Imagining the past: the use of archive pictures in secondary school history textbooks

ROBERT G. DAVID
St Martin’s College, Lancaster

ABSTRACT

This article examines the use of archive pictures (paintings, photographs and engravings) in school textbooks, in the controversial setting of the Key Stage 3 (11–14) and Key Stage 4 (14–16) topics of the American West and the Native Peoples of North America, where pictorial images have created powerful stereotypes. Attention is drawn to the 1994 Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority’s report on history textbooks, which criticized the lack of supporting information for archive pictures.

Textbooks written prior to the 1994 report are contrasted with those written since. It is noted that despite the report and recent historical interest in the study of representations, there has been little improvement in textbook design. The methods of analysis that should be used on paintings, photographs and engravings are explained in some detail, and the effect of not providing the essential background for pupils to develop a reasoned discussion of their value as historical evidence is demonstrated through a number of case-studies.

Finally a checklist is provided for authors, publishers, teachers, trainee teachers and teacher educators to help them incorporate essential background material, in order to ensure that pupils can bring the same critical awareness to pictorial images as they have become accustomed to with written sources.

KEY WORDS

history; textbook; images; secondary; America; representations.

INTRODUCTION

The publication of the history National Curriculum for England and Wales in 1991 stimulated a publishing revolution (DES, 1991). Publishers, large and
small, well established and new, commissioned textbooks that would address the requirements of the Statutory Orders. Three years later the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) evaluated the quality of textbooks which had been written for a number of the study units at Key Stages 2 (pupils between the ages of 7 and 11) and Key Stage 3 (pupils aged 11–14) (SCAA, 1994). The report, published as an Occasional Paper as the History Orders were being revised (DFE, 1995), was seen as offering ‘an opportunity to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of the first publications’ (SCAA, 1994). Recently the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has undertaken similar reviews in a number of other National Curriculum subjects such as music, but no further investigation of history textbooks has been undertaken (QCA, 1998).

Though some of the conclusions of the 1994 report were considered controversial by authors and publishers, it did draw attention to a number of features which diminished the quality of the historical investigations that could be conducted by school pupils. The report commented that the rewriting of so many history textbooks had provided an opportunity to set new standards in ‘innovative and sophisticated design’ (SCAA, 1994), particularly with regard to the inclusion of a wider range of monochrome and colour pictures than had been possible before. With support from the picture agencies, visual material included archive pictures such as reproductions of paintings, photographs and engravings, as well as modern photographs of historic sites and artefacts, and artists’ reconstructions. The report commented that at both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 books were ‘extensively illustrated with many examples of interesting visual sources’ (SCAA, 1994: 10). However the report did not distinguish adequately between archive pictures and modern photographs of past material culture. It indiscriminately referred to reproductions of illuminated manuscripts in the same context as modern photographs of artefacts and key historical sites. The report was critical of the way visual material at both key stages was seen as ‘illustrations in the text’ rather than as historical evidence to be investigated, and that opportunities for progression from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 in the development of analytical skills had been missed (SCAA, 1994).

The report criticized the publishers, and the picture agencies upon which they often relied, for providing too little contextual evidence to enable pupils to assess the value of sources, whether textual or visual. It observed that at Key Stage 3, ‘It is relatively rare for pupils to be given any significant detail about the background of sources.’ It indicated that ‘it is not at all unusual to find sources undated, and also to find questions targeted on the reliability or usefulness of a source which give pupils insufficient information by which to judge such characteristics of a source. In general, authors need to give much more systematic attention to provenance’ (SCAA, 1994: 12). Visual sources in particular were ‘accompanied by only the briefest of captions’, and they
were therefore ‘likely to be little more than a decorative addition to the written text if they lacked contextual information’ (SCAA, 1994: 13). The lack of background information is especially problematic when analysing archive pictures, but nowhere in the report was any attempt made to define appropriate ‘contextual material’ beyond references to date and provenance.

