

## Photography and the History of American Education

Rutgers University Graduate School of Education 05:300:364:01

Wednesdays 1:10 – 4:10

10 Seminary Place, Room 011

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(Office hours before class or by appointment)

### Course Description

The advent of photography coincides with the formative period of American education since the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the kindergarten, common schools, high schools, normal schools and universities were first formed in American society. This was also the period when schools assumed the form of age-graded classes and when high schools and middle schools formed subject-matter departments. This period was also marked by struggles for racial integration of schools and equality of educational opportunity, and by political debates over state and local versus federal control of schools, matters that have become the subject of legislation in the period of increasing federal involvement in public schools since the 1950's. This history is politically interesting to Americans because it has shaped most of their lives and because it continues to express itself in current debates about education. It is also interesting in a humanistic sense or anthropological sense, since it is also part of the history of American families and their identities in modern society. Photography has become part of this history and offers special insights into this past that so concerns us.

Photography has been part of American education in many ways and for many purposes. Commercial photographers have entered schools to take class pictures, students and teachers on school trips have snapped pictures documenting their presence in the places that were the objects of their field studies, artists and photojournalists have taken pictures of teachers and school kids as subjects for journalism or literature, etc. Countless paper pictures from more than a hundred years of American school life lie in family albums, dresser drawers, and archival boxes in closets, attics, and libraries, holding images of the past, as if waiting for someone to pick them up and say something about them, or to pick them up or to feel the little shock we often get in seeing the past preserved in a photo.

Countless photographs of schools, scenes of school teaching, students, classes and teachers have been made. Some of these have been published in books and journals, but the vast majority of them remain stored in archives and in people's homes, unstudied by scholars. These pictures record a good deal of the social, cultural, and intellectual history of American education in showing how people dressed, how they posed and presented themselves, how they took their places in the society of the school, how they allowed themselves to be grouped and recorded by others, etc. But as photographs they also capture the past in a way that no other record has been able to do and this special presentation of the past is a unique subject for history. Thus while photographs document many things that are natural subjects for history – images of school buildings, students' dress, evidence of social relations, materials of education – they also include things that history has a hard time articulating, namely the sense that the past was real in ways that the present is excluded from, and that we are somehow given privileged access to through photography. When we look at an old picture we see things that we might recognize from history or be curious to study as history, but we also see the past itself, which is not history, not a story at all, but rather an image of the past that comes to us intact and very much uninterpreted, even or almost beyond analysis. History is interpretation, story; but there is something in photographs that resists interpretation, though it is clearly related to history...

For this class we will choose photos from archival collections – mainly from the Library of Congress' online "American Memory" collection – and study them alongside reading in the history of education. The goal will be to study the images and their relevant histories together, seeing the one informing the other, and to make interpretations of the pictures we choose. In order to make these interpretations, we will have to learn some of the history relevant to each picture, which we will do by reading Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner's *American Education: A History*. We will also document the pictures we study as archival material, learning as much as we can about who is pictured in them, when and where they were taken, who has kept them, where the pictures are now, etc. We will develop protocols for doing this and discuss their meanings and the validity of using them to write history. But we will also interpret the pictures we choose to focus on in a few other ways, specifically by studying them rhetorically, aesthetically, in terms of the cultural information they contain, and as

prompts for narratives (or poems). I will show you some key ways of doing these things and provide handouts with instructions and rationales for these methods of interpretation, as well as recommended optional readings you can take up if you would like to study these things further. As we learn each approach to interpretation, you will write short papers (three in all, explained below), each one applying a new method. We will also discuss and think about how these interpretations relate to the work of history. As a final project, you will make portfolios (also explained below) of pictures in which you see common themes.

### Learning Goals

One purpose of this course will be to look at archival photos – many of them now digitized – as material for a study of the history of American education. In doing this we will learn some things about how history is written. We will also learn key events, figures, movements, ideologies, and contexts in the history of American education as we read Urban and Wagoner’s text and make connections between their history and the pictures we find in archives. As suggested above, another aim of the course is to think about the nature of photography and its relations to history. These are all large questions that we cannot fully answer in the course, but we will make it our purpose to learn some concrete ways of approaching them and to take from our study a specific set of ideas and methods for interpretation that can be used in other studies and in life. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, this course aims to prompt personal and critical reflection on education, which should help in your development of self-knowledge as a student. Communication is also an important learning goal of this class. For more on this point, see below, under “Portfolios.”

### Required Text

Urban, Wayne J. and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr. (2008). *American Education: A History*. Fourth Edition. New York and London: Routledge. Additional readings will be posted on Sakai, but the main part of our reading is in this text.

