

Discourses of Power in Historical News Photographs: Bain News Service and Representation in the Age of Imperialism

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Abstract. News photographs, as a form of visual communication, serve a critical role in the formation of knowledge and understanding of the past and present. The ability to interpret news images in the context of their production is an essential visual literacy skill that aids the effectiveness of both the production and the consumption of visual messages. To illuminate some approaches to the news image interpretation process, this paper investigates visual discourses of power in early twentieth century news photography. The study takes a closer look at one of the first news photo agencies in the United States, Bain News Service, and the images it provided to the American press. The visual representations of the social, political, technological, and cultural progress of the United States, as compared to other nations, demonstrate that the news photo service helped introduce, at least visually, both the domestic “self” and the foreign “other” to the American people in ways that suggested domestic superiority. The paper analyzes select photographs George Grantham Bain’s service produced between 1900 and 1920, to investigate how these mediated representations served to illuminate differences and otherness and to position the United States as a world power. Ultimately, the paper argues that Bain’s news photographs, as sold to and eventually published by the press, promoted a sense of nationalism and exceptionalism in the age of empire.

Keywords: Bain News Service, news photography, visual image interpretation, visual literacy, representation, power, cultural diplomacy, nationalism, exceptionalism

News photographs have shaped and continue to shape the way we understand the *self*, the *other*, and our identity and belonging at large. These notions have been and are still communicated most effectively via visual images whose content is abundant with underlying messages and ideologies. Through an examination of historical news photographs in the context of their production and consumption, this book chapter highlights an approach to interpreting images and an understanding about the way they help create specific social and cultural discourses. Understanding these images’ visual “language” is an essential visual literacy skill that can help reveal the messages and meanings of news photographs.

The term visual literacy itself, first used by the writer and co-founder of the International Visual Literacy Association, John Debes (1968),

has been defined by communication scholar Paul Messaris (1995) as the gaining of knowledge and experience about the workings of visual media. Visual literacy requires the development of a group of skills, such as exploration, critique, and reflection that enable individuals “to understand and use visuals for intentionally communicating with others” (Ausburn & Ausburn, 1978, p.291). As visual arts scholar Anne Bamford (2003) noted in *The Visual Literacy White Paper*, “visual literacy is what is seen with the eye and what is ‘seen’ with the mind”(p.1).

News photographs, as one of many systems of representation in visual communication “are made up of presentational symbols whose meaning results from their existence in particular contexts” (Bamford, 2003, p.3). The ability to accurately understand the meaning and messages embedded in these images is

critical. News images in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, for example, illuminate individual traits and differences that are highly specific for their day and time. A historic exploration that considers such body of images as produced by an institution such as the mass media, offers a look into the way strategic and unified systems of visual representations made America *American* in the age of imperialism.

In particular, American news photography of the early 1900s can be understood effectively when considering images produced by one of the first news photo services, or agencies, in the country, Bain News Service, as it provided a substantial volume and variety of representations to the American mass media and audience. A closer look at Bain's image archives suggests that the products and practices of the media illuminate "both the longer world history within which the United States emerged and the understanding of Americans about themselves within a global entirety, increasingly yet unevenly mediated through electronic information technologies" (Lowe, 2014, p.121). The study of the movement of such cultural products beyond the confines of the nation-state, their production and distribution, supply and demand, and use by governments to instill certain beliefs can expand one's visual literacy skill set and broaden the knowledge about the state of global flows of representations, ideologies, and discourses of power too.

Bain News Service and its photographs provided images of modernity, expansion, immigration, and urbanization, as well as social, political, technological, and cultural differences and superiority that introduced, at least visually, the power of the American nation to both its own people and those living abroad. It did so in ways that simultaneously offered a collective sense of nationalism and sovereignty on domestic grounds, while creating awareness of the nation's exceptionalism on a global scale.

Furthermore, news photographs are central to the understanding of global culture and the implications of globalization on representations of self and other in terms of both individuals and entire nation-states. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997) once noted that historically, the

construction of *difference* and *otherness* is one of the central ideas in the discourse of globalization. Indeed, a difference between two opposites is essential to the meaning-making processes. Hall (1997) suggested that difference is necessary to construct meaning through a dialogue with the "other" and the marking of difference is the basis of our symbolic order, or culture. "Culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them different positions within a classificatory system" (p.236), he wrote, so the 'other' is fundamental to the constitution of the self. The present study of Bain News Service and the agency's images of the American *self* as compared to the foreign *other*, highlights the workings of this dialogue and the process of meaning-making via visual media.

To offer an understanding about news images and their meaning within their historical and cultural context, this book chapter employs a (visual) discourse analysis of selected photographs produced by Bain News Service. This approach includes not only a look at the composition and content, but it also considers the agency of the image and the ideologies that it carries. Such visual analysis, as supported by theories of representation, can illuminate the larger role of visual media and the importance of visual literacy in society as a whole.

George Grantham Bain and His News Photography

Turn of the twentieth century was a remarkable time for innovation as in the span of only twenty years, cars displaced horses and carriages, airplanes took to the air, magazines and newspapers began to run photo features using the improved halftone process. The early 1900s United States proved to be the right time and place for George Grantham Bain and his innovative business venture. The nation had gained new territories in the Pacific and the Caribbean following the Spanish-American War and by the end of World War I the country had established its reputation as a major world power.

Bain's world was also characterized by a keen sense of pro-Americanism as a major influx of immigrants entered the country and the nation's government-supported cultural diplomacy efforts were just taking off. It was a favor-able time for news photography, as a centralized journalistic institution, to establish its authority on the mass media front. At the time, the demand for photographs sparked the development of agencies that would serve as intermediaries between the photographer and the press.