Five years have elapsed since the publication of the 1994 report, providing enough time for authors and publishers to act upon the criticisms that were made. This article compares the use made of archive pictures in textbooks published prior to the 1994 report with those published since. As the number and range of textbooks covering the history National Curriculum is so enormous, a case-study approach has been adopted, as in the original report. The focus on visual images, in this article, has meant that the themes of Medieval Realms and The Making of the United Kingdom, which were chosen by the SCAA, are less appropriate than study units where the interpretation of pictures raises particularly significant issues such as the creation of stereotypes. The non-European study unit, Indigenous Peoples of North America at Key Stage 3, and the Schools History Project study in depth on The American West at Key Stage 4 introduce visual sources in their most difficult and controversial context, namely representations of ‘the Other’. Popular images of the Native people of North America have been heavily influenced by the nineteenth-century paintings, engravings and photographs which have been the subject of academic study, exhibitions and television series (Fleming and Luskey, 1988; Josephy, 1995; Alison, 1998). The same images have been frequently reproduced in the pupils’ textbooks that are the subject of this article. A focus on these study units will allow the discussion on using archive pictures to develop around an important, but difficult, corpus. The analysis of the use made of archive pictures will require consideration of recent methodological approaches developed by historians and anthropologists interested in representations of ‘the Other’, and will demonstrate how recent textbooks have been impoverished by the lack of systematic contextual information relating to the pictorial images that have been reproduced. Finally recommendations will be made about the nature of the contextual information which should be supplied, for the benefit of authors and publishers.

**RECENT METHODOLOGIES DEVISED FOR THE STUDY OF VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS**

An appreciation of the historical value of archive pictures, whether they be paintings, engravings or photographs, requires an understanding of technology, context and purpose. School textbooks have made increasing use of visual evidence, but authors, publishers and picture agencies have been less than meticulous in providing the essential background.
During the past two decades cultural and imperial historians have devised methodologies to elicit meanings from the increasingly diverse range of representations that characterized the nineteenth century. These developments have not only encompassed visual images such as painting, photography and engravings, but also such characteristic nineteenth-century entertainments as museums, international exhibitions and panoramas, and the analysis of the writing of travelogues, novels and juvenile literature of all kinds (Marshall and Williams, 1982; MacKenzie, 1986, 1995; Greenhalgh, 1988; Hyde, 1988; Edwards, 1992; Smith, 1992; Coombes, 1994; Youngs, 1994; Castle, 1996; Ryan, 1997). To some extent university history courses have reflected these approaches, but the continuing low status of image-based research, identified by Prosser (1998), means that many trainee teachers have still had few opportunities to study this area and, as is so often the case, new ideas have not permeated into schools through history textbooks.

A useful tenet for the study of representations is the distinction between ‘images’ and ‘imaginings’ drawn by Bernard Smith (1992), in his study of the artists who accompanied James Cook on his three eighteenth-century voyages of discovery. Smith defined ‘images’ as being created at the time, or soon afterwards, by people who witnessed the events they described or drew; and ‘imaginings’ as created by people who did not have such direct knowledge, and who were thus dependent upon the ‘images’ of others. However in suggesting that ‘a person constructs an image in the presence of an object from which the image is fashioned’, Smith added that ‘imaging involves not only sensations and perceptions, but also constructive skill and memory’ (Smith, 1992). Smith and others have examined the processes at work in the creation of visual images (Gold, 1980). First, there are the intellectual and cultural assumptions which the image creator takes to his chosen subject. Second, there are a range of filters, such as memory loss and conscious or subconscious prejudice, which transform the original image into the working drawing or text; and third, a further degree of ‘imagination’ is at work, in part the result of the limitations of technology, as the original text or image is re-represented for the public. Images were rarely created in their entirety with the object in view, as artists often completed their pictures elsewhere. Smith demonstrated that it was normal practice for Cook’s artists to make ‘rudimentary field drawings’ at the scene, from which pictures were worked up later, sometimes even back in England, after the voyage was over (Smith, 1992). Most of the artists who painted scenes from the American West, such as John White, George Catlin, Karl Bodmer and Seth Eastman, and whose canvases are so often reproduced in textbooks, worked in this manner. Catlin, for example, often worked from a sketchbook as he travelled through thousands of miles of unmapped wilderness, including on one occasion a 2000-mile canoe journey down the Missouri (Mooney, 1975).

Other artists, such as Rosa Bonheur who worked in France, never saw
Native Americans at first hand and relied on ‘images’ to create their ‘imaginings’. The same applied to engravers who, prior to the 1880s and the invention of new photomechanical processes which enabled photographic images to become infinitely multiplyable, enabled the work of painters and photographers to be reproduced in the illustrated newspapers and as illustrations in books, and consequently viewed by the masses.