### Description of Assignments

#### 1. Classwork:

Each week you will be required to search “American Memory,” a Library of Congress website, for images of schools, schooling, school kids, classes, teachers, school events, school principals, high school students, school lessons, other examples of

teaching, etc. (As we proceed, we might include other sources, especially ones from the Rutgers University Libraries, but we will use “American Memory” as our main source.) I will also bring photographs to each class, but our discussions will be based mainly on the ones you bring. You must bring one new picture to class each week and be prepared to talk about it in class, telling what you have been able to find out from the Library of Congress site about the picture (who is in it, where it was taken, when it was taken, etc.). We will set initial documentary protocols for this at the start of the course and expand these as the class continues. As we learn this and other methods for interpretation, we will apply these collaboratively in our class work to the pictures you bring to class. Some or all of these methods might be new to you. *It will be my responsibility to make sure you can understand these methods and can use them skillfully.* I will assign you to working groups within the class for some of our activities. Your participation grade (20% of your final grade, earning up to 20 points) will be based mainly on this classwork. For more on participation, see below, under “Grading Policy.” Participation grades will be given after the class meetings of October 12 and November 30, for work done thus far; each will be worth up to 10 points.

2. Short papers and outline (40% of your grade, earning up to 40 points):

You will have to write three short interpretive papers (earning up to 10 points each) on pictures from “American Memory” using methods of documentation, interpretation and analysis studied in class and including a brief personal *commentary*. Each paper will be about one picture. Each of these papers should be three to four pages in length, double-spaced, and you must include the image you are writing about in the paper as part of your text. (As you write the paper, think about where the picture will fit in your text best and how it will look most interesting, both in terms of its size and its rhetorical effect as part of your paper. We will discuss ways of doing this in class.) You will also have to make an outline of two historical themes in American education in the period from 1830 to the present (based on your reading of Urban and Wagoner), illustrated with one or two archival photographs. You will make this outline collaboratively, working in your small groups; it can earn you up to 10 points each and each person in the group will receive the same number of points for it. We will take time in class at several points during the semester to work on these outlines and to allow the groups to divide the history and themes, so that each group’s outline will be

different. Specific directions and grading requirements for the outline will be given in class when we start it. You will not have to include a written explanation of the photograph(s) you include in our outline, but you will be expected to give an explanation in class. We will take time in class for you to present and explain your outlines when they are finished.

3. Portfolios (40% of your grade):

For your major assignment, you will have to make a portfolio (we will plan together what form this might take) of photographs related to the history of American education, with an interpretive/documentary essay. This requirement, like the outline, reflects a key learning-goal of the class, which is that you should practice collaboration in the development of interests, ideas and materials of learning and that you should learn meanings of our study in part with others. Specific grading requirements for the portfolio will be given once we are ready for this project, no later than week seven (though you should start understanding how to do it even before then). You will have to explain and defend your portfolio as an in-class presentation on exam day. As the schedule of class meetings (below) shows, you will be working on the portfolio, as well as the outline and the short papers, in part in class time.

Grading Policy

In addition to the values assigned to the short papers and portfolios (40% for the three short papers and the outline, 40% for the portfolio, as stated above), participation will count for 20% of your grade. *Participation means showing an active interest in questions and projects undertaken by the class, week by week, showing willingness to learn, and showing commitment to the learning of others; it also means coming to class each week having done the assigned readings and having found a photograph for our discussion.* Papers will be graded for their historical knowledge (from Urban and Wagoner), for their knowledge and effective use of methods of interpretation studied in the class, for complexity, and for conformity with academic writing style. Grading guidelines for the assignments will be given in advance for each one. This class will uphold the Rutgers University academic integrity policy, which can be found at:<http://senate.rutgers.edu/FinalInterimAcademicIntegrityPolicy.pdf>

### Schedule of Class Meetings

*N.B.* Readings given for the various weeks are due in the weeks where they appear; activities listed will be done on the dates where they appear. Due dates for graded assignments and for assigning participation grades are indicated in the schedule where weeks are marked with an asterisk (\*). “Interpretations of photographs” in the weekly schedule means the activity of making interpretations of pictures found by members of the class; these activities will include some writing, in the form of expressive drafts of possible interpretation papers. These will give you a sense of how to write the three short papers and how to do much of the work in your portfolios.

