia, posed on a model-stand, glorious as a thunderbird, isolated and strange as if he were stuffed and cased behind glass in the old Smithsonian Institution, that "attic of America." An Indian boy, uniformed in the official Battalion blue-and-gold version of a U.S. Trooper's dress, regards his blood-brother with awe. Behind perches another masterpiece of taxidermy, an American eagle, as ferociously disinfected and harmless as the patient students themselves. On the wall behind is a print of a Remington painting: cavalry, on their rough-riding way to exterminate the rebellious Piute or Ojibwa. Miss Johnston betrays no ready resentment. The Indian youths in their starched collars survey the scene as if it were still-life, which is exactly to what she has been able to reduce the spirit in this odd happening.⁵⁰

Kirstein is sharply aware of emotional undertow. Socially speaking, the picture is a virtual maelstrom of conflicting currents. It would be reason-

able to think that someone or something was to blame for such cacaphony, and Kirstein, therefore, goes out of his way to exclude Johnston. "This is by no means to suggest that there lurks some secret, unsuspected or condign parody in Miss Johnston's prescient lens. She has merely the taste to arrange what she finds."⁵¹ But whereas it is comforting to know that Johnston did not think up this tableau and reassuring to be told that the multiple *faux-pas* of this rather preposterous image were generated by the participants themselves, it is not an adequate explanation of the image. Kirstein wishes to place its confusion to the account of "history" itself.

Her subjects continue their essential lives, independent of her or our observation, locked in the suspension of time, like flies in amber, but nevertheless alive in the translucent air of history. They stand as metaphor or parable in their sturdy dreaminess, their selfless absorption in self-improvement. It is a measure of Miss Johnston's vision that she enables us to spy upon so many anonymous, long-vanished individuals, who still so vividly speak to us in public of their proper private longings for a shared social paradise. Despite her camera's candor, her entire incapacity to trim or trick, we must know it was not, nor by no means yet is, any earthly heaven. But she did capture, to an almost magical degree, the better part of an historic aspiration in its innocent and necessary striving.⁵²

But the "air of history," as we have seen, is not "translucent"; her subjects are not living their "essential lives" and "private longings" in public; and they are neither "independent of our vision" nor of hers. Who she was and the audience she stood for had everything to do with how her subjects presented themselves and how she pictured them. Their "necessary striving" may have been part of an "historic aspiration," but it could not have been "innocent." And Johnston's camera, as we have seen, did indeed harbor "some secret, unsuspected or condign parody." In the effort to account for what is today an unthinkable image, Kirstein gives away all of the tools needed for analysis, one by one.

What remains is the sense that the image needs explaining. Kirstein is correct, I think, to turn to history, but it is a history that is not transparent, that itself needs to be unpacked. As Robert Engs has written in his essay on Hampton entitled, "Red, Black, and White: A Study in Intellectual Inequality," from 1878 until 1912, Hampton Institute carried on a highly unusual program for multiracial education.

During the thirty-four years of black and red education, all of the absurdities, hypocrisies, contradictions, and injustices inherent in American racial attitudes could be discovered at the Institute and in the lives of its Negro and Indian graduates. It



Figure 22. Class in American history.

is not that Hampton failed in its mission to "civilize" its students. Rather it was that American society refused to accept either blacks or Indians on the basis of equality, no matter how "civilized" they might be.⁵³

What is rising up in this photograph are the "absurdities, hypocrisies, contradictions, and injustices" of that history; so much is clear. But the significance, the meaning, of these absurdities is not spontaneous. It must be retrieved from where it has been consigned, underneath the self-evident paternalistic surface of the print. The ideological and the semiotic level in this image are in particularly strong contention with one another. The competition here, between what can and cannot be spoken, is at a higher pitch than anywhere else in the body of Johnston's work.

In the image there is once again a break in the normal school-day discipline, marked by a disruption in seating. An Indian in ceremonial dress, holding a peace pipe, stands on a bench at the head of the classroom, in front of a stuffed American eagle, and presents himself as an exhibit. The Remington print hangs on the wall to his side, directly in front of us. The Indian meets the gaze neither of the students nor of the viewer of the photograph, but looks off at an angle into the distance. Managing the lines of vision in this way, he offers himself fully as an

object to be stared at, while refusing any access to his own subjectivity. The Indian, as if in an ancient tribal test, is able to make his personhood invisible at the same time as he exposes his body so cruelly. This places us, the viewers of the photograph, into a parallel relationship with the students in the class; they look at the Indian, and we look at the Indian, and the Indian does not look at us. But the triangulation is not equally weighted, for we, the viewers, also look at the students, while they cannot look at us. Thus, the photograph exaggerates our access to the Indian and the students. In it, they *both* are objects of our gaze, open to our visual pleasure. The students, however, seem defenseless in the openness of their looking; from their postures and their expressions, we can tell what they look at, and that they wonder. While the Indian is closed, we do not know what he looks at, and we cannot touch his emotion except as a stuffed dead thing. He is alive, yet what makes him alive, how he endures his situation, is unknowable.