Following such aesthetic, political, and business developments closely, then as a working journalist, Bain established his photo agency, Bain News Service, in 1898 with the goal to work with freelance photographers and member newspapers and facilitate a rapid distribution of imagery for publication. At the time, circulation and readership of newspapers and magazines in America was growing rapidly and was trans-forming the mass media into one of the more powerful and influential institutions in the nation.

Named the "father of foreign photographic news" by his friends, George Grantham Bain, was not a professional photojournalist, yet, as a former journalist and a photographer, he had advantages as he knew the ins and outs of the business of news (*George Grantham Bain, Pioneer News Photographer*, 1944). Born in 1865, he began his lifelong affair with news photography and journalism in 1883 as a reporter for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* and later for the *Post-Dispatch*. Eventually, he became a magazine writer who also photographed his subjects. His writing however was not appreciated by the publishers who almost always held onto his photographs, but discarded his articles (Freund, 1980). At the time when sending photographs to the press was still an unknown service, Bain founded several small agencies in 1898, with the first one being the Montauk Photo Concern (Freund, 1980).

After leaving the *Post-Dispatch* to become the Washington manager of the United Press Association, Bain became aware of the growing pictorial needs of newspapers across the country and began to purchase and collect photographs of news events and notable per-

sons from around the world (Carlebach, 1997). Based in Washington, D.C., as a journalist, he developed close ties with political figures and institutions that may coincide with his desire to "legitimize" photography, both as a journalistic tool and a business venture, during a time of worldwide expansion and modernization.

Newspaper syndications at the turn of the twentieth century had served as his business model. His agency was responsible for delivering by mail or messenger approximately eight photographs a day to member news-papers. The publishers were required to send Bain a similar number of their own photographs in return (Carlebach 2011). Bain was able to diversify his news service catalogue with images purchased from professional photographers and studios in the both United States and abroad, while occasionally working with freelance photographers too (Carlebach, 2011).

At the time, modernization and technological developments signaled a myriad of changes in worldwide photographic business practices. The growing international focus of images in turn legitimized the importance of the news photograph and created new grounds for organizational competition in business and commerce on a global scale. Bain News Service indeed functioned like a syndicate — it charged a higher monthly fee for an exclusive contract in a city, ranging between \$30 and \$60, augmenting the News Service files with photographs purchased from professional photographers and studios in this country and abroad (Carlebach, 2011).

While most of Bain's photographs were intended for domestic publications such as the *New York Times* and *New-York Tribune*, among many other local newspapers, a global photographic exchange of ideologies and values was taking place and an example of this can be found in the text of what appears to be a business agreement between Bain News Service and a Canadian newspaper the *Toronto Star*.

We will take your Daily Illustrated News Service for one year beginning March 29, 1910, at the rate of \$30.00 a month. We understand that you will

supply us on each day of the month, excepting Sundays and holidays, about eight photographs, and (if desired by us), a card index system for filing them. These photographs to be sent to us in the ordinary package mail. We agree that these photographs will be used in no paper except the *Toronto Star*. We will supply you from time to time a reasonable number of local pictures as convenient, and in return for this you will furnish us from your stock a reasonable number of such special pictures as it is possible for you to send as requested by us. We will put you on our mailing list to receive our daily and Sunday paper regularly (Subscription to Daily Illus. News (n.d.), Library of Congress, Bain Collection).

As these technological and business developments allowed for news and images to travel farther and farther around the globe, it is unclear whether Bain's products made it to many parts of the world as much as foreign images made it into his archive. Nonetheless, turn-of-the-twentieth-century's Bain News Service illustrates the early emergence of a globally influenced and influential business and journalistic venture intended to shrink space and time for both audiences and publishers alike. Using photography that represented both the domestic self and the foreign other in society, politics, and culture, Bain's agency successfully positioned the American nation as a global power for three or so decades.

Exceptionalism, Nationalism, and the Politics of Representation

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found the United States prosperous and confident. It was a time of transnational flow of people and goods, and a growing interest in both domestic and international affairs. Historian Foster Rhea Dulles (1959) observed that America's imperialistic ventures, although

skeptically viewed by some, were an expression of a growing national power and an international prestige that were deeply satisfying to most Americans (Dulles, 1959).

The emergence of the United States as a uniquely free nation was also underlined by its image as an exceptional and a highly progressive one in the newly industrialized and modernized world. What defines the notions of imperialism and exceptionalism here is the idea that the United States should not be conceived in just the sense of its commercial penetration of other lands. Instead, as American exceptionalism historian Ian Tyrrell (2007) suggested, the nation "displayed differences and ambiguities that one could expect from a country so professedly opposed to empire and so favored by material circumstances to avoid its overt manifestations over much of the nation's history" (p.118). Yet, the American imperial strength involved expansion and cultural exchange just as much as ruling. The consequences of these efforts stemmed from the political and ideological character of the United States as an exceptional world power (Tyrrell, 2007). The nation needed to not only convince the world of it, but its own people too, and news images and everyday accounts as the ones seen in the press, were among the most effective tools the United States used to represent its political and economic strength.