1. *September 7*, Introduction: an image from “American Memory” and some questions about photography, history, and education; homework: begin searching “American Memory” and collecting photographs to bring to class (you will need one for each class session in weeks 2 through 14; it might be good to make an initial set now and keep searching the site as the weeks go by to see if you find others that prove more interesting); begin reading Urban and Wagoner (see reading schedule at end of syllabus)
2. *September 14*, Urban and Wagoner: overview of their thematic outline of the history; some questions in history of American education; the invention of photography and its early applications and techniques; early uses of photography in American schools; kinds of photographs; changing meanings of photography coming from changes in its physical nature; digitized archival photographs; how photographs differ from drawings; presenting and talking about photographs students bring to class
3. *September 21*, Interpretations of photographs: how to document the pictures we find, and what should count as documentation; relations of archival materials to history; ownership and copyright of archival photographs; other sources of photographs of American education that we might use, including the “Special Collections” of the Rutgers University Libraries; presenting and talking about photographs students bring to class and posing questions about documenting them; documentation, archives, and the nature of history
4. *September 28*, Interpretations of photographs: learning about and practicing rhetorical analysis techniques that can help us interpret photographs as persuasive

- arguments establishing relations between the photograph and its audiences, between audiences and the subject matter of a photograph, between the photographer and this subject matter, etc.; presenting and talking about photographs students bring to class; Urban and Wagoner – making notes for thematic outlines from chapters 4-6
5. \**October 5*, Writing the first short paper (to be submitted electronically by the end of this calendar week): this will be a writing session; we will use the class period for drafting the first short paper, asking questions about writing, and learning the grading guidelines for the assignment; this first paper (and only this one) will be graded pass/fail, with full points given for a “pass” and you will receive comments from me about any weaknesses in your work that might prevent your other papers from receiving A’s; by now you should have had enough practice with documentation and rhetorical analysis to write your paper using one of these techniques; Urban and Wagoner – further discussion
  6. \**October 12*, Interpretations of photographs: learning about and practicing cultural analysis – relating imagery in photographs to culture and meaning; comparing photographs and making sets with common formal elements from the ones we have collected thus far, a technique we will continue as we go forward; Urban and Wagoner – making notes for thematic outlines and discussion of the history, chapters 7-8; presenting and talking about photographs students bring to class; first participation grade (up to 10 points) will be given after this class session
  7. *October 19*: Sorting the images collected thus far into sets and mounting a practice thematic exhibit; responses to the exhibit; Urban and Wagoner – making notes for thematic outlines and discussion of the history, still on chapters 7-8; presenting and talking about photographs students bring to class with further practice in documentation, rhetorical analysis, and cultural analysis; typology of photographs
  8. \**October 26*: Reading and responding to each others’ second short papers; reviewing what we have learned thus far about interpretation and history; Urban and Wagoner – making notes for thematic outlines and discussion of the history, chapters 9-10; presenting and talking about photographs students bring to class with further practice in documentation, rhetorical analysis, and cultural analysis; second short paper due (on Sakai by the end of the week)

9. *November 2*, Interpretation of photographs: writing expressive comments on pictures, learning about and making ideology critiques; Urban and Wagoner – making notes for thematic outlines and discussion of the history, chapters 11-12; interpreting and talking about photographs students bring to class with further practice in documentation, rhetorical analysis, and cultural analysis
  10. *November 9*, Interpretation of photographs: learning about and making phenomenological narratives or poems from pictures; Urban and Wagoner – making notes for thematic outlines and discussion of the history, finishing up; interpreting and talking about photographs students bring to class with further practice in interpretation and analysis
  11. *November 16*: Sorting the images collected thus far into thematic sets and mounting a second temporary thematic exhibit as a model for final portfolios; responses to the exhibit; presenting /interpreting/analyzing photographs students bring to class
  12. \**November 21 – N.B. This is a Monday...* presenting and talking about photographs students bring to class; third short paper due on Sakai
  13. \*\**November 30*: Completing the thematic outlines and preparing them for posting and review on Sakai by the end of this calendar week; second participation grade will be given after this class (up to 10 points)
  14. *December 7*, Finalizing portfolios: collaborative work session with teacher's help
  15. \*Exam – date to be announced: Presentation of portfolios
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#### Urban and Wagoner Reading Schedule:

*N.B.* We will be working on these chapters up through week 10 (November 9), but you should read them by the dates given in this schedule.

Chapters 1-3 (pre-1830) – Read by 9/21 (105 pp.)

Chapters 4-6 (1830-1890) – Read by 9/28 (114 pp.)

Chapters 7-8 (1890-1929) – Read by 10/12 (159 pp.)

Chapters 9-10: (1930-1960) – Read by 10/19 (60 pp.)

Chapters 11-12: (1960-2008) and Epilogue – Read by 10/26 (92 pp.)

#### Grading Schedule:

October 7: First short paper due (up to 10 points)

October 12: Participation (up to 10 points)

October 28: Second short paper due (up to 10 points)

November 21: Third short paper due (up to 10 points)

November 30: Participation (up to 10 points)

November 30: Thematic outlines (up to 10 points)  
Exam/Portfolio (up to 40 points)