A second triangle is inscribed in the image. It runs from the viewer to the eagle to the Remington print. All are official symbols of the United States. The eagle is obviously so, the viewer only slightly less obviously. One merely has to remember that the photograph was made for the American pavilion at the International Exposition to recall the functionary character of its imagined audience. The intended viewer, in whose place we stand, officially represents America to the world. The third point is the Remington print. Emblematic of recent American expansionism against peoples of color, into Indian lands on our own continent and abroad in the Philippines, the print depicts a scene of military conquest. The triangle of official America is wider than and circumscribes the triangle of the Indian, the students, and the viewer, but the viewer is at the apex of each. Thus, the Indian, black, and white drama of the school room is contained and encoded within a set of symbols of our national identity and of personal identity that situates us, the viewers, in the ministerial and powerful place. We are the link between both triangles, the place where they intersect. We are, in Lacanian terms, the "subject supposed to know," for whose sake the image is made.

In the name of the powers that be, the picture explains that the American conquest of the Indian is complete. Our native savage has been tamed enough to be safely shown alive to a high school class, like other live exhibits of natural history. Just as the black students throughout the Hampton album exhibit no debilitating marks of slavery, the Indian students in this image betray no dangerous resentment. If the three Indian boys in the back of the group do not seem to stare at the exhibit with the same open curiosity as their black classmates, at least they stare at and not past the Indian like the others, as they are supposed to do. As is general in the Hampton images, on an ideological level the image signifies that everything is under control.

What disrupts the adequacy of this explanation is first and foremost the tremendous and mysterious presence of the Indian on display. The

students cannot return our gaze, and therefore, strictly speaking, are objects rather than subjects within the discourse of the image. But they play the part of actors with their subjectivity intact. As they bounce their questioning glances against the display of an Indian in their class, they do not enact the explicit role of objects. Although they must be aware that they will eventually appear in a photograph to be looked at, they are objectified unknowingly, as it were. On the other hand, the Indian takes upon himself explicitly the role of object. He exaggerates it, he deepens it, and, by so doing, he transcends it. The trajectory of his averted vision removes his subjectivity beyond the frame. In a consummate outwitting of the camera, he makes it plain that we can capture his body only. His spirit will escape. Since we, the viewers at the single apex of the double triangle, stand for American policy as well as private vision, it is clear that this Indian has eluded the official grasp as well.

"Class in American history" is therefore a deeply ambiguous image. It intends to illustrate on the one hand that the authorities at Hampton have correctly gauged both the political situation of the nation and the educational and ethical needs of their multiracial students. On the other hand, it offers insistent evidence that Hampton does not know what it is doing. Johnston, as the maker of this contradictory image, might seem to lack control. But as I argued earlier, I believe that Johnston's own ambivalence toward what she saw at Hampton is one reason that the photographs are so powerful. The social moment that Johnston recorded is as complex as any in our history, and Johnston had the rare ability to orchestrate while refraining to narrow that complexity. For a photographer, this can be a most important kind of control.

In the *Hampton Album* two more Indian pictures appear on the page facing the "Class in American history." This page is unique in the album because it contains two individual portraits; everywhere else people appear in groups. These Indians are therefore doubly isolated: first, because theirs are single images, and, second, because as a reference to individuals within a powerful group aesthetic they are thereby distinguished from the norm and placed outside of it. The excision of the images is enhanced by a number of different textual procedures. First, although the portraits are printed two to the page, as no other page is printed in the MOMA edition, the actual space taken up by the image of each person is much larger than any person occupies in any other picture. Around each portrait, also, is a border of white page. This in itself is not different from any of the other photographs in the album except in its effect. Whereas the border of the group portraits functions to unify the many people within the picture as a single group, the function of the borders of the two single portraits printed side by side is to further separate the images from one another. As a result, the singularity of the Indians is emphasized both by the relatively much larger size of their individual images and by the creation of an abstract boundary between them.

