

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: HOW THE PICTURE PRESS MADE AMERICA:
 NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE POLITICS
 OF REPRESENTATION

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This dissertation looks at the related ways in which two pioneering news photographic agencies depicted the American self and presented an “understanding” of America’s nationhood. First, this dissertation investigates Bain News Service between 1900 and 1920 and the concurrent industrialization and technological achievements that changed the nature of photography and mass communication. It considers Bain’s agency as an influential national institution and gatekeeper of visual information that, along with newspaper publishers, determined the flow of photographic representation both at home and abroad. Second, this dissertation examines in parallel terms the VII agency from its inception in 2001 to 2020—a period defined by globalization, digitalization, and media convergence. VII, as a decentralized global entity, competed with a multitude of producers and consumers to influence the social discourse. The findings of this dissertation illuminate the power, and recent loss thereof, of news photographs to

make visible and to promote specific social discourses within the functions of news photo agencies.

In investigating Bain News Service, the first commercial news photo service in the United States founded in 1895, and the VII Photo agency, one of the preeminent photo agencies in the digital era founded in 2001, the dissertation considers how changes in the news business and photographic technologies altered representational practices and the sharing of visual information globally. This dissertation traces the rapidly evolving economic and technological environment across the century — two trends which together have not only contributed to the diminishing authority of the news photographic agency as an institution, but have weakened news photography's role in promoting and sustaining a national identity and a nation's reputation. Centralized national news photographic agencies of the early twentieth century, such as Bain News Service, dominated visual representations in the press. The Bain agency provided images of the United States that promoted the sovereign national status quo and disseminated images of the nation-aligned with the ideology of the country's political elite. One hundred years later, photo agencies including VII, operate in a globally-oriented, citizen-driven public sphere. The photographs disseminated by VII serve to challenge the American national status quo; they were (and still are) taken and often published in the hopes that the images will (help) bring social change.

Guided by Stuart Hall's concept of the *politics of representation*, this dissertation traces the evolution of the news photo agency, as a journalistic institution, while specifically examining news images along with ideologies embedded in them. The dissertation also considers the news photo agency as an Althusserian Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)— a system separate from the government, but indirectly involved in the expression of dominant ideologies and the promotion of a particular social discourse.

To assess the significance of the news photo agency as an institution, and the ways in which it represented “Americanness,” this dissertation uses several approaches, including discourse and historiographical analyses and a photo-thematic analysis of the archives of Bain News Service and VII Photo. In analyzing the construction of American social discourse, the following questions guided the research: How do news photographs and the news photo agencies as journalistic institutions help represent/promote social discourses? How have Bain News Service and VII represented “Americanness” in their news photographs? How are ideas and ideologies of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream visualized in these photographs? How does the representation of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream differ in twentieth-century images produced by Bain compared to the twenty-first-century images produced by VII? Through thematic and visual examinations of news photographs of the American nation, as produced by Bain News Service and VII Photo respectively, this dissertation also looks at representations of American exceptionalism, nationalism, and the American Dream over time to determine the visual dialogue within the United States and between the American nation and the rest of the world.

This investigation finds photographic representations of America’s greatness took an important place in the news and for the news photo agencies of the early 1900s, creating a highly specific understanding of the American nation as a rising global power. The centralization of image production under the news photo agencies of the twentieth century also determined a specific meaning of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream in line with the nation’s leadership. With the advent of newer technologies in the twenty-first century, the public also began to take on an active role in the producing and distributing of representations of the American individual and nation, resulting in the waning authority of the news photo agency. The decentralization of image production that resulted from forces such as

convergence, digitalization, globalization, and citizen (photo)journalism in the twenty-first century has, in turn, complicated and visually re-defined the meaning of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream. Moreover, news photographic representations of social inequalities, environmental issues, and political divisions that proliferate across the Internet and social media in the twenty-first century have altered the visual portrait of America's reputation and the ways global audiences "see" the United States.

The examination of the business, structure, and news photographs produced by the two innovative news photo agencies set a century apart illuminates the significance of the news photo agency at large. The investigations outlined in the chapters ahead clarify how photojournalistic institutions have shaped public knowledge about a nation and its ideological values.

HOW THE PICTURE PRESS MADE AMERICA: NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY AND
THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

by

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PREFACE

Growing up in communist-ruled Bulgaria, I had a fascination with foreign images. Shielded by the “iron curtain,” Bulgarians were rarely exposed to distant lands and cultures in person or through media. This was not a surprise, of course, given that in the 1980s, the newspapers and television were still handled by a government that focused on the nation’s elites. At the time, however, a one-of-a-kind magazine called *Paraleli* (or *Paralels*) issued by the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (BTA) offered a glimpse of the world outside my homeland. *Paraleli* arrived at my family’s doorstep once a week and helped open my eyes to life beyond the “iron curtain.”

Paraleli featured rather smallish, poor quality, mostly black-and-white images of exotic lands and countries, diverse cultures and traditions from around the world, scientific discoveries, celebrities, and more. Among these images, photographs of the United States appeared on many occasions and left a lasting impression on me. I remember being smitten by America’s vast oceans and landscapes, the breathtaking skylines and high rises, the bustling streets, dreamy houses with white picket fences, and the fashionably dressed people hurrying off to important, high-paying jobs or to mesmerizing entertainment venues. Every weekend I would sit and cut out picture after picture and glue it in my personal “American Dream” notebook. The notebook also featured my own drawing renditions of the Statue of Liberty, the American Flag, and poetry about America, among other clippings.

Years later, after working and traveling around the world onboard cruise ships and seeing many of those exotic lands firsthand, I was finally able to visit the places featured in my Dream

book, too. Not only that, I was able to pursue my higher education and career advancement, help resettle my Bulgarian family, and create a family of my own on American land. The process and experiences along with it, however, were not nearly as “dreamy” as I had imagined. Of course, moving to a foreign land is no easy feat for anyone. In time, I began to search for answers about what those magazine images had done to change the course of my life so profoundly, and with it, the life of my entire Bulgarian family. To answer these questions, among many others that came eventually, I began investigating photography and representation. In the early 2010s, during my time at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas as a master’s student, my investigation culminated in a master’s thesis on American photography of immigrant experiences, with Jacob A. Riis’s work as the primary subject of my investigation.

Fueled by Riis’s work, my search for answers grew even more intense and my exploration continued beyond my master’s degree. By the time I began my doctoral course of study at the University of Maryland, College Park in 2015, much has already changed in terms of photographic production, distribution, and consumption. The traditional press (newspapers, magazines, television) competed with citizen-produced images uploaded to the Internet faster than they can be viewed. The images of America’s magnificent oceans and landscapes, the breathtaking skylines and high rises, the bustling streets, the dreamy houses with white picket fences, and the fashionably dressed American people, were quickly being replaced by images of highly subjective individual life experiences, which were often overshadowed by political conflicts, oppression, hardship, hurt, and anger.

My dissertation, “How the Picture Press Made America: News Photography and the Politics of Representation,” is an exploration of this shift. What you are about to read is an

inquiry into the way the global visual landscape can alter the perceptions not only of individuals, like me, but the perceptions of entire nations. The rest, as they say, is history . . .

Denitsa H. Yotova

Henderson, Nevada, February 1, 2023

DEDICATION

For my parents,
who helped me realize my American Dream.

And for my son,
who made it complete.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many who helped me along the way on this remarkable journey. First and foremost, I want to extend my sincerest gratitude to the members of my committee, without whose help and support my dissertation would not have been possible. My deepest appreciation goes to my committee chair, Professor Susan D. Moeller. Her detailed reading, constructive criticism, meticulous editing, and thoughtful guidance have been tremendously impactful from start to finish. Her support, understanding, and expert advice on photography and photography's history have been equally invaluable. I also wish to express my deep gratitude to Professor Saverio Giovacchini for introducing me to the philosophy of history, which inspired my work and helped build this dissertation's theoretical foundation. I will never forget our lively intellectual discussions and the ways in which he challenged me to "misread" famous intellectual works and to "think outside the box" while doing so. This project would also not have been possible without the attentive feedback, comments, and suggestions of Professor Kalyani Chadha, whose class on global media served as the springboard for my dissertation. Her knowledge of media theory and her expertise on the topics of globalization and Americanization have been instrumental throughout my entire doctoral studies journey. I would also like to sincerely thank Professor Carl Sessions Stepp and Professor Krishnan Vasudevan for their insightful comments and suggestions and most of all, for their unwavering support, patience, and encouragement throughout the entire writing process.