History textbooks reproduce engravings but provide no help for pupils to understand the medium. Most of the engravings that are reproduced in textbooks originated as illustrations in travel narratives or the illustrated press. Engravers worked from paintings, sketches and photographs in offices in cities, rarely witnessing the event or scene that they were transforming into an engraving. Using Bernard Smith’s definition they are imaginings. The opportunity for distortion, whether intentional or otherwise, was always present. John Springhall (1986) has described the process by which sketches were transformed into engravings during the 1880s and 1890s. Once the sketch had reached the publisher

the main outlines were redrawn, or traced, in reverse on to boxwood that was divided into separate blocks. A double page spread might need as many as forty of these blocks and several artists working simultaneously on them, one specializing in architectural detail, another in topography, another in figures and so on – a form of art by committee. When the work was finished, the blocks were bolted together with much care being taken to ensure that there was the closest fit where the pieces of wood met. Then the work was sent to the engravers who cut away all except the lines. A wax impression of the wood engraving was made from which a metal printing block carrying the reversed image of the original could be electrotyped ready for the printing press. (Springhall, 1986: 58–61)

In addition, the process of engraving, as Bernard Smith has shown, involved techniques that ‘could mediate between perception and representation in the secondary acts of draughtsmanship’, and aesthetic conventions that could further alter the finished product (Smith, 1992). The opportunity for the original sketch to undergo modification was clearly considerable, especially if the image contained details which were not fully understood by someone unfamiliar with the landscape or culture that was being portrayed. It was also possible for editorial interference to alter the message of the picture, in order to ensure the finished product was marketed within the parameters of accepted canons of taste. Few engravers would have been familiar with the landscape of the American West or the culture of the Native Americans, so opportunities for unintentional errors in interpretation abounded. Similarly, the interest in, and sympathies for, the culture of the Native Americans shown by many of the artists were not necessarily shared by the editors of
newspapers or books who commissioned engravings, so engravers may have been under pressure to make various alterations to the original picture, in order to change its meaning. However, Bernard Smith has reminded his readers that alterations were not inevitable and ‘before we dismiss voyage drawings or engravings as inaccurate or misleading, we should remind ourselves that all information is conveyed by a code of some kind, and the first thing to do is to learn to read that code’ (Smith, 1992: 184). Unfortunately, textbooks do not help pupils read that code, and most teachers’ guides do not provide the guidance that would help teachers help their pupils.

For mid-nineteenth century society, accustomed to acquiring images of place mediated through word-pictures of authors and the eyes of artists, it was not difficult to be persuaded to view photography ‘as a simple recording truth-revealing mechanism’, the archetypal image in Bernard Smith’s classification (Edwards, 1992: 4). The authority of the photographic image became unquestioned, whereas in reality, ‘far from being objective and neutral, photographs are highly selective in construction and frequently ambiguous in effect’ (Ryan, 1995: 55). Unfortunately many of the photographs of Native Americans reproduced in modern school textbooks are presented as reality.

Each photographic image, as with text and paintings, was framed by the cultural milieu of the photographer, his technical skill and motivation, as well as its intended purpose and ultimately the caption placed with it. Early photographs in particular were influenced by the lingering aesthetics of the picturesque and sublime. James Ryan has pointed out that ‘photographs need to be understood not simply as visual repositories of some frozen history, but rather as complex moments in historical processes of representation’ (Ryan, 1995: 55). This observation is particularly apposite during the period of rapid change in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when photography fostered ‘in the minds of its spectators the reassuring illusion that they were controlling (the world) even as they explored it’ (Lemagny and Rouillé, 1986: 59).

The nineteenth-century photographer was hampered by the technological limitations of a new medium. The wet collodian plate, which was the dominant negative process from the mid 1850s to about 1880, required photographers to carry their darkroom, equipment and chemicals with them. Given the climate, the rough terrain, the lack of fresh running water in the arid regions, wet collodian plate photography was too restrictive and cumbersome to be practical, and this explains why the medium of photography was initially rarely used in the American West. Even the invention of dry-plate negatives in the 1870s left the photographer with a bulky camera and long exposure times. As photography was also limited to black and white images, the artist with his lightweight equipment was still valued, finding a particular role in recording the colour of the landscape, culture and sky. The technological breakthroughs of the late 1880s and 1890s that introduced smaller cameras and nitrate film saw an exponential growth in the number of
photographers at work in the field, and consequently the majority of photographic images that are reproduced in textbooks date from this period.

If photographs are to be used as sources from which pupils are expected to be able to extrapolate an understanding of the past, an appreciation of the origin and purpose of the wide range of photographs of the Native people of North America is also essential. Unfortunately the requisite background information has survived less frequently for photographs, but often considerably more is known about an image than the textbooks suggest (Fleming and Luskey, 1988; Josephy, 1995; Alison, 1998).