Second, the backdrop against which the portraits are taken appears to



Figure 23. Adele Quinney, Stockbridge tribe. "A girl whose every physical measurement is correct."

be the assembly room stage curtain or some other such featureless drape. In every other photograph in the album, the subjects are presented inside a painstakingly elaborated *mise-en-scène*. It is, in fact, because the varied backgrounds are so spectacularly detailed that the compositions come to be so full of meaning in resonance with the carefully placed groups. Only these two portraits are dispossessed of the visible contextualization afforded every other photograph.

The third procedure of textual excision involves the actual written text that Johnston supplied for the images. It reads: "FAR LEFT: 'Adele Quinney. Stockbridge tribe. A girl whose every physical measurement is artistically correct.' LEFT: 'John Wizi. Sioux. Son of Chief Wizi of Crow Creek. S. D.'" By itself, the visual rhetoric that serves to differentiate the pictures of this Indian boy and girl from the pictures of the group



Figure 24. John Wizi, Sioux. Son of Chief Wizi of Crow Creek, S. D.

also serves to offer the images to the viewer as a pair. That is, the pictures construct a situation in which the two Indian students are not "the same" as the others because they are solitary. But because they are alone together in that difference, the pictures indicate that these two students are "the same" as each other. Furthermore, they are pictured against the same backdrop, they sit (successively) in the same chair, the light in the images is the same, and they are photographed according to the same photographic formula—the three-quarter-frontal close-up torso view, hands in lap, the unsmiling, attentive expression, and the eye contact with the photographer, which, by means of the photograph, is relayed by implication to the viewer. And in the context of the many coeducational groupings in the repertoire, the choice to isolate a boy and girl increases even further the chance to find them legible as a pair, even though the viewer is unaware, of course, of the actual social relations between the two living subjects.

But Johnston's written text splits this matching in a particularly instructive way. The caption relates John Wizi to his tribe, to the geographical/political location of Crow Creek, South Dakota, to his father, Chief Wizi, and by means of his father's chieftom, to patriarchal authority, both within the tribe and within the larger white nation that competed with it. John Wizi's caption, therefore, encodes the boy within a detailed social-political system where it becomes possible to speculate about his specific history and the effect of the school upon it. Although John Wizi's solitary image is isolated from all the images of groups of people at Hampton, it is not removed from a larger social context.

The image of Adele Quinney, on the other hand, is differently assigned. The caption identifies her as a member of a tribe, but that tribe has no specified location; no familial, social, or political position within that tribe is named in relation to her. Unlike the caption for John Wizi, the caption for Adele Quinney separates her thoroughly from her social context. In the place of specific information about her social role is offered the brutally objectifying information that her "every physical measurement" is "artistically correct." This observation may have been supplied to confound the racist suppositions of physical anthropology then coming into vogue, or it may have been simply a dissociated artistic observation; it is not possible to determine. But the effect is to institute a disjunction between the two portraits that is of great importance in reading their meaning to the album.

Despite careful coding of the images as "the same in their difference," the captions show that the portraits of the Indian boy and girl are far from equally placed. The momentum of the depiction of the masculine "other" is toward his capacity to reproduce social relations, with himself as a subject. The caption assures Wizi an unerasable social identity by virtue of which, no matter what his future life decisions, he will figure as an actor in relation to his own people, and also, remotely, to the nation as a whole. But Quinney is vouchsafed virtually no social identity that sticks to her beyond the representations of her own body—how her features are formed, how she holds her head, her general posture and bearing, and by extension, the clothes she chooses and the style with which she carries them. The feminine "other" is doubly remote from subjectivity as defined by the dominant culture: As an *Indian* she is removed from "civilized" instrumentality, but as a *female* Indian she is an exotic object to be appraised.

The overlapping white border between the two prints in the page layout takes on a special function from this information that is transmitted below the literal level of the text. The "abstract boundary," as I termed it before, that separates the two images makes a symbolic as well as a formal statement. It stands for the gulf of gender. A powerful verbal pun lies hidden in the caption for the photograph of the classroom on the facing page; it is a photograph of "class in American history" if there ever was one. Similarly, the featureless strip between Quinney and Wizi is a

visual pun of a very high order. The blank separation of these two portraits is like the mute distinction of sexual privilege, as major as that of class or race, that is sublimated but powerfully operative in the image.

It is interesting to compare the photograph of Adele Quinney to the photograph of the Indian on exhibit in "class in American history." In the group photograph, again the Indian managed to outwit the alienating force of Johnston's camera by taking upon himself the conscious role of exotic object and intensifying it. In this he is aided by the irony of the scene into which he was placed. By increasing the force of his own objectification, the Indian demonstrates its inappropriateness and counteracts it. Adele Quinney gets no such help from the relatively contentless surroundings in which she is photographed. Nor does her facial expression or bodily posture imply that she is aware that she must make a defense. In contrast to the Indian man in tribal dress, the Indian woman in Victorian dress gives access to the camera. She seems somewhat wary, but also proud, and she shows that pride and self-respect in her face. This is different from the Indian man in the classroom, whose facial expression we cannot determine, whose emotion is wholly inward.