Beyond my committee, this dissertation would not have been possible without several others, who sparked my research interest in news photography and the news photo agency. First,

Professor James E. (Jim) Mueller, from the Mayborn School of Journalism at the University of North Texas who is chiefly responsible for “introducing” me to one of the main subjects of this dissertation – George Grantham Bain—in 2016. By extending an invitation to write a digital review of the Library of Congress’ Bain Collection for the prestigious academic publication *American Journalism*, Professor Mueller firmly set my eyes on Bain— a man I have neither heard of nor read about in my journalism classes or other academic work. As I went about my research on Bain and his first-of-a-kind news photo agency in the United States, Dr. Michael Carlebach, a photographer, historian, and author of *Bain’s New York*, went above and beyond to assist me with copies of archival materials he had used in his own work. Melissa Lindberg, a reference librarian at the Library of Congress’ Prints and Photographs Division, was also instrumental in my research as she answered many of my inquiries about the Bain Collection and the cataloguing of Bain’s photographs. She also mailed a hard copy of Bain’s biography by Emma Little directly to my home address. Last, but not least, I am grateful to Giana Choroszewski, Director of Operations at the VII Photo Agency, who worked with me on accessing VII’s archives, provided useful communications about the VII agency, and guided me with helpful copyright information on the images I used in my dissertation.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the support of the entire academic community at the University of Maryland, College Park and especially the Graduate School and the Philip Merrill College of Journalism. I will never forget my interactions and collaborations with my fellow doctoral students, especially with Dr. Prashant Bhat who has been a treasured friend and colleague since the beginning of my doctoral journey in 2015. I am grateful for our lively and inspiring conversations and I hope I will have the opportunity to collaborate with him in the future. My sincere thanks also go to Dr. Linda Steiner, Dr. Sarah Oates, Dr. Ronald Yaros,

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And finally, to my family: you put up with me being irritable, distracted, exhausted, and overwhelmed, so I am forever grateful for your patience and understanding. Special thanks are due to my husband, Dr. Gregory A. Borchard, for his encouraging words and expert advice on overcoming obstacles during the research, writing, and editing process. I am also grateful for Greg's help with nurturing our little boy Alan while I was busy working on this important project. My deepest gratitude is also extended to my parents for the years-long support in my academic career as a first-generation higher education student and, most of all, for their unwavering faith that I will bring this last journey to completion. I will always remain indebted to my father Harry; whose unconditional encouragement gave me strength and inspiration along the way. As an immigrant, he persevered through numerous adversities to support my educational journey in the United States and although he did not live to see the completion of my dissertation, he will always be remembered as my biggest cheerleader who taught me to believe in myself and to never give up on my dreams.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The crowning triumph of nineteenth-century journalism was undoubtedly news photography, according to the *Dallas Morning News*, June 4, 1899. “Before the introduction of news photography, the cold type conveyed to the mind the scene that a writer endeavored to portray vividly enough to make it a pen picture that was mirrored before the reader while the eye perused the story.”¹ News producers have historically considered images as secondary to the written word, using pictures as ways to illustrate stories or brighten up a newspaper’s page, but by the turn of the twentieth century the news picture, in the form of illustration at first, had become an essential ingredient to news stories. “Photography is now a ‘fad,’ and the ‘fadders’ are not alone,” noted *Wilson’s Photographic Magazine* in April of 1893. “The youthful reporter of to-day, with pompadour hair and inspired mustache (to say nothing of his cheek) cannot secure a position unless he can swing a photographic vocabulary and press a button.”²

But news photography was more than just a fad, it was an opportunity for profit too. The American photo business began with the invention of photography back in the 1830s, and while the business started out with art and portraiture, landscape and architecture, news publishers quickly noticed the importance of illustrating the news. Film technologies rapidly evolved across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Inventions included the daguerreotype (1839-55), the collodion on glass and iron plates (1855-80), the gelatin on roll film (1880-95), the celluloid film (1895-1909), the cinematographic film (1909-25), and digital photography (1970s and beyond). The modes of production, distribution, and consumption of photo images changed the nature of the news photography business.¹

¹ Denitsa Yotova, “Discourses of Power in Historical News Photographs: Bain News Service and Representation in the Age of Imperialism,” in *Dreams and Inspirations: The Book of Selected Readings*, D. M. Baylen, ed. (Carrollton, GA: International Visual Literacy Association, 2018), 43-62. The remaining chapters of

Industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and technological developments during the first half of the twentieth century, signaled a myriad of changes in journalistic practices and a growing international focus of news images. The emergence of the early twentieth-century news photo agency and its establishment as a journalistic institution propelled the global spread of information and, in turn, the beginning of modern globalization. These changes helped legitimize the importance of news photography in society and created new grounds for competition in business and commerce on a global scale.³

News photography during the first half of the twentieth century became a central source for the depiction of nations and national identity, pointing to the growing function of news images not as mere windows to the world, but as ideological representations shaped by photographers, news photo agencies, and the press at large. As the editorial staff of the famed picture newsweekly *Life* later wrote in “The Camera as Essayist,” a 1937 editorial:

When people think of the camera in journalism they think of it as a reporter—the best of reporters: the most accurate of reporters: the most convincing of reporters. Actually, as *Life* has learned in its first few months, the camera is not merely a reporter. It can also be a commentator. It can comment as it reports. It can interpret as it presents. It can picture the world as a seventeenth-century essayist or a twentieth-century columnist would picture it.⁴

this dissertation include passages inspired by work produced for a Global Journalism class at the University of Maryland headed by Kalyani Chadha in 2016. The author presented this content at the International Visual Literacy Association (IVLA) Conference in Chicago, 2018, under the title “Visual Discourses of Power in Early Twentieth Century News Photography: Bain News Service and Representation in the Age of American Imperialism.” The author revised and published the content as a book chapter in *Dreams and Inspirations: The Book of Selected Readings* (2018) under the title “Discourses of Power in Historical News Photographs: Bain News Service and Representation in the Age of Imperialism.” While the language of sentences woven throughout the following pages may replicate descriptions of the theoretical approaches described in “Discourses of Power in Historical News Photographs,” the interpretations, findings, and conclusion of this dissertation are separate, unique, and independent from those featured in the published chapter. Any incidental replication of words (other than direct quotes) are noted here as those of the author.

As illustrated media and the picture market expanded, the camera became a powerful device for the manipulation of public opinion in the public sphere, photography historian Gisèle Freund noted. “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.”⁵ Indeed, and as German social theorist Jürgen Habermas pointed, the evolution of the press revolutionized the public sphere by giving the opportunity for intellectual leaders to be heard by the masses.² Furthermore, “the public sphere in the world of letters was replaced by the pseudo-public or sham-private world of culture consumption,” Habermas wrote.⁶ As mass media transformed the public sphere into a sphere of culture consumption, common channels for ideological messaging changed from discussions in salons and coffeehouses to articles and photographic images in mass-produced newspapers. National news photographic agencies of the twentieth century dictated the visual representations in the press and much like the rest of the mass media at the time, they served as mouthpieces for political leaders and business elites.

With the arrival of the new millennium, however, further advancements in business practices such as conglomeration and convergence promoted unprecedented changes in representational practices. In turn, technological advancements, such as digitalization, offered a multitude of channels for ideological messaging. By the twenty first century, the economic and technological environment transformed the former role of the news photographic agency as an authoritative national institution. News photography and the voice of the news photo agency lost their singular authority —their perspectives weakened in the heap of citizen (photo)journalism,

² Excerpt from *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*: “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.”

social media posts, and YouTube videos. Still today, the millennial news photo agencies operate in a globally-oriented and citizen-driven public sphere, one in which they strive to give voice to the voiceless and to challenge the national status quo.

1.1. The News Photo Agency: Two Case Studies

At the turn of the twentieth century, invention upon invention and increased use of mechanical devices and various machinery accelerated the American lifestyle. Publication of weeklies and dailies was closely linked with urban developments and the transformation of colonial towns to metropolitan areas with a million people or more.⁷ The nation was growing aware of its interdependency with other countries and this was highlighted by changing patterns of trade, tourism, transport, communications, and media.⁸ The economic and technological advances of the United States attracted hundreds of thousands of immigrants who poured into the country in search of a better life, in search of the American Dream. “America was the promise of a job, of a higher standard of living, of opportunities that might be realized by the immigrants’ children if not by the immigrants themselves,” historian Foster Rhea Dulles observed.⁹

The new century was not just a time of progress and development for politics, technology, and finance, but also for society. News photography covered social issues such as child welfare and women’s suffrage within the United States and abroad. Images of immigrants, Ellis Island, ethnic neighborhoods, and more, introduced many foreign “others” who were now living in the United States. News photo agencies that began to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century were among the leading visual content providers that represented not only global cultures, but the values and ideologies of the American nation too.