The earliest photographic images of America’s Native peoples are provided by the Delegation photographs which began in 1858. These photographs, which continued the tradition of portrait painting centred around the Washington artist Charles Bird King, usually consist of individual portraits of Native American chieftains taken by white photographers at the time of their visits to Washington and other cities of the eastern seaboard in order to negotiate treaties with the American government. Most pictures were taken in the photographer’s studio with many of the portraits combining a sense of dignity with a feel for the exotic. The difficulty for the viewer was that as the studio deculturalized the subjects, it was difficult to make sense of the image. The mannered or romantic poses favoured by the artists were copied by the photographers, and the juxtaposition of ‘savage’ elements in a ‘civilized’ setting perhaps convinced the viewer that though native traditions were unsustainable, Indian improvement was possible (Dippie, 1992). The large number of photographs of Native chieftains dressed in traditional costume had a profound effect on contemporary and later popular images. Many of the photographs were purposely taken to document a changing culture that was heading for extinction, but some photographers soon recognized their commercial value. For example McClees, a successful Philadelphia photographer, pointed out in an advertising leaflet that ‘as mementos of the race of red men, now rapidly fading away, this series is of great value and interest’ (Fleming and Luskey, 1988).

Later in the century new photographic technology allowed photographs to be taken in the field, and this enabled the recording of the Native people in their own lands that had been initiated by artists such as Catlin and Bodmer, to continue. Survey photographs were part of the brief of the US Geological Survey. Its mission was to survey and photograph the land and the people who inhabited it as the frontier moved west. The competing interests of the military, potential settlers looking for land, scientists and anthropologists impacted upon these survey photographs which therefore need to be read very carefully. For example, the photographers on the Powell Survey (1871–9) took what have become classic photographs of the Hopi and Paiutes. However, photographs taken of the Circle dance of the Paiutes in January 1872 show the subjects sometimes wearing winter clothes and
sometimes summer ones. Clearly Powell was directing the subject matter. In 1873 Powell invited an artist, Thomas Moran, to accompany the expedition, in order to arrange the Indians in artistic poses for his photographers (Fleming and Luskey, 1988). The results marry ethnography, aesthetics, science and at times the erotic, and these pictures are often reproduced, without explanation, in school textbooks.

Some photographs were taken specifically for anthropological purposes. Anthropological photography pictured salvage ethnography, anthropometry and assimilationist ideology. Salvage ethnography was institutionalized in 1879 with the establishment of the Bureau of American Ethnology, which grew out of the US Geological Survey. The meanings behind these photographs are complex. In order to promote understanding of Native peoples with the objective of ameliorating their plight, at a time when the Plains Wars had hardened attitudes, the subjects were appropriated and objectified. Photographs reflected representational norms such as full-face and profile portraits which mirrored the classic positions of anatomical description appropriated by the pseudo-science of anthropometry. The imperatives of salvage ethnography were achieved through incorporating an array of cultural material, much of it anachronistic, and backdrops were used which, more often than not, deculturized the subject. Assimilationists, such as Alice Fletcher, photographed the Omaha mirroring western cultural and family values such as gender hierarchy and the settled life of the homesteader as opposed to the traditional nomadic existence of the Indian. The meanings of such photographs are ambiguous when a ‘scientific’ photograph complete with cultural artefacts is purposely aestheticized and given a western gloss (Edwards, 1998).

Improved photographic equipment encouraged the emergence of a large number of professional frontier town photographers, and amateur members of camera clubs. Together they took an enormous range of photographs, both in the field and in their studios. Some satisfied the Native Americans’ own desire for photographs of themselves, while others pandered to the insatiable appetite among white settlers for frontier photographs. A few, like Charles Lummis, became sensitive to the plight of the Indians, and used their photographs to help raise public awareness.

Photographers at the start of the twentieth century realized that they were witnessing the end of traditional Native American culture. In reality they were too late, and the photographs they took re-created an already extinct way of life. Edward S. Curtis, the most prolific of all early twentieth-century photographers, took some 40,000 images over a thirty-year period, and was a leading figure among the ‘Pictorialists’, who married aesthetics with, in his case, recording the majority of Western Native peoples. He might have seen himself in the tradition of ‘salvage ethnography’, but as he requested his subjects to wear traditional dress, and chose arcadian landscapes in which to
photograph them, the historical value of the photographs as a record of Native American way of life is much reduced. Other photographers such as Joseph Kossuth Dixon, the photographer on the Wanamaker expeditions between 1908 and 1913, recorded what they saw as the ‘Sunset of a Dying Race’, the title of Dixon’s most famous image. At the same time Native American photographers were beginning to depict their society in transition, looking to the future rather than harking back to the past.