Political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson (2006) who convincingly proposed the notion of *imagined communities*, or the sense of belonging to a nation, noted that such belonging and nationhood are precisely powered and sustained by language, spoken or printed. The popularization of the printing press starting as early as the fifteenth century, helped individuals learn about fellow community members by reading with and about them and imagining them. In Anderson's (2006) view, the imagining itself serves as a linkage among the members of a given nation that becomes solidified through mediated communication. The "revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism" was central to the creation of imagined communities, as the mass mechanical reproduction of printed works united people that would otherwise have found it difficult to imagine themselves as part of the same com-

munity (Anderson, 2006). To extend Anderson's idea, with the growing mechanization of the world by the start of the twentieth century this intra-cultural interaction expanded into multiple cross-cultural channels and news images illuminate these paths of exchanges of cultural values and ideologies. They aided not only the "imagining" of the exceptional American nation, but its actual visualization too.

Yet, one may wonder how the processes of establishing national identity and imagining the other — be it an individual or an entire nation-state — changed when the medium of news photography became an everyday occurrence in the early 1900s. Questions of visual representations of nationalism, exceptionalism, and power can at least in part be explained through the study the early photo agencies, such as Bain News Service. These questions can also help identify the way knowledge about national and foreign cultures was shaped. In these terms, this book chapter aims to extend Anderson's idea from a nation's "imagined community" to a global one and from the act of "imagining" it to "visualizing" and "representing" it.

The spread of photography beyond national borders is indeed an example of the strategic representation of the modern nation-state and the affirmation of its existence and power, as it did not require complex interpretational skills. Armed with photographic evidence from around the world, individuals could affirm and re-create a wide range of communities that were once merely imagined. Representations of self and other were beginning to take on an important role in the news and picture agencies, such as Bain's, that began emerging in the late 1800s and early 1900s fulfilled the role of producers and distributors of a new understanding about the world.

Given the changing socio-historical circumstances at the time, institutions and governments were becoming engaged with getting to know both their own nations and those outside their borders too. Thus, these entities focused on the logics of social meaning and systems of representation which had to be sustained in order to support the broader nation-state ideology. In French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's view, the state has two components,

a repressive state apparatus, which include the army, the police, and the courts, and enforces class domination, and the ideological state apparatus (ISA), which maintain complicity and identification with class society (Ryder, 2015-16). The ISAs, such as the media, influence the cultural practices and systems of representation as their goal is to "not express, but construct, inflect, maintain or subvert the relations of domination and subordination in which heterogeneous social identities are produced" (Tagg, 1993, p.30). Bain's news images served to both represent and produce such identities, to further enhance the American nation's idea about the domestic self and the foreign other, as well as to convey notions of American domination in a world at the brink of modernity.

This kind of representation, as an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture and between cultures, involves the use of language, signs, and images. They are always present in the media and provide ways for audiences to visualize the world around them, to reflect on it, and to make meaning. Yet they also produce stereotypes of cultural groups both at home and abroad. Theoreticians such as Edward Said (1994), Stuart Hall (1997), and John Tagg (1993), among others, have offered an understanding of the effects of cultural representations in their relation to media, culture, institutions, authorities, and more. Although in different ways and to different degrees, they all delve into the Foucauldian notions of *discourse* and *knowledge/power* to highlight important ideas about the effects of institutionalized representational practices on the shaping of social discourses. According to French philosopher Michel Foucault (1981), power is based on knowledge and knowledge is produced through discourse. Discourse, in turn, is the means of constituting knowledge. Some discourses dominate the social world, while others, though suppressed, give way to some hegemonic practices to be contested, challenged and resisted (Foucault, 1981).

In John Tagg's (1993) view "power, then, is what is centrally at issue here: the forms and relations of power which are brought to bear on practices of representation or constitute their conditions of existence, but also the power

effects which representational practices themselves engender – the interlacing of these power fields, but also their interference patterns, their differences, their irreducibility one to another,” he wrote (p.21).

As shown in the work of both Hall (1997) and Said (1994) too, identity is the “structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself,” Hall noted (1997, p. 21). Everyday representations in news photography are part of what Hall (1997) has defined as the “politics of exhibiting” or “politics of representation,” which have the power to establish meaning and validity upon objects and subjects in line with specific discourses. In Hall’s (1997) view, photography offers a certain vision of people and events and a construction which rests on how they were represented by the choices of both photographers and the press. All forms of photographic representation are more than just a record of a given moment, because they are burdened by the values and ethics of those who worked within it (Hall, 1997).

An example of the workings of representation, difference, power, and their interplay is also detailed in Edward Said’s (1994) theory of the superficially constructed boundary between the Occident/West and Orient/East. In *Orientalism*, Said, like Hall, views the notion of otherness as grounded in the discourse of power and knowledge. He suggested the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, “of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (p.3). Yet more importantly for Said (1994), it is “a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts” (p.12).

Said’s dichotomy of Orient/Occident can be seen as an instrument for Western cultures to create and maintain the necessary cultural products, such as news photographs, in order to construct a desired social reality and assert a discourse of power of Western nations, including the United States. Such mediated cultural and ideological exchange holds the power to exacerbate binary notions of superiority and inferiority and of differences

between the self and the other. As news photographs began travelling readily beyond the American nation-state’s borders as early as the turn of the twentieth century, they fueled an ongoing dialogue between the self and the other and rendered difference visible. These differences are readily represented in the press and in news photographs, including those of Bain News Service as one of the earliest photo agencies contributing visual content to the world.

Practicing Visual Literacy through (Visual) Discourse Analysis

To offer some tools for studying historical images, the investigation of Bain News Service features the method of discourse analysis. The study looks at the news photo agency as a journalistic institution and it examines its photographs as sources for representation of difference, nationalism, exceptionalism, and power. The research and analyses delve into some of the practices of the news photo service while investigating visual representations of nationalism, exceptionalism, power, and the self, compared to the foreign other, along with the ideas, ideals, and ideologies that accompany these representations.