Frederick J. Haskin of *The Washington Post* recognized the important position of news photography in modern journalism as early as 1909. “Photography has visualized the current history of the hour and has brought before every eye the wonders of the universe,” he noted. The immense popularity of photography and the rapid expansion of its use has been “multiplied from year to year,” and while “it is impossible to predict its future...its very existence is assurance that all posterity will know this age better than we know any age of the past,” Haskin concluded.¹⁰

During the twentieth century, advancements in photographic equipment, technologies, techniques, and business practices expanded the production of visuals in various formats and with wider distribution. New practices have occurred with each technological shift since the invention of the daguerreotype, the Speed-Graphic, the 35mm compact camera, and later, moving images and video. New printing technologies fueled the growth of faster image dissemination, more sophisticated newspaper and magazine layouts and the publication of color pictures. With the rise of the Internet and digitalization in the twenty-first century, the market for photographs changed dramatically and so did the news photo agency’s structure and practices. The professional transition to digital photography enabled visual information to travel anywhere in the world in a matter of seconds making immediacy both critical and valuable to the public, its institutions, and the media.

Modern technologies and a decentralized worldwide web of networks took the forefront in shaping news photography and communication within and between nations. At the same time, citizen-produced visuals and social media transformed the traditional, one-to-many field of mass communication and began to complicate the public sphere with the transmission of multidirectional ideological messages within and beyond national borders. In the twenty-first century, “at any given moment, each of us is seer and seen, manipulator and manipulated,

mediator and judge, authentic and unauthentic,” according to visual communication scholar Julianne Hickerson Newton. “Photojournalism stops a bit of time so that people can consider the whole of time.”¹¹

The economic, technological, and cultural developments of the twenty-first century have led to the adoption of new business practices and changes in photographic representation, that manifest in cultural productions that rely heavily on social media platforms. Mobile technologies manipulate space and time and increase the speed with which people do so. Images have grown bigger and bolder in the pages of the press, technologies have opened avenues for image alterations and the strong faith in the authenticity of the news photo has been losing its momentum under the pressures of Internet trolls and hackers and disinformation campaigns.

Social, political, economic, technological, and cultural forces have also contributed to massive changes in the quantity, quality, and content of news photographs. In response, the ways in which audiences view themselves, their fellow countrymen, and people from other nations have changed as well. As journalists and their audiences engage in a global dialogue and meaning-making through the production and consumption of images, both sides also engage in public discourse that helps establish personal views and ideologies, shape collective memory, and convey highly subjective social knowledge and norms for behavior.

This dissertation argues that news photo agencies, as suppliers of photographs to the press, are closely entwined with forces of cultural and identity production. To establish this argument, this dissertation surveys two news photography agencies—Bain News Service and VII Photo—in two key periods of technological, political, economic, and cultural change set exactly a century apart. First, this dissertation investigates Bain News Service in its heyday from 1900 to the 1920s, a period that spans the Progressive Era and the First World War and was underlined

by industrialization and technological achievements that changed the nature of photography and mass communication at large. Second, this dissertation examines VII Photo from its inception in 2001 through 2020—a period defined by the growth of digitalization, media convergence, national security issues, and conflicts in politics and global relations.

These news photo agencies have been battling fires in both literal and metaphoric ways ever since their introduction at the turn of the twentieth century. Between the 1900s and the new millennium, the consolidation and growth of “big business” forced some agencies to merge with larger media corporations, others to sell their archives and retreat to independent studio work, or even to completely disintegrate. Nonetheless, the news photo agency has played, and in a way, continues to play, a critical role in the production and distribution of news photographs.

The twentieth-century Bain News Service, introduced in Chapter 2, illustrates the early emergence of national business and journalistic venture in the United States. As a former journalist, amateur photographer, and businessman, George Grantham Bain possessed the type of knowledge that served him well during the establishment of the first American news photo agency in New York City. His approach to incorporating foreign photography also represented a change in the way the consumption of news extended beyond the written word and national borders between 1900 and 1920.

Although rarely identified in journalism history books, Bain News Service was the first news photo agency in the United States to meet and feed the demand for visual news at the turn of the twentieth century. Founded in 1895, the agency grew to success in less than a decade. Unlike earlier photo services or studios that provided mostly portraiture and landscape photos, Bain’s agency was unique both in its approach to working with publishers and photographers as well as in its photographic products. His service was focused on offering breaking news images

to dozens of publications and other clients, it also included a photo archive of tens of thousands. As Bain noted in his papers, his daily service of news photographs was “the first service of its kind known to American journalism.”¹²

As a way to evaluate changes within the practices of news photo agencies, Chapter 2 also surveys VII Photo, referred to as VII in subsequent pages, and its work between 2001 and 2020. The twenty-first century VII agency founded in France—home of the first European news photo agencies a century previously—demonstrates the change and the massive global expansion of photographic services the twenty-first century has come to witness.¹³ VII is a storied photo agency and a cooperative endeavor that allows its photographers to determine their own work and clientele and to offer services beyond just the production and sale of pictures

As VII continued in a trajectory launched by Bain, it did so under very different circumstances, as enormous social and political changes, technological progress, and visual practices have transformed the world. Founded by seven famed photographers, coincidentally a few days before the September 11, 2001 attacks, VII is a decentralized and globalized institution that yet retains some of the structural elements of its predecessors, including Bain.

Between the emergence of the first news photo agencies in Europe and Bain News Service in the United States, the nature of visual news and journalism at large had changed. The opening of the Trans-Atlantic cable in 1866, for example, transformed international news agencies. The Associated Press (AP) had since 1848 transmitted news primarily within the United States, but now it was also able to quickly access news from European news agencies, including—Reuters, Hawas, and Wolff. The US newspaper market was becoming wealthy enough to support several major news agencies, which led to the emergence of the United Press (UP) in

1907.¹⁴ Thereafter, the large-scale international news agencies dominated the market of news for years to come.

While this dissertation does not focus on these large-scale international news agencies, a brief survey of their involvement in the news photography business is also featured in Chapter 2, as their emergence had a dramatic influence on the role of the news photo agency as contributing member of modern media. In global journalism scholar Oliver Boyd-Barrett's view, the large news agencies and the news content they produced "contributed to the processes of the construction of national identity; to imperialism and the control of colonies; it was an essential lubricant in day-to-day financial affairs, both within and between domestic markets. The collection and dissemination of this commodity were organized and rationalized on behalf of media and non-media clients by a small group of powerful agencies, acting globally and as a cartel," he wrote. "Hence the links between modernity, capitalism, news, news agencies, and globalization are an outstanding but neglected feature of the past 150 years."¹⁵

Scholarship on photojournalism and the major international news agencies is plentiful, but the development of the news photo agency as a global journalistic institution devoted to supplying images has remained previously understudied. Specifically, scholars have not yet explored George Grantham Bain's news photo service comprehensively. Publications only mention Bain biographically or his name and work receive a brief acknowledgement in survey-type journalism history books. The VII agency, on the other hand, has not been studied academically at all. An exploration of the two agencies' practices and their news photographs illuminates the changes in everyday visual information-sharing that have influenced societies and nations for more than a century. Moreover, the history of the news photo agencies and their

developments over a century is necessary to understand how photographic representation of “Americanness” and the American nation has changed overtime.

1.2. A Word on Photography, Ideology, and Representation

From their very beginning, news photographs were not just commodities for sale. They held—and hold—ideological powers beyond their frames and can trigger intense momentary reactions and long-term effects in their viewers. As photography critic for the *New York Times* Vicki Goldberg once wrote, “photographic images have been altering people’s minds and rearranging their lives for a long time.”¹⁶ Historically, the press and visual media such as paintings, cartoons, and images have been integral to the rise and fall of empires, diplomacy, war, the spread of languages and cultural norms, globalization, and modernity.¹⁷ The media are at the forefront of meaning-making as values and ideologies are inevitably embodied in the news, photographs, advertisements, films, and more.

Institutions, such as the news photo agencies, serve a critical role in the production and distribution of ideological representations. As noted by visual culture scholars Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright:

[P]hotography emerged as a popular visual technology because it fit certain emerging social concepts and needs of the time—modern ideas about the individual in the context of growing urban centers, modern concepts of technological progress and mechanization, modern concepts of time and spontaneity the desire to contain nature and landscape in mechanically reproducible form, and the rise of bureaucratic institutions in the modern state interested in documentation and classification.¹⁸

In the early twentieth century, news photographic institutions such as Bain News Service helped make certain social realities visible, while rendering others effectively invisible. In contrast, citizen-produced images in the twenty-first century offer accounts on social media that illuminate the unseen and counter the authoritative representations provided by institutions. VII and the news photo agencies of the new millennium compete with citizen-driven photographic representations. These images offer a form of counter-narrative, one that helps create alternate realities and social discourses both locally and globally.