THE USE OF ARCHIVE PICTURES IN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS, 1977–93

The significant role for evidence-based investigation enshrined in the history National Curriculum is a direct result of the influence of the innovative Schools History Project (originally known as the Schools Council History Project) which was introduced in Britain in 1976. An understanding of evidence, its nature, variety, survival and its use to historians was seen as central to making history education relevant to the young people of that time. Evidence was defined as ‘whatever men have said or written, or made’ and was seen as embracing ‘artefacts, buildings, and (for modern history) film, as well as documents’ (Schools Council History Project, 1976: 38). Any idea that paintings, engravings and photographs should also be considered as sources of evidence was noticeably lacking. The emphasis given to written evidence within the project materials was a product of the primacy of written documents in the hands of professional historians of that time. The original textbook written for the popular ‘Study in Depth’, The American West 1840–95 (Schools Council History Project, 1977) reflected the dominance of the written source. Visual evidence was introduced to illustrate the text but not as source material in its own right. The narrative never referred to the illustrations, and as a result the limited use made of them by teachers and pupils rarely reflected the critical approach to evidence that the project encouraged. This was despite the opportunity provided by existing studies which had raised significant questions about the accuracy of many of the early photographs of American Native people (Scherer, 1975). In addition, the poor quality of many of the captions did nothing to encourage analysis. In fact most captions mirrored attitudes to ‘the Other’ common to early twentieth-century anthropologists. Elizabeth Edwards has shown that such captions often consisted of simple statements which tended to the creation of types, or short pieces of text which gave more precise, but still very generalized, information on location (Edwards, 1992). That The American West followed a similar approach is shown by captions to paintings and photographs such as ‘A warrior band’, ‘A highly religious being’, ‘A young brave outside his tepee’ and ‘Night attack on a wagon train’ (Schools Council History Project,
1977: 10, 21, 31, 120). Rarely did the early anthropologists identify anyone by name, and this remained the case in this 1970s textbook. Apart from a ‘Who’s Who’ of six artists added to the page of acknowledgements, no background information was provided which would have allowed any reasoned analysis of the archive pictures reproduced in the volume.

An attempt to improve the status of illustrative material in textbooks was made by the Historical Association (Unwin, 1981). This guide for teachers aimed to develop teachers’ expertise in using visual evidence, by summarising what was known about children’s developmental stages in visual perception, and offering a variety of teaching strategies. In his conclusion Unwin pointed out the shortcomings of many contemporary textbooks, and urged publishers to recognize ‘the value of visuals as historical evidence’ (Unwin, 1981: 51):

The usefulness of illustrations in textbooks and library books is lessened if they are reproduced without comment and, unfortunately, sloppy caption work is still common. Captions can be a valuable aid to observation and should not be just included as an afterthought. The inclusion of such detail as identification, classification, dating and attribution should be normal publishing practice if visuals are to be treated as sources of information from which students can learn.

The publication of one of the first revised versions of the Schools Council History Project textbooks, *The American West: 1840–1895* (Rees and Styles, 1986) reflected some of the advice tendered by Robert Unwin. Reproductions of paintings by artists such as George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, Seth Eastman and Frederic Remington (but not Rosa Bonheur) were accompanied by background information about the artists and their connections with the American West. It has, however, become a characteristic of textbooks that pupils are provided with background information to help them analyse the work of artists, but that less care is given to presenting information about engravings and photographs. In this book, as in others, nothing was said about the nature of engravings, and little about the origin or purpose of the photographs that were reproduced, making it impossible for pupils to consider their meaning. An engraving of Catlin’s painting of an Indian Scalp Dance (35) could have been compared with the original sketch, Catlin’s own description of the scene, and his subsequent painting (Catlin, 1844: 245–6 and plate 104; Rees, 1993: 32), to show how an engraver re-created a picture. In this case the heightened sense of drama, achieved by enhancing the contrast between light and shadow, reflected Catlin’s description more than the images on which it was based. The engraving received wider circulation in the nineteenth century than any of the parent images and therefore significantly contributed to popular imagination, but none of this was explained to the pupils, who were obliged to take the engraving at face value.
In many textbooks published between 1991 and 1994 visual sources were provided with a descriptive caption and nothing more. Tasks that drew upon the illustrations were frequently restricted to a consideration of the date at which the image was created in relation to the event it purported to portray. The implication was that the more distant in time the picture was from the event, the less ‘reliable’ it would be as an historical source. When analysing a visual source other factors should be considered, but they are rarely introduced to pupils through the textbooks, leaving them reliant on the teacher’s exposition. In order to offer any worthwhile analysis of the source pupils need to consider the circumstances in which the picture was created, the cultural conventions that dictated the format of the finished product, the creator’s purpose in creating the picture, the audience for which it was created, the caption that was added and the ways in which contemporary technology both influenced the original picture and altered it in the process of reproduction.