The young woman performs an act that is deeply concordant with her gender role in presenting herself and her quiet pride to the viewer's pleasure. Women, unlike men, are *supposed* to be proud to be objects of visual pleasure.⁶⁴ Indeed, the fact that she can present herself in this way to the white woman's camera, in the clothing and posture determined by white womanhood—in the mode of, or "as" a white woman—is a minor triumph of sorts for the theory and authority of the school. Indian women in native dress and tribal surroundings hardly ever drew such calm, unexoticizing attention in the white media as is bestowed by this photograph. Quinney trustingly presents herself as a *female object*—a self-posture that is entirely in keeping with and supportive of her social personhood. And Johnston's subtle humanistic camerawork enhances this stance.

But Johnston's caption aggressively undercuts it with words that contradict the understated unexceptionality of tribal womanhood portrayed in the photograph. In its place Johnston instructs the viewer to see that Adele Quinney is an exception as an object of beauty—not because she is *exceptionally* beautiful, but because she is *correctly* beautiful. Evidently, Johnston chose to photograph her not because of what she was (a beautiful girl), but because of what she was not (an aboriginal type). Because she is an Indian, she is not a *female object*, as a well-bred pretty white woman would be, but an *Indian object*; and as such she cannot figure as the normal "woman" she so clearly thinks herself to be. Unlike her male companion on the page, John Wizi, who also looks quietly and confidently out at the viewer, if a touch less openly, Adele Quinney gets emmeshed in no other knowable social framework but that of her objectified body.

With this in mind, it is moving to notice that Adele Quinney is also

present in the "class in American history." Standing far to one edge of the little group of students who stare at the live Indian exhibit, Quinney looks even prettier than her own portrait showed her to be. The expression on her face is just as open as it was in the portrait, and just as complicated, but rather sadder. She looks at the costumed Indian as if something displeases her or makes her uneasy, but she doesn't seem to have determined exactly what it is. She stands quietly and obediently; she stares down at the middle of his chest rather than up at his face like most of the others; she steadies herself with one tense hand against the edge of her classmate's desk. His calculated self-protection is worlds away from her. She gives no sign that she suspects how seriously the transformation of a member of her race into a classroom exhibit of exoticism and military defeat might unnerve her, although, quite obviously, it does not delight her. But even more deeply buried than that unease about what is being done to him, or to her own education, is the suspicion that any insult will come her way in the graceful and pleasing goodwill with which she offers herself to the school, to the camera, and to history.

It is unlikely that, given her class and racial position, Johnston registered much about the meaning of Adele Quinney's complicated aspect beyond noticing it as a point of design in the grouping as a whole. Quinney is the last figure standing on the edge of the group. The interesting outline of her leg-of-mutton sleeve, the backward thrust of her left shoulder, and even the angle of her face, which mirrors (reversing) that of the costumed Indian himself, all help to bring a formal sense of closure to the scene, like the final mark of a parenthesis. A photographer as good as Johnston would probably have sensed instinctively the value of Quinney's presence on the level of design, if only for a fraction of a second. But Johnston's camera, stopping time, does work for Johnston and for us, which, if unaided, she probably could not have accomplished herself. The photograph captures and restores to us fleeting relations of expression that could barely have been seen, much less analyzed, at the time. By permitting contemplation, the photograph supersedes Johnston's own instincts and opportunities and escapes the depletion of her narrative frame. In it, we can find a Quinney probably missed by the photographer, a Quinney who contradicts, in fact, the thrust of Johnston's complacent caption, a Quinney who communicates more than Johnston intended.

We owe our vision of this contradiction in the first place to the brilliant complexity of Johnston's practice of photography—a practice that seeks and believes in mastery even though it cannot be fully regulated. Because of her dedication to control, design, and detail, the vitality of the past itself becomes legible in her photographs. Here is history not simply as a static thing, the frozen image of a group of long-dead students in an antique classroom staring at a long-dead Indian. Here also is history as movement, a flash of insight into the choices made by a group of people at the moment of exposure—what they did, and the possibilities that, simultaneously, they were holding at bay.

NOTES

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1. Robert F. Engs, "Red, Black, and White: A Study in Intellectual Inequality," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction*, eds. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 243.