The ongoing technological and business advances during the twentieth century altered not only the picture market itself, but photographic techniques and modes of representation. News photographic representation and its related practices are inextricably entwined with institutional, political, cultural, and social forces too. From the moment of production of the news photograph by the photographer, to distribution by the news photo agency, to exhibition by the news publication, and finally, to consumption by individuals and nations alike, demonstrate what Stuart Hall called *politics of representation*, or “the way meaning can be struggled over, and whether a particular regime of representation can be challenged, contested, and transformed.”¹⁹

While a photograph can communicate the essence of factual experience, provide access to distant places, and offer a sense of “having being there” for the viewer, it inevitably carries the burden of the societal, cultural, and political values and ideologies of its time. As historian Susan Moeller suggested, photographers make a unique contribution to our understanding of the world: “photographs not only describe the actual landscape ... they capture the mood of the times.”²⁰

Twentieth-century journalism became an increasingly vital force in the United States and contributed to the nation’s ideological shifts. “As an agency of persuasion and control, the news

industry was active in influencing people by means of emphasis, suppression, opposition, and support of various political, economic, and cultural movements and groups as well as their leaders,” journalism historian Sydney Kobre wrote.²¹ Between the establishment of the first commercial news photo service in the United States—Bain News Service—at the turn of the twentieth century and the VII agency of the twenty-first century, the advancements of both business practices and technologies promoted not only an unprecedented change in the global sharing of visual information, but fueled a re-shaping of nations, cultures, politics, and identity.

Guided by Stuart Hall’s concept of the *politics of representation*, this dissertation investigates these changes as it traces the evolution of the news photo service or agency and takes a close look at agency-produced news images, while considering the ideologies that these images carry and the effects of their circulation and viewing. This dissertation examines how syndicated news images portray Americanness all while helping transform notions of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream.

While these concepts have been, and are, interpreted differently and by various communities over time, the American Dream has long been one of the constellation of American myths: The United States is “the promised land,” a “melting pot,” and a place where a “self-made man” can achieve the “American Dream.”

The notions of exceptionalism and nationalism have also long been presumptive parts of American character and the nation’s history. This dissertation defines “exceptionalism” as a political insistence that the United States is a uniquely powerful and progressive nation, one unlike any other. In turn, this dissertation defines “nationalism” as something greater (and more exclusive) than “civic engagement” or even “patriotism.” “Nationalism” is a consciousness of

belonging to a nation that is established and sustained through a shared national language, symbolism, and ideology.

The press was and is at the heart of community-and nation-building, as suggested by historian Benedict Anderson. Anderson's concept of the *imagined communities*²² helps build the present argument that news photographs enable not just the imagining, but the visualizing of nations. News photographs of the early twentieth century gave voice to the elites and helped spread their ideologies, all while silencing "the other half." In the early twenty-first-century's public sphere, citizen-produced visuals began to challenge the "voices" of the elites, by representing the underrepresented.

This dissertation examines how exceptionalism, nationalism, and the American Dream were identified in the first two decades of the 1900s and the 2000s. The meaning of those terms altered, and the photographs from each period illustrated those historical shifts. The forthcoming chapters delve into the historical, the theoretical, and the visual, by considering what the Bain and the VII photo agencies chose to take pictures of and what they made visual.

More specifically, the investigation considers the ways in which news photographs illuminate social discourses within the changing context of news photo agencies. Through the production and consumption of news photographs, society engages in meaning-making by participating in a social discourse that helps establish dominant ideologies, shape collective memory, convey social knowledge and norms for behavior, and often, motivate social change. This dissertation, therefore, considers the news photo agency as an Althusserian Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)—a system that is separate from the government, but indirectly related to aid the expression of dominant ideologies—that serves to construct a specific social discourse and influences the way a nation not only "imagines," but projects itself to the world.²³

Early twentieth-century discourse regarded America as highly progressive and exceptional— an ideology that was prominent in presidential rhetoric, historical volumes, and literary accounts. In turn, visualizations of America’s exceptionalism, nationalism, and the American Dream took on an important place in the news too. Photo agencies of the early 1900s fulfilled the role of producers and distributors of this highly-specific understanding about the nation. As newly established journalistic institutions at the time, these agencies served as channels for cultural diplomacy messages that helped build a nation’s sovereignty and strength for its own people and the rest of the world to see.

But with the advent of newer technologies in the twenty- first century, these institutions are no longer what they once were. In addition to changes in the structures and operations of traditional news photo agencies, the public also began to take on an active role in the producing and distributing of representations of the news. “Against this background, the new structural transformation of the public sphere is taking place in the field of tension between three institutional developments – digitalization, commodification, and globalization of the social,”²⁴ wrote social scientists Martin Seeliger and Sebastian Sevignani. “In this process, professional journalism, and traditional mass media, which largely organized publics, are increasingly bypassed as gatekeepers of public communication flows with the help of digital and social media.”²⁵

The twenty-first-century’s public sphere is relentlessly penetrated by the public sharing of highly provocative images and views, causing a disruption of the societal status quo which was once sustained by journalistic institutions. In turn, the reputation of the US as an exceptional nation has grown questionable. Social-media-amplified voices have enabled a global exposure of deeply seeded issues disquieting the nation, such as violent political conflicts, racism and

oppression of minorities, and more. Thus, in Habermasian terms, the digital revolution of the twenty-first century represents a shift in society, or the public, from being the passive recipient of knowledge to becoming both the creator and the object of that knowledge. The millennial spectators and creators of knowledge are active in the construction of alternative representations and therefore in alternative discourses. This dissertation interrogates the resulting numerous complications for news photography and the news photography industry.

1.3. The Tensions of National and Global Images

Since their inception in the early twentieth century, news photo agencies have been central in representing the American nation both at home and abroad. Photographs found in Bain's archive are largely credited to the agency itself, as owner and gatekeeper of all photographs. VII's catalog, on the other hand, features images produced by a networked team of international photographers. While Bain News Service promoted an image of a prosperous, progressive, and exceptional American nation, as compared to others, VII focused on global issues such as the environment and climate change, diversity and (in)equality, poverty and economic recessions. Both agencies' photographs accurately reflect the twentieth and twenty-first century's political, cultural, economic, and technological/visual climates respectively.

In the new millennium, traditional news photo agencies such as Bain's were threatened by convergence and conglomeration so they either began looking into other means for profit, became engulfed by large media organizations, or were forced to become stock image factories. The combination of technological innovations, forces of globalization, and expansion of the photographic business at large influenced the photographs that were created. In turn, photographs

taken by the news photo agencies helped (re)produce culture and national identity, ushered or challenged the sense of belonging, and disseminated national ideologies across the globe.

As the American nation (and the world) sped into the twenty-first century, subjective ideological forces that were fueled by digital technologies, globalization, and a mass self-publishing climate began to undermine America's national status quo and disrupt the nation's reputation-building efforts. As leading nationalism scholar Anthony D. Smith suggested, the rise of a global culture and mass media that guide it, have complicated the ideas of national cultures and identities. In turn, nationalism has faltered as an ideological movement that attains and maintains autonomy, unity, and identity.²⁶ Nationalism of the twenty-first century has become misunderstood, displaced, and often rejected. Instead, modern communication technologies and social media have been serving as mouthpieces for global elites who have put the idea of a nation and the national to a test. State leaders and institutions are also overshadowed by citizen actors with powerful rhetoric and vast social networking connections.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the global war on terror, the war in Iraq, the economic downturn of 2008, the global anti-racism movements initiated by the American-based Black Lives Matter (BLM) group, and the COVID-19 pandemic, are just some examples of factors that began to reshape America in the new millennium —the nation (almost) everyone looked up to in the early twentieth century. The United States of the twenty-first century appears divided more than ever and conflicting photographic representations, produced by both ordinary citizens and the media, not only capture the internal turmoil of the nation, but make it visible to the entire world. In the digitalized and globalized twenty-first-century public sphere, news photographs and the dynamics behind their production, distribution, and consumption are no longer central to the understanding of individual and collective, or national identities.

The reason for this, as sociologist Manuel Castells has rightfully argued, is that the new millennium's global communication networks largely rely on "mass self-communication," or citizen-produced content circulating on social media channels. "The critical issues conditioning everyday life for people and their governments in every country are largely produced and shaped by globally interdependent processes that move beyond the realm of ostensibly sovereign state territories," Castells claimed.²⁷ As a result, as in the example of VII, nongovernmental bodies bring the needs, interests, and values of people into focus, all while undermining the role of governments.²⁸

In the twenty-first century, individual and collective identities form and transform through a globally networked dialogue. There is an ongoing and "growing loss of power by centralised political systems; changes in social structure are bringing about new forms of political culture," sociologist Peter Dahlgren suggested.²⁹ The online public sphere provides every citizen with the opportunity to express themselves publicly. As media and political communication scholar Dounia Mahlouly noted, Web 2.0 provided amateurs with the opportunity to contribute to their themes of interest, confront different opinions, and find an audience. "In that sense, amateurs acquire an influence that, not so long ago, was the exclusive privilege of professionals and experts," she claimed.³⁰ As a result, subjected to digitalization and the omnipresence of the Internet, the millennial news photo agencies were not only forced to compete with fellow agencies, but with any individual who had the opportunity to contribute to public discourse.