The information that accompanied the illustrations of paintings continued to be more informative than that provided for photographs and engravings. *Indians of North America* (Reynoldson and Shuter, 1992a) is typical, in that the caption accompanying a painting by the sixteenth-century artist John White provided information on the subject matter, the date of the painting and the artist: ‘The Algonquin Indians fishing with fish traps and spears in shallow water. This was painted by John White, one of the English settlers at Roanoke in 1585’ (12), whereas the information beneath a nineteenth-century photograph was limited to ‘A young Nootka whaler’ (29).

An unfortunate development in this period was the editing of paintings and photographs to fit around text passages and to fill available spaces. In *What Do We Know About the Plains Indians* (Taylor, 1993) the photographic portrait of Wolf Robe (8) and Karl Bodmer’s painting of Mato Topé (30) were both presented as icons with associated background culture, present in the originals, removed. In *Indians of North America* (Reynoldson and Shuter, 1992a) an Edward Curtis photograph, already depicting incomplete cultural artefacts (see Figure 1) was further trimmed at the margins leaving the viewer totally dependent upon the caption in order to make sense of the picture (33).

The textbooks used numerous portraits, many of which are examples of Delegation photographs, while some were taken by independent frontier photographers. No background information was provided on the photographers (they were rarely named), and little on their sitters, and no attempt was made to explain the nature of these types of photographs (where, when and why the photographs were taken), so it was virtually impossible for pupils to come to any judgement about the source and its usefulness, even though questions often asked this. Questions such as ‘What image of Native Americans do you think the photographer was trying to give?’ when applied to a nineteenth-century Powell Survey photograph, which merged aesthetics,
science and erotica, and is provided with the disarming caption ‘Kaiar, a member of the Paiute nation, from Nevada, photographed in summer clothing in 1873’ is likely to generate a bizarre answer when no background information is supplied (Macdonald, 1993: 6–7) (see Figure 2).

Another frequently used type of photograph that was not always explained was the romantic twentieth-century image that sought to re-create the Native American’s past way of life before it totally disappeared. Many textbooks concluded with photographs taken on the Wanamaker expeditions. In Native Peoples of North America (Macdonald, 1993: 58) a ‘romantic’ portrait taken by Joseph Kossuth Dixon was described in detail, but in The Plains Indians (Rees and Styles, 1993), the famous image ‘Sunset of a Dying Race’ was given its original title, but nothing was said about the intention of the photograph. Fortunately, in this case, pupils were not directed to answer any questions on it as they could not do so without an explanation of the circumstances in which that picture was taken.

Edward Curtis’s photographs were also used in these textbooks, but little or nothing was said about their special nature. MacDonald (1993), for instance, used his portrait of ‘Red Cloud’, undated and uncredited, to
Figure 2 An archive photograph used in a textbook which requires more contextual information. The Smithsonian Institution picture library provides a title (Kaiar, in native summer dress), her tribal affiliation (Paiute), the locality at which the photograph was taken (The Ve-gas or Meadows in south-west Nevada), and the date, expedition and name of the photographer (1873, Powell expedition, Hillers) but the publisher has used little of this imagination

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illustrate ‘old age’. The photograph was originally intended to portray the wisdom of tribal elders, but in this case it was used to illustrate the accompanying text: ‘Old men and women were valued for the advice they could give, and for the skills they taught younger members of the family, as you can see in the picture of “Red Cloud” ’ (32). The photograph does not, of course, show these attributes, but the text guides the pupil to infer them.

Most photographers whose works are used as illustrative material in textbooks were European-Americans, though their ethnic origin is usually little emphasized. A number of accomplished Native photographers emerged during the latter part of the nineteenth century, but very few of their photographs have been incorporated into textbooks, so opportunities to contrast the agendas of Native and immigrant have been missed. Richard Throssel was a Native photographer who lived on the Crow Reservation between 1902 and 1911, and whose work has appeared in textbooks. Macdonald (1993) used his photograph ‘Interior of the best kitchen on the Crow Reservation, 1910’, but failed to credit the photographer or reveal its original purpose, and thus misused it to suggest that ‘many Native Americans like the middle-class family (in this picture), made the choice to fit in’ (38). In fact this photograph had a specific purpose. Throssel was an employee of the US Indian Service, and he produced a series of photographs depicting disease among Montana’s Crow people as part of an educational programme aimed at improving Native health. This picture was part of the series and promoted the benefits of living in conventional houses, and eating formal meals at a table. He captioned it ‘the best kitchen’, and it was never intended to represent the typical Native American at home (Alison, 1998: 251, 315) (see Figure 3).