Discourse analysis is an effective tool for photographic interpretation because it helps place visual representations in the context of their production while discussing the ways in which producers of the images may construct a particular kind of knowledge. Discourse analysis is therefore concerned with; 1) the image content, 2) the image context, 3) the construction of the existing social reality, and 4) the ideology at the time.

Communication scholars David Machin and Andrea Mayr (2012) noted that discourse analysis assumes that power relations are discursive. The approach typically involves the analyses of news texts, political speeches, and advertisements, while exposing strategies that appear normal or neutral on the surface, but which may be ideological and aimed to shape the representation of events and persons for particular ends. This type of analysis, also found

in the work of the renowned French philosopher Roland Barthes, is concerned with “denaturalizing the language to reveal the kinds of ideas, absences, and taken-for-granted assumptions in [visual] texts” (p.5).

Ultimately, discourse analysis entails paying attention to the contexts of discourse production and is an effective way to look at images to interpret their effects, especially in relation to constructions of differences (Rose, 2012, p.219). The producers and distributors of news images accomplish their “rhetorical” work by observing, examining, and displaying everyday social practices that have become naturalized through the social discourse. As visual communication scholar Gillian Rose (2012) noted, such “regularly ritualized everyday life performances may express, convey, and reproduce gender or sex roles, racial classifications and stereotypes, and economic class” (p.15). In her view, “discourse disciplines subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting, they, the subjects, are produced through discourse” (p.192).

To assess some key points in terms of “nationalism,” “power,” “exceptionalism,” and “otherness” more concretely, this book chapter also examines select photographs of foreign and domestic artifacts, people, and places. The primary criteria for the selection of these photographs revolved around three themes of depiction; 1) societal values and norms, 2) everyday life, and 3) progressivism and modernization, as displayed in certain national achievements and innovations. More specifically, by focusing on ideas of *national character*, including domestic institutions, business, industry, society, and culture versus the *character of the foreign other*, this investigation seeks to illuminate early twentieth century representational practices that constructed an exceptional American image.

To gain an understanding about the ways in which images relate to issues in the early 1900s American society and the world, the book chapter considers the images’ contents, their context of production, circulation, and viewing, as well as their purpose. The study focuses on what the images say about American history, individual and national identity, society, and culture. This study is in fact interested in the

process of visualizing and imagining — be it an individual or an entire nation-state — and how this process might have changed when the medium of news photography became an everyday occurrence in the early 1900s.

Some questions this chapter aims to answer include; What was the role of news photography, as a cultural mass-mediated product, in representing both self and the foreign other in the age of imperialism? Did news photography help the American society re-imagine its nation, positioning it in a strategically advantageous way compared to other nation-states and how? Did news images of the early 1900s serve to affirm values of nationalism, exceptionalism, and world domination, and how? How did Bain’s news photo agency fit within this context?

The research approach relied on digitized primary visual sources from the Bain archives at the Library of Congress’ Prints and Photographs Online Catalog. The Library of Congress’ (LOC) Bain Collection homepage claims “the photographs Bain produced and gathered for distribution through his news service were worldwide in their coverage, but there was a special emphasis on life in New York City” — one of the most modernized and progressive locations of the country at the time (LOC, Bain Collection). Most images date from the 1900s to the 1930s, but there are some early accounts going back to the 1860s. The digitized Bain Collection offers 39,744 glass negatives and about 1,600 photographic prints for which copy negatives exist. The vast array of images covers the entire globe and includes topics such as innovation, immigration, social life, police and state matters, sports events, entertainment, social movements, disasters, politics, public celebrations, and more. While this investigation focuses on the archive of images produced by Bain News Service, a closer look at major publications in which they appeared, such as *The New York Times* and the *New-York Tribune*, might shed additional light on notions of representation and should be of interest to scholars.

During the research process, the +2000 subject categories were studied in terms of how they collectively might convey ideas of “nationalism” and “exceptionalism.” In particu-

lar, the two notions were investigated taking into account political, economic, social, cultural, and informational elements that best represent them and demonstrate a nation's unity and strength. From these subjects, twenty-eight individual images were randomly chosen for a closer analysis in order to assess their representational values, techniques, themes, ideologies. The selection includes images of people —studied to evaluate the notions of “nationalism” and “otherness” – and images of artifacts and places — to examine the notions of “exceptionalism” and “power” — are the main emphasis of this study.

While the images were organized in predetermined by the LOC categories or subjects, some of the key search terms that helped narrow the scope of the study included the words “dwellings,” “streets,” “emigration and immigration,” “ethnic neighborhoods,” “automobiles,” “airplanes,” “ships,” “city,” “bridge,” “flags,” “military,” “New York City,” “children,” “family,” “men,” “boy,” “women,” “girl,” and “group,” and had to be present in either the image descriptions or captions. In other words, a close attention was given to representations of society, culture, industry, politics, and other developments that can inform about the state of modernity and progressivism the American empire was undergoing in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Bain News Service and Representation in the Age of American Imperialism

As a major global player and innovator in terms of economics, urbanization, and industry, turn-of-the-twentieth-century United States signaled a shift in culture too. The modernization of people and society at large was inscribed in the newly developed patterns of lifestyles and behaviors that were influenced by exposure to the vast array of aspects of modern life such as technology, industry, migration, commodification, mass media, urbanization, professionalization, education, growth of income, and more. As a result of these transformations and with the aid of mass-

mediated communication, the American nation began to gain a better understanding of its influential place in the world.