Likewise, in the words of media anthropologist Zeynep Devrim Gürsel, "the transition to digital transmission has changed the work of image brokers—people involved in the creation of images. New image brokers and changed infrastructure of representation challenge established

hierarchies and who provides and polices images.” Referring to the life-altering events of the New York terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the author further noted, “at a moment when the war on terror is also a war of images, battles over infrastructures of representation are battles over visual worldmaking.”³¹

The examination of the business, structure, and news photographs produced by the two pioneering news photo agencies set a century apart is therefore necessary not only to illuminate the significance of the news photo agency at large, but to investigate both continuity and change in the business of visual representations and the nature of representations themselves. Such investigation speaks to the way institutions help shape knowledge about a nation and its ideological values. In looking at Bain News Service as a national journalistic institution and VII as a globally networked cooperative, this dissertation illuminates the ways the photographs of news photo agencies contribute to a dialogue not only about America’s nationalism, but about its exceptionalism and the American Dream. These are also notions this dissertation sheds light on as it searches for the meaning of Americanness, its representation, and the way it has evolved between the early 1900s and today with the help of the photographs of the two agencies under study—Bain News Service and VII.

1.4. Approach to the Study

This dissertation looks at Bain News Service and VII to determine what these agencies prioritized and took photographs of and how the context they operated in may have influenced the types of photographs that were taken. As a result of the changing nature of news photography business and representational practices, news photo agencies of the early twentieth and early

twenty-first centuries approached their work quite differently. Business, technological, political, and cultural forces in each period worked closely together to construct a specific image of the American nation that was projected with the help of these agencies' news photographs. The following chapters examine the development of the news photo agency as a global journalistic institution, and its photographs as sources for representations of the American national identity and character, nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream.

To assess the historical developments of the news photo agency as a journalistic institution and its role in the production and dissemination of national ideology and identity, this dissertation features a tripartite approach via a (visual) discourse, a historiographical, and a photo-thematic analysis. This multi-fold approach provides a more comprehensive survey of the news photo agencies and their business and representational practices—all while addressing the American agencies' roles in signifying and disseminating elites' political agendas: those of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream.

The analysis effectively serves to establish news photography's role in underlining power relations, shaping dominant social discourse, and aiding cultural diplomacy efforts, both locally and globally. In looking at news photographs as produced, published, and displayed by journalistic institutions such as the news photo agencies and the press, the findings suggest that twentieth- century news images articulated highly specific social positions, often those of privilege, while twenty-first-century news images have been more likely to—at least at times—challenge a “Western”-centric way of seeing.

Using Michel Foucault's ideas of a panopticon, or institution design, visual communication scholar Gillian Rose proposed that institutions work in two ways: through their apparatus and through their technologies. An institutional apparatus is the forms of

power/knowledge that constitute the institutions, such as regulations, philosophical statements, laws, morals, etc. Institutional technologies, on the other hand, are the practical techniques used to exert this power and to put into practice this knowledge.³²

The news photo agency, as a journalistic institution, produces specific knowledge and discourses through its products—news photographs. As art historian John Tagg suggested, institutions are central to the issue of photographic meaning, as photography itself serves to define and establish hierarchies of power.³³ The power of the photograph, he argued, is manifested as the complex historical outcome of a medium dependent on techniques, procedures, institutions, and social relations. Photography's representational purpose, Tagg observed, is restricted by its “frame” and is convoluted by and grounded in the dissemination of power and ideology. It is an “‘instrument,’ a ‘vehicle,’ a conduit,’ a ‘passage’ through which those who already have ‘real power’ violently inseminate their conceptions in those who have none.”³⁴

Discourse, then, effectively connects to the notions of knowledge and power as noted by Foucault and Tagg, and helps place photographic representations in the context of their production while discussing the ways in which producers of images construct a kind of knowledge. Discourse analysis is therefore concerned with the following:

- 1) the image content;
- 2) the image context;
- 3) the construction of the existing social reality; and,
- 4) the ideology at the time.

Communication and media scholar David Machin and linguistics scholar Andrea Mayr noted that discourse analysis assumes a discursive foundation to relationships that have elements of power to them. 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 may be ideological and aimed to shape the representation of events and persons for ends. This type of analysis, also found in French literary theorist Roland Barthes' work, is concerned with the "denaturalizing the language to reveal the kinds of ideas, absences, and taken-for-granted assumptions in [visual] texts," Machin and Mayr suggested.³⁵

Ultimately, this approach 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.³⁶ 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 "regularly ritualized everyday life performances may express, convey, and reproduce gender or sex roles, racial classifications and stereotypes, and economic class."³⁷

Following the examination of the news photo agencies' workings, this dissertation outlines the ways the American self, nation, and national ideologies, have been and are portrayed in news photographs by the news photographic agencies. Bain News Service and VII, two unique news photo agencies in two eras set a century apart, offer an account of the changes that have occurred within the business, technologies, and representational practices of these institutions. To effectively discuss the way American social discourse is constructed and visualized and how its representation has evolved, the research was focused on the following questions:

RQ 1: How do news photographs and the news photo agencies as journalistic institutions help represent/promote social discourses?

RQ 2: How have Bain News Service and VII represented “Americanness” in their news photographs?

RQ 3: How are ideas and ideologies of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream visualized in the photo agencies’ news photographs?

RQ 4: How does representation of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream differ in twentieth-century images produced by Bain compared to twenty-first century-images produced by VII?

To effectively examine “what” Bain News Service and VII produced, this dissertation’s upcoming chapters analyze the agencies’ photographic archives and examine how the two agencies, in two distinct periods of time—1900-1920 and 2001-2020—visually represented the American character and nation. In so doing, the thematic analysis provides insight into how American discourse has been constructed by news photographs and how that discourse has changed with the advancement of technologies and business practices. The thematic analysis of Bain’s and VII’s archival collections also serves to determine the dominant subjects the agencies worked with. The archives were mined using the following categories and search terms:

1. The American identity
 - search terms “immigrants,” “people,” “family”
2. The American land
 - search terms “mountain,” “park (national),” “river,” “lake,” “beach”

3. The American city
 - search terms “city,” “street,” “bridge,” “skyline”
4. The American business and industry
 - search terms “ship,” “airplane,” “automobile,” “railroad,” “industry,” “factory,” “business”
5. American nationalism and exceptionalism
 - search terms “America,” “American flag,” “parade,” “national”

While the number of photographs each search term produced varied across the two agencies, approximately 50 to 100 photographs were examined for each of the five categories. The featured examples of individual images were selected from the first page of the archives’ search results and are used for illustrative purposes only. The selection was made based on the closest, most literal, display of each search term within the images. The sample photographs help illustrate the broader themes this dissertation is interested in and the historical context at the time.

In addition to photographs, featured textual primary sources include historical and contemporary magazine, newspaper, and online accounts, various photography trade publications such as handbooks and manuals, advertisements, and more. In addition to the Bain archive at the Library of Congress (LOC) and VII’s online photo archive, a great number of the above-mentioned sources were found on the websites of nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and university libraries such as Hathi Trust Digital Library, Readex Historical Newspapers, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, and Internet Archive.³⁸

For Bain News Service, the study focused on primary sources from the first two decades of the twentieth century found at the Library of Congress (LOC) Newspapers division and the Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, as well as George Grantham Bain's papers and news articles, available at the New York Public Library (NYPL), and Bain's biography by Emma Little published in *Picturescope* magazine in 1972.³⁹ For VII, the study relied on VII's websites and social media accounts as well as on published interviews with the agency's founders as well as former and current members.

Guided by the aforementioned research questions, historical and contemporary accounts, and related literature, Chapter 2 delves into the business and the photographic practices of Bain News Service and VII. Chapter 3 examines the literature and theories developed by scholars about photographic representation, nationalism, exceptionalism and how they contribute to an understanding of the American Dream as a key component of American identity. Following the survey of the agencies' practices, technologies, and techniques, and while taking theoretical frameworks on photographic representation into account, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 examine how news photographs, and the news photo agencies as journalistic institutions, help represent/promote social discourses and how Bain News Service and VII, in particular, have helped publicly (re)define the American identity. The chapters present an analysis of the archives of both Bain News Service and VII and feature a sample of images produced by the two agencies.

Through the thematic and visual examination of news photographs of the American nation, country, society, and culture during the 1900-1920 and 2001-2020 respectively, this dissertation also looks at the ways in which American exceptionalism, nationalism, and the American Dream have been represented over time, and considers the changes that have occurred

with the depictions of these notions. This approach is necessary to determine the ways in which news photo agencies have contributed and continue to contribute to the global visual dialogue within the United States and between the American nation and the rest of the world.