1995–8

Since the SCAA’s 1994 report, the publication of books on Native Americans has continued apace. In many cases there has been no significant improvement in the use of archive pictures in school textbooks and library books, but a few recent publications have begun to set a new standard. Four of the textbooks published during 1998 demonstrate the varying quality that now exists. *The American West 1840–95* (Wichard, 1998) shows little advance upon its 1977 namesake (Schools Council History Project, 1977). Few archive photographs of Native Americans are included, and those that are have generalized captions such as ‘An Indian prays to the Great Spirit’, with no information on the photographer, the date, or the origin and purpose of the photograph. Their low status in the book is indicated by the fact that most of them are included as illustrations rather than as sources to be studied. *The American West 1840–1895* (Mellor, 1998) and *The American West 1840–95* (Green, 1998) represent some advance on the earlier generation of textbooks.
Figure 3 Richard Throssel, 'Interior of the best kitchen on the Crow Reservation, 1910'

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Both books include reproductions of George Catlin’s paintings and extracts from his writings. These are integral to the narrative and, alongside some limited biographical information, support the answers to questions asked of pupils. However, no background information is provided for the other artists who are reproduced in Mellor’s book. This means that pupils who have been encouraged to consider the factors that influenced Catlin cannot approach the work of the other artists in the same spirit of enquiry. Too little information is given about the archive photographs that are reproduced. For example, the photograph of the Sioux Reservation at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, which is featured in both books (Mellor, 1998: 93; Green, 1998: 91) is dated, but its value as evidence of life on the reservations is diminished by the lack of any contextual information concerning the purpose of the photograph. It is quite clearly a posed photograph, but its meaning can only be read knowing the context. Green asks a question requiring pupils to use the photograph and an unattributed piece of text to describe conditions on the reservations. The question is clearly unanswerable in any historical sense (see Figure 4).

Figure 4  An archive photograph requiring more contextual background information to encourage pupils to question what exactly the image represents

Copyright: Peter Newark’s American Pictures.
Many authors and publishers do not seem to have the knowledge to make effective use of archive pictures. Missed opportunities abound. For example, in Mellor’s book one of the paintings attributed to Karl Bodmer, ‘A buffalo dance of the Mandan Indians’ is in fact a reproduction of Alexander Manceau’s published print, which was only loosely based on Bodmer’s original (Honour, 1976: 233–4). It could have been used as a vivid example of the way in which engravers and printers altered original artwork.

The recent official Schools History Project text on the American West (Martin and Shephard, 1998a) has moved significantly in the direction envisaged by the authors of the 1994 report. The accompanying Teachers’ Resource Book states that the sources which include ‘dioramas, engravings, paintings, photographs . . . are designed to be used’, and that ‘the source line – which introduces and describes the source being studied – is an important tool for the student. It contains details such as who made or wrote the source, and when, which students will need to know to answer questions’ (Martin and Shephard, 1998b: 3). The background information about George Catlin shows the book at its best. An extended biography (44) complements the reproductions of numerous of his paintings. Information is given on the dates of his travels and paintings. His purpose is made explicit as ‘a collection that would form an Indian Gallery (that) would record the Plains Indian Society that he knew would disappear’. Further reference is made to his writings and his obvious sympathy for the Indians; and to the importance of ‘his visual images . . . on the way other Americans thought about the Indians’. Although less is said about other artists that are illustrated, references to internet sites for the Smithsonian Institution (http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/nmaa/images) and the EACH project (http://www.dorset-cc.gov.uk/educate/each1.htm) provide access to further information on, for example, Seth Eastman. The same care is not, however, shown for engravings and photographs. The information provided is inconsistent. Engravings are, unusually for textbooks, described as such, but no help is given to the student to help him/her understand the nature of engravings. On only one occasion (155) is the source of an engraving indicated and the engraver named, but with no information about the engraver, the picture on which it is based, or about the audience of the Illustrated London News in which it appeared, little analysis can take place. The same applies to photographs. The portrait of Red Cloud (131) is dated and the photographer named, but on other occasions we are told nothing about the photograph, or photographer, additional information being confined to further information on the sitter. The frequent removal of the background of a photograph means that the problem of deculturation persists. Many of these books continue to decontextualize the image by only reproducing part of the picture or making the figures into icons. Even though many original images were themselves deculturalized, this approach is unfortunate. Part of the understanding of a picture lies in the background. A studio portrait, or a
photograph taken on site, needs to be seen as such in order to enable the viewer to understand the meaning.

The Eyewitness Guide *North American Indian* (Murdoch, 1995) is in many ways an equally successful production, but in many books intended for library and home use, archive photographs have been replaced by artists’ reconstructions (Thomas and Pendleton, 1995). The result is that there is much less emphasis on sources of evidence and very little attempt to help children understand how we know about the past. Although *What Do We Know About the Plains Indians?* (Taylor, 1993) highlights the importance of oral testimony and *Plains Indians* (Hayden, 1997) elaborates on the continuity of traditional ways of living into modern society, neither of these books mentions archive pictures as a source of evidence about the past.