Bain's news photographs contain such depictions and were characteristic of the illustrated press of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the time, picturing the world in photography did not just involve the documenting of exotic lands, but ethnographic images fueled the interest about the foreign other as the popularity of the medium grew precisely during periods of colonialism and imperialism.

The new visual experiences allowed for symbolic exchanges not only of cultural values, but also of a closer observation of political, economic, and social developments across national borders. These practices commenced early cultural diplomacy and soft power techniques that are an ordinary occurrence in the now globalized world. As Freund (1980) rightfully suggested, already, upon its popularization, photography became at once a powerful device for propaganda and the manipulation of opinion too. “Industry, finance, government, the owners of the press were able to fashion the world in images after their own interests. The last decades of the nineteenth century mark the beginning of a new era,” Freund (1980) wrote (p.103).

At the time, New York City — Bain's playground—was at its peak as the financial, commercial, and manufacturing capital of the United States. The increase of photographic supply and demand was not only fueled by the technological growth, but also by the influx of immigrants. While many were not fluent in the local language, they were just the right audience for visual materials which did not require the possession of complex interpretation skills. With national mainstream publications such as the *New York Times* and the *New-York Tribune*, buying into Bain's innovative picture production and distribution services, one can begin to see the shift in representational practices and the importance of photographs. Furthermore, as Americans were seeing more and more faces and places of foreign origin, they were becoming increasingly more knowledgeable about the foreign other and the way it differed from the American self. It was a time for the realization

of Benedict Anderson's no longer just "imagined," but now also visualized community and picture services of the early twentieth century provided a channel for this to happen on a global scale.

An examination of Bain's images, more precisely the subjects he chose to work with, reveal that the demands of both publishers and audiences alike were progressively founded in artifacts, people, and places that might have a direct relationship to the United States. The most prominent photographic coverage between 1900 and 1920 appears to have included a high degree of international affairs signaling the global spread of representations within and across national boundaries. As noted by Photojournalism historian Michael Carlebach (2011), "while current events — breaking and feature news — remained the principal focus of the News Service, they could not by themselves sustain the business. Newspapers and magazines now offered their readers much more than just straight news, adding pages devoted to fashion, entertainment, and especially sports" (p. xxv).

Photographs of various political powers, government officials, and industries from around the world also indicate that political, business, and economic ventures outside the national borders were of interest, implying that the American nation was looking at power in international contexts as well. Dominant foreign subjects represented in the archive featured people of high ranking and of an aristocratic nature, such as royals, kings, emperors, shahs and "Dover – Lord Mayor & Wilson" (see Image 1), is just one example.



Image 1. *Dover -- Lord Mayor & Wilson*. Bain News Service. Dec. 26, 1918. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

Business and industry sectors were among the largest categories with dominating subjects such as "railroad facilities," "railroads," "ships," "aircrafts," "automobiles," and more. Particular attention was given to these mechanical/technological developments to demonstrate the military or imperial strength of the United States alongside competing nations, such as that of the Soviet Union. "The USS *New York*" and "Midships of Russian battleship *CZAREVITCH*" (see Images 2 and 3), were produced around the time of World War I inviting audiences to witness and even compare national strength and military status.

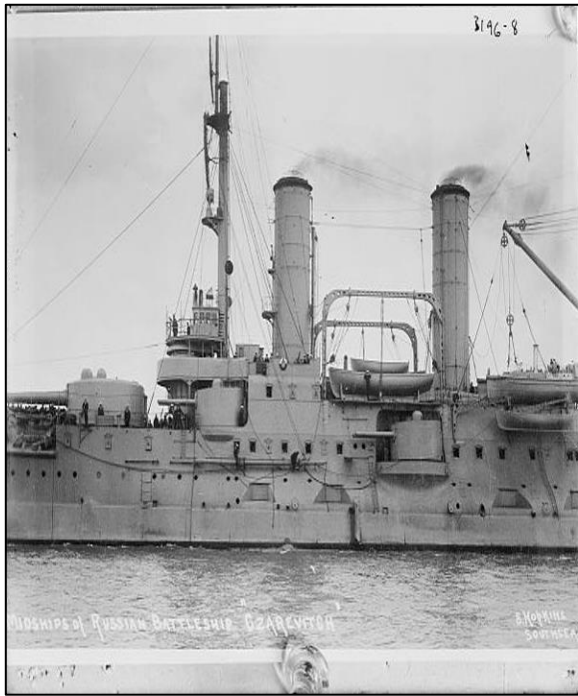


Image 2. *Midships of Russian battleship CZAREVITCH (i.e., Tsarevich)*. Bain News Service. Between ca. 1910 and ca. 1915. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

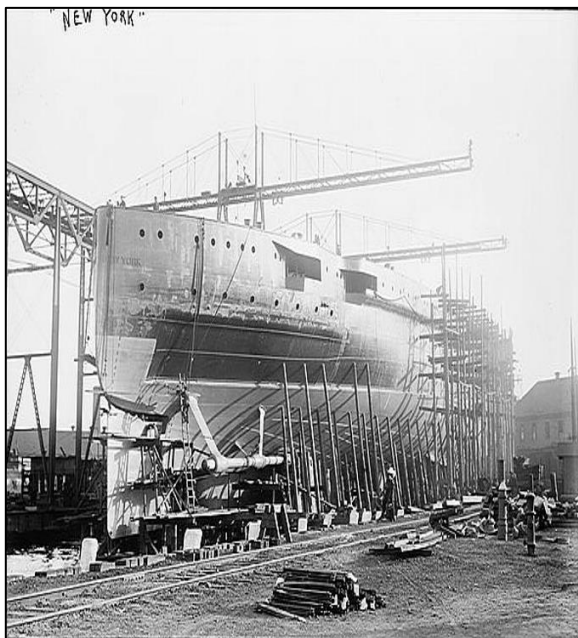


Image 3. *USS New York*. Bain News Service. Oct. 30, 1912. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