Mediated images can inform audiences and consumers globally about institutionalized representation practices used to display the self and the foreign “other” in ways that can reinforce ideologies of exceptionalism, nationalism, and national power. These “ways” are present in images that flow between nation-states and are central to the public and cultural diplomacy tactics. Studying their representation in the media over time and as constructed by Bain News Service and the VII news photo agencies can help illuminate the larger role of news photography as a globalizing system of knowledge. Chapter 7, therefore, evaluates whether news photography should be considered as an informal tool of soft power and cultural diplomacy. The chapter considers the changing nature of informal diplomatic efforts on the cultural front by discussing the findings for the early twentieth-century Bain News Service and the VII agency of today.

Lastly, as Chapter 8 concludes, the centralization of image production under the news photo agencies of the twentieth century determined a specific meaning of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream that was in line with the nation’s leadership. In turn, the decentralization of image production that had resulted from forces such as digitalization and globalization in the twenty-first century has complicated and re-defined the meaning of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream

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³⁴ John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2009), xxix.

³⁵ David Machin and Andrea Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012), 5.

³⁶ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 219.

³⁷ Lester C. Olson, Cara A. Finnegan, and Diane S. Hope, *Visual Rhetoric: A Reader in Communication and American Culture*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 15.

³⁸ Library of Congress, accessed February 23, 2018, at <loc.gov>; VII Archive, accessed February 23, 2018, at <viiarchive.com>; Hathi Trust Digital Library, accessed February 23, 2018, at <hathitrust.org>. Readex Historical Newspapers, accessed February 23, 2018, at <readex.com/content/americas-historical-newspapers>; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed February 23, 2018, at <proquest.com/products-services/pq-hist-news.html>; Internet Archive, accessed February 23, 2018, at <archive.org>.

³⁹ Bain Collection, *Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*, accessed February 23, 2018, at <loc.gov/pictures/collection/ggbain>; George Grantham Bain papers, New York Public Library, accessed February 23, 2018, at <archives.nypl.org/mss/181>.

Chapter 2: News Photography and the Business of the News Photo Agency

For many centuries, inventors and artists alike have been fascinated by the idea of capturing the world through light. Photography historian Beaumont Newhall noted that camera pictures in some respects have been made ever since the late Renaissance. “The principle of the camera had long been known: light entering a minute hole in the wall of a darkened room forms on the opposite side of the wall an inverted image of whatever lies outside,” Newhall wrote. “The use of the *camera obscura* (literally ‘dark room’) for the production of pictures however was not realized until a century later,” he noted.¹

The invention of visual devices, such as the camera obscura, diorama, kaleidoscope, Phenakistoscope, and stereoscope, and their integration for various purposes in society ushered new and exciting ways for obtaining visual knowledge. As a result, during the nineteenth century, a new set of relations between the body and various forms of institutional and discursive powers redefined the status of the observer, art critic Jonathan Crary wrote. In Crary’s view, the “mechanization” of visual technologies from its very beginning occurred not simply with the intent to shift appearances of images or systems of representation. This shift also served to reduce the individual to a political force and was “inseparable from a massive reorganization of knowledge and social practices that modified the myriad ways the productive, cognitive, and desiring capacities of the human subject.”²

While Frenchman Joseph Nicéphore Niépce is credited as the forefather of photography with his 1825 invention of a heavy photoengraved printing plate called a *heliograph*, Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre, who worked alongside Niépce, improved production methods and helped popularize the art of photography. Unlike Niépce’s cumbersome plates that captured

unreadable images, Daguerre's 1830s *daguerreotype* offered highly detailed images, made on lighter, mirror-like plates that developed a "photograph" through the chemical reactions of silver, chloride, and mercury. In a letter to his friend Charles Chevalier in 1839, Louis Daguerre wrote he had finally "seized the light" and "arrested its flight!"³ Exposure times for the earliest daguerreotypes required anywhere between three and fifteen minutes, making portraits impractical, and while Daguerre himself did little to improve his invention, eventually others contributed with innovations that reduced the exposure time to less than a minute.

The role of photography evolved rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century as photographic commerce, especially travel photography, internationalized the audiences' visual experience. Daguerreotypists spread throughout Egypt and Russia and into the Middle East, India, China, Australia, and South and Central America.⁴ The photographer became a recorder, interpreter, and the middleman of a global community that was visualized and no longer just imagined (Anderson). Early travel photography illustrated both places and ideas about places. Photos taken in the United States captured the idea of "Americanness." American photographs featured in worldwide publications and at international fairs were among the main ways to spread the word about the "exceptional" character of the nation. They highlighted the nation's picturesque landscape and its material wealth, its industry and progress, its diverse cultural makeup and unique national character—in short, by the turn of the twentieth century, American photographers were exporting the American Dream.

2.1. Early Years of News Photography and the News Photo Agency

Visuals were impactful from the moment they showed up in the press and publishers used their impact to their advantage. During the Revolutionary period, some publishers used symbols and graphics, often in the form of advertising, to decorate their front pages and headings to catch the eyes of their readers, but largely publishers were short of paper and lacked the adequate reproduction technologies to make illustrations a permanent feature of their trade.

News photography, in the form of wood engravings that were copied from, but not identical to original photographs, emerged in print in the 1840s. The first weekly magazine to favor pictures over text was *The Illustrated London News*, founded in 1842. It was followed by *L'Illustration* (Paris), the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* (Leipzig), *L'Illustrazione Italiana* (Milan), *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion* (Boston), *Harper's Weekly* (New York), *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (New York), *La Revista Universal* (Mexico), *A Ilustração* (Rio de Janeiro), *Illustrated Australian News* (Melbourne), and others.⁵

A major milestone not just in mass communication, but also in news photography was achieved in 1855 when Roger Fenton's photographs of the Crimean war appeared as wood engravings in the *Illustrated London News*. They served as the inspiration for Mathew S. Brady and others to document the American Civil War (1861-65).⁶ With the help of a team of photographers, Brady produced emotionally charged images before and after battles using a wet-plate process of production.

Taking pictures was indeed challenging, but reproducing them in the press was a feat in itself. An August 2nd, 1856, article in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, "How Illustrated Newspapers Are Made," described the arduous process used to publish photos, suggesting it required "a most ingenious division of labor, a total regardlessness of expense, and a directing

head to the whole concern, not only possessed of more than usual business capacity, but also perfect in the generally inconsistent quality of a perfect knowledge of art, and all the practical details necessary not only to produce pictures and engravings, but also a perfect knowledge of the mechanical appliances by which they are created.”⁷ *Leslie’s* noted that the illustration process was extremely tedious and time-consuming. “The hour of publication is near at hand, and here we have a two-page picture to be engraved, which cannot be completed by a single hand under *several days of hard labor*.”⁸ Yet, the efforts were worth it, and *Leslie’s* soon found competition in the market for illustrated journals when publications such as *Harper’s Weekly* (1857) and the *New York Illustrated News* (1859) joined the market.

In addition to improved camera and reproduction equipment, the growth of photographic commerce was closely interrelated with developments such as telegraphy, railroads, and the postal service. The invention of the Morse code in 1844, the completion of the transatlantic cable in 1866, and the opening of the Suez Canal helped link nations around the world via the telegraph. This in turn aided the shipping of goods and the growth of trade opportunities and international business deals. The young American nation was becoming well-traveled and involved in transnational or global flows of trade, tourism, transportation, and communication.⁹

Major influences for the first photo businesses came from Europe signaling the globalization of forces both in form and in practice. “By 1864, twenty-five years after the invention of photography, twenty-five periodicals on the subject were being issued in six different countries. Almost as many photographic clubs had been founded to organize exhibitions, protect the interests of their members, create business, and sell photographs,” Freund observed. Founded in Paris in 1862, *la Chambre Syndicale de Photographie* (The Photographic Trade Union), for example, served as the intermediary between the manufacturer and the

photographer, and between the photographers and the public. “One branch was involved in organizing the import and export of photographic materials. As a business, photography was making great strides,” Freund wrote.¹⁰

As the demand for travel literature grew in the late nineteenth century, *National Geographic*—one of the first picture magazines featuring foreign lands and cultures that emerged in the 1880s—became one of the leading publicity channels for the American image abroad all while enriching the American nation’s impressions of the world. “Though geographical information available to Americans from this and other sources did not necessarily dissolve ill-informed representations of exotic cultures, it did multiply the amount of information and whetted the appetite for things foreign,” historian Ian Tyrrell wrote.¹¹ In turn, as historian James D. Startt observed, media affected political culture in the nation because they had the ability to penetrate and spread national culture further and deeper. “The media, indeed, were central to the national political culture. They were the chief disseminators of information, opinion, and persuasion that shaped the political culture of the time regarding matters both national and international.”¹²

The introduction of the halftone printing process in the late 1870s and 80s by Cornell University photographer Frederick Eugene Ives, paved the way for the reproduction of photographs in newspapers. News images slowly became a feature in the press with the *New York Daily Graphic* publishing the first halftone photograph in a daily newspaper on March 4, 1880. This first photograph was “A Scene of Shantytown, NY,” a two-page pictorial spread of imagery “reproduced directly from nature,” illustrating the “Fourteen Variations of the Graphic Process.”¹³ The halftone process was not fully adopted by newspapers until nearly two decades later.