**DEVELOPING PUPILS’ ABILITIES TO ANALYSE ARCHIVE PICTURES**

The 1994 SCAA report, despite its limitations, deserved to have more of an impact. The lack of clarity in the text about the nature of the visual images that were being discussed, and the insubstantial advice it offered authors and publishers as to how archive pictures could be presented more effectively, has unfortunately limited its value. Visual sources have too often continued to have little function beyond acting as illustrations, because neither the teacher nor the pupil is provided with the tools that will permit visual images to be deconstructed. Some understanding of Bernard Smith’s image/imagination categorization would provide a foundation for an understanding of the origin, creation and purpose of pictures.

Many teachers and most authors were trained before the recent developments in understanding visual representations emerged in university departments. This has meant that teachers are not always much better equipped than their pupils to analyse archive pictures. Many publishers produce Teachers’ Resource Books to accompany their textbooks, but the emphasis has always been on providing teaching approaches and learning activities rather than providing the reader with the background knowledge necessary to interpret the visual images (Reynoldson and Shuter, 1992b; Martin and Shephard, 1998b).

In the best textbooks there has been some improvement in the way that background information about artists and their paintings is presented. George Catlin is now well enough known for most books to provide at least some information about the author, the dates between which he worked, the purpose behind his paintings and the subject matter itself. Other artists and their works need to be treated in the same detail, in order to enhance the
opportunities to analyse their work as historical evidence, thus removing the temptation to regard their images at face value.

Engravings are still not explained. They are presented as images alongside paintings and photographs, and pupils are given no guidance as to how they differ. Opportunities exist both in teachers’ handbooks and in pupils’ textbooks to demonstrate how engravings vary from painted originals, and to comment on their importance in creating the images that dominate western perceptions of Native Americans. When engravings are used in textbooks they should be introduced with an explanation of how they were created, the ways in which they can differ from original artwork and why this happens, and an appreciation of their importance for the development of public opinion on an issue. This should be given in addition to specific background on the engravings themselves.

For most children photographs form part of everyday culture. However, familiarity with the medium does not necessarily lead to any greater understanding of its nature. The complexity of meaning, characterized by Winston as a ‘continuum of authenticity’, which involves ‘a complex range of relationships with the real world depending in different degrees on the plastic materials and action within the frame as well as the manipulations and intentions of the photographer’ challenges the commonly held perception that the camera never lies (Winston, 1998). Possibly as a consequence of this complexity of meaning, photographs continue to be poorly treated in textbooks, encouraging the view that they are a record of the truth. It is imperative that, where possible, the same level of background information should be given to photographs as to paintings and engravings. They cannot be understood unless placed in their cultural context, which means naming the photographer, providing a date, describing the occasion on which it was taken and explaining the photographer’s purpose in creating the image. The importance of contextual information is such that it is incumbent upon publishers and authors to use only those picture libraries which can supply the necessary richness of data for the pictures they hold. It is equally important that an image’s historical integrity is maintained so book designers must resist the temptation to remove the background from paintings and photographs.

As the impact of pictures is greater than that of text, so the plethora of visual images in the newer textbooks gives them the power to both create and confirm stereotypes. This is particularly the case with the Native American, as pupils come to this topic with half-formed images based on play, comic books and Hollywood films. By presenting pictures as mere decoration, or as unchallenged evidence, textbooks will tend to confirm the stereotype. To analyse the picture, and therefore begin to challenge the stereotype, pupils need a level of support with which they are rarely provided. The inclusion of study units on the Native Peoples of North America in the history National Curriculum and at Key Stage 4 has been a popular and welcome development.
So far, however, the accompanying textbooks have not demonstrated a commitment to historical enquiry and the fostering of a sceptical outlook that the Native peoples themselves deserve.

Pictures have often been regarded as easy pickings for the less able. Deciphering their meanings is at least as difficult as for written sources, but this has yet to be recognized by some authors and publishers. This article has demonstrated the approaches that should be adopted for the study of archive pictures and assessed the quality of textbook coverage in a particular historical context. Paintings, engravings and photographs are being used in a similar fashion in textbooks written for other National Curriculum study units and GCSE syllabi. The methodologies for the understanding of images that have been described, and the recommendations for improving the quality of contextual information in textbooks, are applicable across the history curriculum.

REFERENCES


Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) (1994) *The Impact of the National Curriculum on the Production of History Textbooks and other