The economic and technological progress of the United States and the nation-wide growth of industry and urbanization can also be contrasted with the developments of other nations. The composition of cityscape type photographs, such as “New York from tower of Brooklyn Bridge” and “Riga — bridge of boats, Soviet Union” (see Images 4 and 5), points to the superior status of the American empire (depicted via aerial shot) as opposed to the Soviet empire. The New York city scape includes high rises and well-maintained roads and bridges in comparison to the somewhat primitive look of the Soviet river shot with low rises and medieval architecture in the background. The two images showcase what two distinct world empires possessed and were like at the time, indirectly pointing to progress and modernization, with that of the United States being superior.



Image 4. *Riga - bridge of boats, Soviet Union*. Bain News Service. Oct. 18 1919 Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 5. *New York from tower of Brooklyn Bridge.* Bain News Service. Between 1907 and 1915. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

as a tool of information and diplomacy for the nation-state.



Image 6. *Group of women standing on top of vehicle waving flags, New York City.* Bain News Service, between ca. 1907 and 1916. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

Notions of nationalism are also evident in the news images depicting political, military, economic, social, and cultural artifacts and symbols. It is not a secret that the United States is one of the few countries around the world that displays its national flag so frequently and prominently. News images from Bain’s archive show the uniting of people under the flag and signal the importance of a national spirit and values. “Group of women standing on top of vehicle waving flags,” “Chinatown N.Y.,” “Flag Shop, Navy Yard,” and “Hauling flag Ebbets Park,” (see Images 6, 7, 8 and 9) are among the photographs that convey a mutual dedication to the nation regardless of gender, race, class, and ethnicity—a leading trait of the American nation that still stands today. Women are holding and waving flags on the streets and creating them diligently in a sewing factory. In Chinatown, dozens of flags are hanging from storefronts and residential windows, and in Ebbets Park, men from all walks of life are hauling the nation’s flag together. These images individually and jointly represent the melting pot of a young nation that greatly differed then, and to a degree still differs, from most others today and these depictions are quite strategic since news photography had at that point began to emerge



Image 7 *Chinatown, N. Y.* Bain News Service. 1913, Jan. 1. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 8. *Hauling flag Ebbets Park*. Bain News Service, 1914, April 14. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

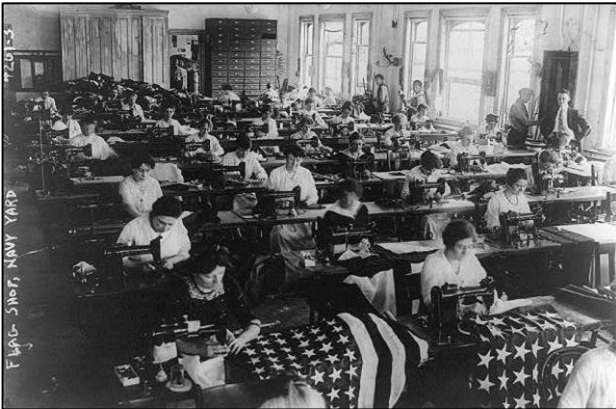


Image 9. *Flag shop, Navy Yard*. Bain News Service, c.a. 1917. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

In terms of difference and otherness on the individual level, when analyzing representations of gender, Bain's photographs of women revealed that they were gaining prominence and were of interest within the modern American society. Depictions of women's suffrage and civil rights movements, their progress in education, employment, and involvement in political activities, along with active participation in sports and social life, also suggest that gender roles were shifting. The subject matter and composition of "Women in School of Anatomy at Y.W.C.A. for Motor Corps of Nat'l. League for Women's Service, New York City," "Martha Clearwater" (playing a game of pool), "How woman policeman would look making an

arrest," and "Police Women - Capt. Edyth Totten and women police reserve" (see Images 10, 11, 12 and 13), points that the modern American woman was gaining agency in society. She looked well put-together, wearing either a uniform or neat clothing, standing proud, and holding a determined look on her face.



Image 10. *Women in School of Anatomy at Y.W.C.A. for Motor Corps of Nat'l. League for Women's Service, New York City*. Bain News Service. May 22, 1918. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 11. *Martha Clearwater*. Bain News Service. N.d. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 12. *How woman policeman would look making an arrest.* Bain News Service. Sept. 23, 1909. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 13. *Police Women - Capt. Edyth Totten and women police reserve.* New York City. Bain News Service. June 25, 1918. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

While domestic women were beginning to emerge as empowered, the foreign others were still depicted as rather primitive. The superior status and progressivism of the Western female is rendered visible not only in daily activities and social life, but also in the fashion styles and general demeanor. Examples of this are evident in “On 5th Avenue, Easter,” “Mrs. Thos. Hastings, coaching beside carriage,” “Women in a carriage drawn by oxen,” and “Street dress, Mohammedan woman, India” (see Images 14, 15, 16 and 17). To use Said’s term, the Occidental American woman is depicted wearing luxurious fashion clothing and accessories and being engaged in high social life. Her demeanor strikes as a highly modernized and empowered and this representation is also aided by the low-angle used in one of the exemplified photographs. The two carriage images reveal that the Western woman has become a rather powerful member of the modern society compared to that of the foreign other, because she was engaged in more “masculine” roles, including politics, activism, sports, and education. Although outside of the main focus of the present paper, the abundance of images in this particular category may be worthy of future investigations.