In addition to reproduction devices, camera technology and image distribution were advancing rapidly too. While the first widely sold hand-held camera, invented by William Schmidt of New York, came on the market in January of 1883, George Eastman's invention of the Kodak box camera and fast film in 1888 launched the photographic craft and business into a new era. Then, in January of 1897, the *New-York Tribune* successfully adapted photomechanical reproduction to the requirement of its high-speed rotary presses, making the occasional novelty of halftone news photographs to become a regular feature in newspapers.¹⁴ Around the same time, Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* was gaining leadership in newspaper illustration. "It is said that Pulitzer had no liking for pictures and once ordered them out, but a drop in circulation reinstated them," journalism historian Frank Luther Mott noted.¹⁵ Ironically, Pulitzer's *World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* popularized the practice of yellow journalism at the turn of the twentieth century precisely with a lavish use of pictures, cartoons, and comics. Illustrating the news had become an important part of reporting and "the yellow papers contributed something—notably banner heads, free use of pictures, and the Sunday supplement—to modern journalism," Mott wrote.¹⁶

Among the very first US-based organized efforts to distribute representations of distant lands, people, and places was the Keystone View Company founded in Pennsylvania in 1892. By 1905, Keystone had become the foremost producer in the world of stereo views, which allowed viewers of photographs to see a three-dimensional version of an image when viewed through a set of lenses. Keystone's images included scenes from all continents, including Australia, with significant numbers of images of famous tourist destinations, such as the pyramids, the Alps, Paris, and the like. Portrayals featured landscapes, flora and fauna, cities and buildings, industrial

and historic sites, and people. Well into the twentieth century, Keystone produced both educational and comic/sentimental images using the uncredited work of staff photographers.¹⁷

A similar endeavor was pursued by the Detroit Publishing Company, founded in the late 1890s. The company, along with Keystone, was among the first to mass-distribute representations of distant lands, people, and places in the form of color postcards. Detroit Photographic owned the exclusive rights to a Swiss process called *photochrom*, which allowed for the conversion of black-and-white photographic negatives into colorized images. The company, launched by Detroit businessman and publisher William Livingstone, Jr., and photographer and photo-publisher Edwin H. Husher, produced some city, architectural, and recreational scenery views of the United States, but photographs from Cuba and the Philippines of the 1898 Spanish-American War represented the firm's largest inventory.¹⁸

By the turn of the twentieth century, newspaper publishers were still slow to adopt photography as there were high operational costs and the processing had to be done outside the newspaper offices. These were also reasons why images in the daily papers were often more decorative than journalistic. Another problem was that in order to have photos illustrate breaking stories, news images had to be supplied quickly, but could not be sent via telegraph as could written reports. Newspaper owners often hesitated to invest large sums of money in new photographic and photo printing equipment and as a result, many publishers relied predominantly on the early picture agencies to fulfill their needs.¹⁹

Between 1900 and 1920, the news photographic input in the press became more widespread and streamlined as technologies and transportation advanced—larger and faster lenses were being built, camera equipment was becoming more simplified and compact, the news photo agencies were helping facilitate photographic distribution, cables, and wires were

speeding the arrival of the news, ships, planes, and trains were furnishing photographs. “The constant desire to get the first and best possible pictures on a story has led to many startling changes in transportation,” A. J. Ezickson of Wide World Photos wrote. “Planes and trains were chartered frequently, and even speedboat and dog-sled and motorcycle were used to bring in the first pack of negatives.”²⁰

Turn of the twentieth-century growth in communication technologies gave media the ability to cover both national and international events more efficiently. Americans witnessed domestic news and were privy to worldwide events too. “In spite of the occasional outstanding news picture sent by radio from Europe to America, the large liners are constantly bringing in the bulky packages filled with the best of Europe’s news and feature offerings,” Ezickson noted.²¹ The news photography business was evolving not just in the United States, but globally; the photographic output of the news photo agencies, as the main picture distributors, were growing in demand.

With the aid of telegraphy and wireless transmissions, press accounts and images traveled around the globe while promoting political and business elites’ agendas and demonstrating the American nation’s wealth, strength, and exceptionalism. “In the twentieth century, in ever more complex ways, the government helped citizens export American influence, while private businesses and groups, in turn helped the government fulfill the expansive ‘national interest,’” wrote historian Emily S. Rosenberg.²² News images in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century influenced the nation’s representations as an international power. Images in the press illuminated traits considered specifically American, including self-reliance and resilience.

Photography had from its earliest days provided a combination of art, news, and entertainment, but its business was also in part a branch of chemistry. As noted in a 1912 article

in the *Bulletin of Photography*, the photographic industry, with its distinctive needs, had to invent its own machines, its own type of factory, and its own methods of testing the products. “Moreover, the photographic industry has from its origin been a secret industry, the working methods of which have never been published, and the technique of which is largely unknown to the majority of scientific men other than those of the industry itself,” the article noted. “The industry at present is developed chiefly in England, America, France, and Germany, though there are a number of scattered factories in other parts of the world.”²³

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the American photographic industry went through major internal organizational and operational changes. The roles of the news photo agencies and newspaper editors became highly involved and complex, partly in response to the economics of the era; prices for domestic goods fell while the standard of living increased and disposable income rose. “There was a general movement away from decentralized, single-function, family-operated manufacturing firms to large scale, centralized, vertically integrated, professionally managed corporations,” wrote historian Reese Jenkins.²⁴ This movement, often referred to as the Corporate Revolution, or the Rise of Big Business, coincided with the growth of globalization. The photographic business joined the railroad, steel, and petroleum industries; the latter three all had a strong international perspective that eventually influenced the American photographic industry too, Jenkins noted.²⁵

Competition in the news business increased too: publishers were desperate to get the visual scoop: sending their cameramen to a breaking-news scene and back as fast as possible, wrote news photographer A. J. Ezickson in 1933.²⁶ This had consequences for the news photo agencies; news photo agencies leapt to take advantage of the best and fastest cameras and equipment and the speeding up of printing and engraving methods. The growing demand for

photographs during the first two decades of the twentieth century sparked further development of the news photo agency already serving as an intermediary between the photographer and the press. The agencies employed contract photographers, stringers, and freelancers with the intent to sell photographs to commercial users, including industry as well as the news media. While the early agencies used mostly their own photographers, they also distributed images shot by others, including photos shot by independent professionals and photographers on staff at smaller photo services. “Most agencies took a 50 percent cut, sometimes more, claiming that they had to share their profits with other agencies around the world,” Freund noted.²⁷ The early news photo agencies’ images, often uncredited, were typically sent to clients by mail, sometimes several times a day within a city to increase the flow of information to publishers. For longer-distance deliveries, mail by train or ship was the fastest way that photographs could travel.

“Just what is a picture agency?” photographer and author of “How to Sell your Pictures” Edna Bennett rhetorically asked in her article for the first volume of the 1964 edition of *The Encyclopedia of Photography*. She noted that she was frequently asked this question and over time had come to her own explanation: “Picture agencies are like literary agents in that they act as the intermediary between the artist and his market,” Bennett wrote. “In other words, the agency provides facilities and services which the unattached photographer could not easily duplicate without establishing a place of business.”²⁸

Agencies, also referred to as syndicates in historical accounts, were among the most vital organizations to support visual representations in the early days of the illustrated press. Since their inception, and until the digital age, these agencies successfully served to connect photographers and publishers, to promote the photographers’ craft, and to help with travel and other costs involved in news photographic work. “In effect, photo agencies did not simply

photograph the news,” art historian M. W. Marien wrote, “they selected the events and people to be photographed and thereby in some degree made the news. An agency by-line lent the image credibility.”²⁹

2.2. Bain News Service as a Revolutionary Enterprise

The early 1900s signaled a monumental growth of population and urbanization in the United States, helping maintain New York’s role as the financial, commercial, and manufacturing capital of the country. Referenced by his peers as the “father of foreign photographic news,” George Grantham Bain was both a journalist and a photographer who knew the business of news well and considered New York his studio.³⁰ “The father of the news snapshot is George Grantham Bain, a distinguished, tall, alert gentleman who might be quickly singled out in a crowd by the phrase, ‘There’s a newspaper man,’” wrote Bain biographer Emma Little.³¹

Bain was born in Chicago, Illinois, January 7, 1865 to George and Clara (Mather) Bain.³² He started newspaper work when he was 19 and took an interest in current news to the day he died in 1944, wrote Little.³³ Bain became interested in news illustration when he was still a young reporter. He followed the illustrated press: publications such as *Harper’s Weekly* and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* that visually brought the American Civil War to the doorsteps of the nation’s citizens via engravings.