2. Lincoln Kirstein, ed., *The Hampton Album* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), p. 7; and Robert F. Engs, "Red, Black, and White," pp. 244, 259.

3. Robert F. Engs, "Red, Black, and White," p. 243.

4. Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York: Airmont, 1967), pp. 37, 39.

5. Kirstein, *The Hampton Album*, p. 7.

6. Anonymous reviewer, quoted in Anne Tucker, *The Woman's Eye* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 30.

7. Olaf Hansen, "Francis Benjamin Johnston," in *Notable American Women; The Modern Period*, eds. Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Greed, with Ilene Kantarow and Harriette Walker (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 382.

8. Pete Daniel and Raymond Smock, *A Talent for Detail: The Photographs of Miss Francis Benjamin Johnston, 1889–1910* (New York: Harmony, 1974), pp. 111–27.

9. Evans made his famous photographs of three Southern sharecropper families in a period of six weeks in 1936 while on leave from his post at the Farm Security Administration.

10. Kirstein, *The Hampton Album*, p. 5.

11. Daniel and Smock, *A Talent for Detail*, p. 96.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

13. This phrase is the title of Robert Sobiechewicz's study of the 19th-Century daguerreotypes of Southworth and Hawes.

14. Anonymous, quoted in Pete Daniel and Raymond Smock, *A Talent for Detail*, p. 96.

15. Alan Trachtenberg, "Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs," in *Representations* 9 (Winter 1983): 2–3.

16. See Rudolf Arnheim, "On the Nature of Photography," in *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (September 1974): 149–61. See also David L. Jacobs, "Interview with Rudolf Arnheim," *Exposure* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 15–19.

17. Kirstein, *The Hampton Album*, p. 55.

18. Editorial, *The Southern Workman and Hampton School Record* (January 1900), quoted in Daniel and Smock, *A Talent for Detail*, p. 96.

19. Kirstein, *The Hampton Album*, p. 5.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

22. See Daniel and Smock, *A Talent for Detail*, pp. 87–93.

23. The caption of the photograph is also written on the blackboard of the photographed classroom.

24. Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 5.

25. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, p. 45.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

28. Engs, "Red, Black, and White," p. 243.

29. Kirstein, *The Hampton Album*, p. 11.

30. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, pp. 47–48.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
32. See Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937; rpt. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); and *Mules & Men* (1935; rpt. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).
33. Rebecca West, *1900* (New York: Viking, 1982), pp. 162–63. Ellipses deleted.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
35. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, p. 67.
36. For a discussion of the “seamless” effect of patriarchal discourse, see Nelly Furman, “The Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle?” in *Making a Difference*, eds. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 59–79.
37. Frances Benjamin Johnston, as quoted in Daniel and Smock, *A Talent for Detail*, p. 34.
38. See Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), and Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1980).
39. Olaf Hansen, “Francis Benjamin Johnston,” in *Notable American Women*, p. 382.
40. John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (New York: Pantheon, 1982).
41. Anonymous Review, “Whittier’s Moral Power,” rpt. in *Critical Essays on John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Jayne K. Kribbs (Boston and New York: G. K. Hall, 1980).
42. John Greenleaf Whittier, “The Slave-Ships,” rpt. in *Anti-Slavery Poems: Songs of Labor and Reform* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), p. 21.
43. John Greeleaf Whittier, “The Christian Slave,” rpt. in *Anti-Slavery Poems: Songs of Labor and Reform*, p. 87.
44. John Greenleaf Whittier, “Massachusetts to Virginia,” rpt. in *Anti-Slavery Poems: Songs of Labor and Reform*, pp. 80–81.
45. John Greenleaf Whittier, “The Sentence of John L. Brown,” rpt. in *Anti-Slavery Poems: Songs of Labor and Reform*, pp. 93–94.
46. Robert Penn Warren, “Whittier,” in *Critical Essays on John Greenleaf Whittier*, pp. 122, 128.
47. John Greenleaf Whittier, “In School Days,” rpt. in *Poems of Nature Poems Subjective and Reminiscent: Religious Poems* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), pp. 162–64.
48. Hazel Carby, “Articulating Race and Gender in a Theory of Social Formations,” unpublished Women’s Studies Faculty Seminar paper, Wesleyan University, February 1986, p. 22.
49. Daniel and Smock, *A Talent for Detail*, p. 145.
50. Kirstein, *The Hampton Album*, p. 11.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
53. Engs, “Red, Black, and White,” p. 242.
54. See Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade—Theorizing the Female Spectator,” *Screen* 23 No. 3–4 (September/October 1982): 74–88.