Image 14. *On 5th Avenue, Easter.* Bain News Service. Between 1908 and 1920. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.



Image 15. *Street dress, Mohammedan woman, India.* Bain News Service. Between 1900 and 1915. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 16. *Mrs. Thos. Hastings, coaching, beside carriage, New York.* Bain News Service. N.d. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 17. [*Women in carriage drawn by oxen*]. Turkey. Bain News Service. Between 1890 and 1925. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

Depictions of international spectacle were also intended to domesticate notions of difference and otherness. Studying images of social life side by side, offers an understanding of the workings of the binary of the developed and superior self, versus the underdeveloped and inferior other this chapter was interested in. “New York City street scenes — 5th Avenue,” “Street scene, Bombay, India,” “Dreamland Coney Island, New York City,” and “China, Changsha; mass of people at waterfront, near view of crowd” (see Images 18, 19, 20 and 21), for example, vividly illustrate this point. While the crowds and subjects on Coney Island and Fifth Avenue are shown wearing formal attire—suggesting wealth, culture, high social standing—their foreign counterparts from China and India were shown as either unkempt and/or primitive.



Image 18. *New York City street scenes - 5th Avenue*. Bain News Service. Dec. 18, 1913. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 20. *China, Changsha; mass of people at waterfront, near view of crowd*. Bain News Service. Between 1910 and 1919. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 19. *Street scene, Bombay, India*. Bain News Service. Between 1902 and 1917. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 21. *Dreamland, Coney Island, New York City*. Bain News Service. Between 1908 and 1915. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

In further looking at images of local “underclass” people, “The big handout Hobo Convention, Cincinnati” and “Selling cold drinks in Syrian Quarter” (see Images 22 and 23), demonstrate that the domestic self, appeared superior to the foreign other even in poverty. The latter is evident in the well-put-together “hobos” and cold beverage salesmen.



Image 22. *The big handout Hobo Convention, Cincinnati, 1912, Feb.* Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 23. *Selling cool drinks in Syrian Quarter.* Bain News Service, c.a.191-. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

Western, or Occidental, superiority is also visualized in images of racially and ethnically diverse individuals living both on U.S. soil and abroad, such as those depicted in “Negro Homes in Thomasville, GA” and “Rodriguez Mexico, Mexican family” (see Images 24 and 25). These images suggest an existing difference in terms of American lower class dwellings versus those of a Mexican one, here expressed in the neat organization of the American dwellings versus the primitive ones in Mexico.



Image 24. *Rodriguez, Mexico, Mexican family and one room house.* Bain News Service. May 8, 1912. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 25. *Negro homes at Thomasville, Ga.* Bain News Service. Between 1880 and 1930. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

The inferior, or in Said's words Oriental, other can be seen as further sub-classified in terms of socio-economic status. Foreigners and immigrants in the U.S., for example, were photographed under various circumstances, most notably in their immediate surrounding, which were not visualized to be as progressive as those of the Westernized nationals. Immigrant images point to existing internal class and ethnic divisions and differences, and "Chang Singx Arriving in New York" and "Festa in Little Italy" (see Images 26 and 27), are only two of many examples that demonstrate it. Furthermore, these images show that the incoming to the country were leaving behind some of their heritage and were working on blending in with a highly-polished Westernized image instead — evident in the attire of the men in the "Chang Singx" picture.

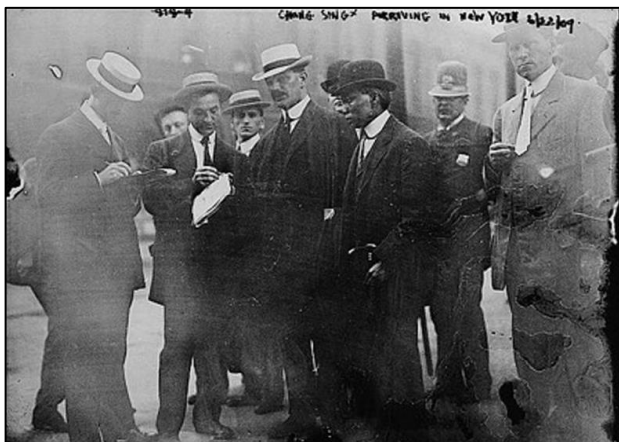


Image 26. *Chang Singx [i.e., Chong Sing] arriving in New York, 6/22/09* Bain News Service. June 22, 1909. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



Image 27. *Festa in Little Italy*. Bain News Service. 1908. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

Representation of otherness as it relates to race and class is consistent with primitiveness in images of Native Americans too. In historian Philip Deloria's (2004) view, "primitivism, technological incompetence, physical distance, and cultural difference have been the ways in which white Americans have historically defined Indians" (p.4). As such, the depiction of "Flathead Indians holding pre-Christmas family gatherings on the west side of Glacier National Park, in dense forest of evergreen trees that skirt the Rocky Mountains" is exemplary (see Image 28). As powerful ideological tools, news images propel audiences to form generalized ideas about individuals and social groups. This perpetuates an endless sense of otherness and the "anomalies" that come with it. The evolution of discourses (practices) and ideologies (what these practices contain and mean), shows that expectations and deviations from them change both in relation to local knowledge and in relation to the broader cultural and social situations (Deloria, 2004). One thing that becomes abundantly clear is that news images contribute to Hall's (1997) dialogue between the self and the other, and depicting or implying a difference between two opposites became fundamental to the meaning-making processes as early as the popularization of photography at turn of the twentieth century.

Although during the early 1900s the news photo agency was still in its inception as a

journalistic institution, Bain News Service is exemplary of some of the initial steps for news photography's entry into the global sphere of cultural representation. Bain's agency not only provided a visual record of the United States and its people, but it successfully placed the progressive nation as a world power in the global context. By doing so, his photographs connected, at least visually, the foreign other and the American self, further extending Benedict Anderson's (2006) notion of an "imagined community" beyond the nation-state's borders.



Image 28. Flathead Indians holding pre-Christmas family gatherings on the west side of Glacier National Park, in the dense forest of evergreen trees that skirt the Rocky Mountains. Bain News Service. Between 1900 and 1920. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

News Photography, the Politics of Representation, and Cultural Diplomacy

Since the turn of the twentieth century, news images have served and still serve as soft power tools of representation that are almost seamlessly employed to influence the foreign others. As cultural diplomacy scholar David Clarke (2016) wrote, public diplomacy is produced by the political system and is for a political purpose. Cultural diplomacy, on the other hand, uses the products of the cultural life of a country to aid its foreign policy goals. "Stated simply, [then], cultural diplomacy is the deployment of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy" (p.148).

Such discourses for exchange of ideologies, ideas, information, and other aspects of culture are now even more easily enabled by twenty first century technologies and globalization. These efforts are intended to represent a nation's ideals and aid its institutions to build broad support for its economic and political goals. This readily ties to the Foucauldian notions of knowledge/power and discourse, and today, to cultural globalization and its practices. Acknowledging the role of visual media in speaking a universal language across political, social and cultural divides, is critical to reveal the solid connection between everyday culture, media, and cultural policy (Flew, 2007).

Bain's work was central to these developments at the turn of the twentieth century. His entrepreneurial skills combined with his keen journalistic eye set the stage for the commodification and institutionalization of news photography and the news photo agency. His service began its journey in international relations and cultural exchanges years prior to major agencies such as Western Union transmitted the first halftone photograph by wire in 1921. The Associated Press did not even commence its wire photo service until 1935. A study of Bain's competitors, such as the *New York Times'* Wide World Photos and Hearst's International News Photos, can also help explain the ways news photography grew internationally and contributed to the

representation of discourses of power in later years.

The establishment of the news photo agency as an institution for cultural representation at large speaks volumes about the power of visuality in the legitimization of a nation. As Tagg (2007) has argued, the use of photography as evidence of national and international affairs was influenced by the emergence of new institutions and new practices of observation and record-keeping. Such new techniques of representations and regulation were central to the restructuring of local and national states in industrialized societies at the turn of the twentieth century (Tagg, 2007). In these terms, the early twentieth century Bain News Service was a pioneering global institution that successfully represented what it meant to be American and in turn it visually conveyed the American progress and power to nations abroad too.

Bain's work is also exemplary of the larger power photographs hold as sources for globalizing ideas, ideologies, and values. While technological progress continues to change the manner in which news photographs exist today, the focus on studying the visual cannot and should not rest in technologies alone and, as Messaris (1995) suggested, "there is also some value in occasionally casting an eye backwards at the traces of visual culture of the past" (p. 55). As news photographs continue to circle the world, transcending space and time for both their producers and consumers alike, it is important to be able to recognize the ways in which this form of visual representation is intertwined with the social context of its creation.

Encouraging the study of historical images, as a form of visual literacy, is a critical building block to historical knowledge. Messaris (1995) indeed argued that photographs are so "intimately and significantly intertwined with the social developments from which they emerged that the teaching of history seems almost inconceivable without some reference to these images" (p.52). In addition, the study of photographs within their context aids cultural understanding and in Messaris's view, there are "certain images about which one might want to instruct younger generations because of the

role which they have played as a reference point in the public life of older generations" (p.52).

Art critic John Berger (2013) has rightfully argued too that the ability to read and appreciate photographs, along with the ideologies embedded in them, helps build an understanding about bigger, more globally-encompassing, truths about the human character. "Every photograph is in fact a means of testing, confirming, and constructing a total view of reality," Berger wrote. "Hence the crucial role of photography in ideological struggle. Hence the necessity of our understanding a weapon which we can use and which can be used against us" (p.27).

Photographs quote from experiences and appearances and they can only produce fragments of events and realities. These realities are ambiguous to the viewers unless the viewers are reading about them or are able to contextualize and understand the "hidden" meanings in a given image. But being literate does not solely involve an understanding of words and texts, in also requires the ability to interpret visual images.

As demonstrated in this book chapter, becoming visually literate — or having the ability to produce, analyze, and use images effectively — is an ongoing process that depends on technologies, contexts, and social realities. In art historian W. J. T. Mitchell's (1995) words, the understanding of visual language today matters more than ever as the long domination of texts and words has now come to an end. Images no longer exist to simply entertain and illustrate a news article, instead they have become central to communication and meaning-making. The new "pictorial turn" has ensued.

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APA citation format for this publication:

Yotova, D. (2019). Discourses of power in historical news photographs: Bain News Service and representation in the age of imperialism. In D. M. Baylen (Ed.), *Dreams and inspirations: The book of selected readings 2018* (pp. 43-62). Carrollton, GA: International Visual Literacy Association.