Bain began his life-long affair with journalism in 1883 as a reporter for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* and later for the *Post-Dispatch*. In the late 1880s, he was named the Washington manager of the United Press Association (UP), an organization established in 1872

to compete with the Associated Press (AP).³⁴ “Here he learned the workings of syndication, a set up on which he was later to pattern his own photo service,” wrote Little. “As an ‘extra-curricular activity’ at this time Bain wrote about Washington topics on his own and syndicated them as feature articles to a string of newspapers,” Little noted.³⁵ Bain resigned from the UP in 1891.³⁶

Before Bain revolutionized the press with his news photography service he was a respected journalist with a keen mind and strong ties to the American political scene. As a young correspondent in Washington, Bain had begun to realize the importance of visual news as he observed the frequent absence of illustrations in newspapers.³⁷ He had acquired his technical knowledge of photography in late nineteenth century while working with his chemistry teacher at St. Louis University. An amateur photographer during his school days, Bain was also influenced by his older brother, Robert Edward Mather Bain. A travel agent by profession, Robert contributed to photographic journals and achieved considerable fame as an amateur art photographer during the 1890s.³⁸ At the time, photography was a relatively new medium and most photographers were still experimenting with the craft. For these, and perhaps other reasons, Bain did not make use of his chemistry lessons, at least not until the turn of the twentieth century when he revolutionized the press world by creating the first commercial news photo agency in the United States—Bain News Service.³⁹

Bain was already in the habit of carrying a camera and taking informal pictures during his interviews with public figures, a novel idea welcomed and encouraged by Bain’s editors. His Eastman Kodak “lightweight” camera helped his work and fueled the popularization of photographic news as senators, diplomats, and other political powers warmly welcomed the camera during press interviews. “This was a box affair: about two feet long and a foot and a half high,” Little wrote. “The equipment was never resented by his subjects—on the contrary, they

seemed to like the idea of their faces as well as their words being disseminated to a nation of readers.”⁴⁰

The history of news photography and the news photo agency advanced even farther with William McKinley’s presidency. Bain, then a UP manager and a close friend of McKinley, was granted some special privileges: “For the first time, pictures of the President leaving the executive offices and of Cabinet members going up the curved walk to confer with him were taken and published,” Little wrote. “[R]eaders in the 1890s felt a new and intimate sense of being in touch with the nation’s best-known residence.”⁴¹ Bain also had the privilege to travel with McKinley on his train in route to the Omaha Exposition in 1898, and the trip started a tradition for press photographers to accompany the President on official trips.

The commercial photography field in the 1880s and 90s was still primarily focused in making art for profit; most photo businesses made money through portraiture, and some had a side business in selling photo souvenirs of “scheduled” events such as inaugurations, parades, public speeches, and funerals of celebrities. At the time, it was Bain, however, who successfully bridged the gap between commercial photo art and photojournalism. He began photographing public figures he was assigned to interview for his feature articles which appeared in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, *The Century*, and the *Cosmopolitan*, among other national publications. He often carried his Eastman Kodak camera during his walks along Pennsylvania Avenue where he encountered the capitol’s high-life and political scene. His editors appreciated his enterprise photo reporting and his candid pictures of prominent Washington figures became a hit among publishers. Bain soon became a regular visitor of then-president William McKinley’s White House residence.⁴²

Prior to Bain's service, sending photographs alone to the press was still an unknown service. "I was drawn into the business of making news photographs chiefly by the need of newspapers for such a business," Bain wrote. "I was no photographer—just an amateur of the camera—but I was in essence a man with a nose for news." The half-tone printing process in newspapers was relatively well developed and the need for visual news was growing rapidly, but "there was no one in the whole United States to supply that need," Bain noted.⁴³

Following George Grantham Bain's success with news photographs of William McKinley in the 1890s, US newspaper offices and audiences clamored to see more public figure photos in the newspaper pages. Bain decided the sale of these photographs should be put on a business-like basis. "Editors everywhere were in need of pictures of national and world-wide subjects. The halftone process, after experiments at the *New York Tribune* in 1897, was working satisfactorily on newsprint. The way was open for a wider use of photographs," Little wrote.⁴⁴

The idea for a business venture that Bain mulled over for some years finally came to fruition in 1890s when, in addition to photographing his own stories, he began to purchase and collect photographs of news events and notable persons from around the world.⁴⁵ His concrete plan was to "build up a library of photographs—prominent persons and places all over the world—which would be on hand whenever needed. And so, the Bain News Service began," Little wrote.⁴⁶ Using photographs that represented both the domestic self and the foreign other in society, politics, and culture, Bain's agency visually positioned the American nation on the global map for three or so decades.

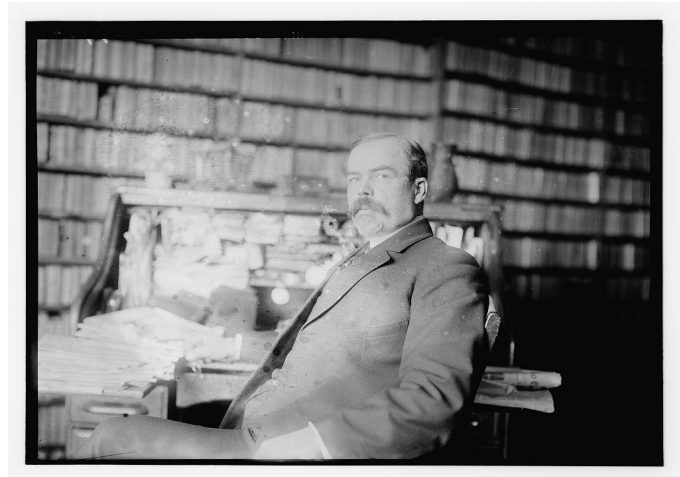


Image 1: G. G. Bain. Bain News Service. Between ca. 1900 and ca. 1915. Glass negative. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

In the early days of news photography, professional photographers who worked in studios were hard to come by so amateurs happened to be the ones working most closely with publishers and the news photo agencies. Their pictures were meeting the growing demand and, as Jack Price, a practicing news photographer in the early twentieth century, noted, “some of the most striking news photographs ever published were taken by amateurs, and on a number of occasions these were the only ones obtained. Exclusive pictures of this type are valuable because of their rarity and often bring high prices from leading newspapers.”⁴⁷

Bain News Service first began working with amateurs too. As Bain’s business grew so did the need for more photographers. Bain did not have the time to take the pictures himself so he personally trained his office boys in the photographic craft. “They learned readily—and soon came back with the sort of picture that he needed. The professional news photographer was on the way to becoming an important figure in American life,” Little wrote.⁴⁸ The key in these work relations was not just Bain’s knowledge of the camera mechanics and chemical processes

involved in photographic production, but Bain's expertise in news and journalism along with his understanding of the visual requirements of newspapers and magazines.

Many of Bain's photographers were immigrants from Europe, predominantly from England, Germany, and France, which all happened to be the places where photojournalism originated as a profession during the late nineteenth century. "A group of German photographers were the first to report events with series of photographs accompanied by a text that was often reduced to mere captions. Portrait photography had its origins in France, but photojournalism began in Germany, where the work of the first photo-reporters truly deserving of the name gave the profession prestige," claimed Freund.⁴⁹ The use of foreign-born photo-reporters and artists pointed to the emergence of an important transnational exchange of photographic practices and styles. These exchanges played a critical role in the global expansion of the news photo agency as a business, all while influencing news values and representations at the time.

At a time when the photo business was a male-dominated field, Bain was working unusually closely with female freelance photographers and even helped launch the career of one of the most prolific women photographers in American history—Frances Benjamin Johnston. Johnston carried out many assignments for Bain's service. She was active in photojournalism and documentary photography between 1864 and 1927. Ironically, as Bain was among the first and most active President McKinley photographers, Johnston happened to take the last-known photograph of the President in 1901 during his speech at the Buffalo Exposition.⁵⁰

Bain benefited from working with Johnston too. According to Emma Little's account, Bain received \$100 for a photograph—a record price for a picture—when he had sold *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* a picture of Admiral George Dewey taken by Johnston in Naples, Italy on the naval forces commander's trip home from the Philippines. Dewey's success in the

Battle of Manila bay on May 1, 1898, and his flagship *Olympia* had become global news.⁵¹ “I honestly believe that if you cover the subject in your best style and quickly you can make enough out of it to pay for your entire European tour,” Bain wrote to Johnston.⁵²

The success of Bain’s agency required not just the possession of a solid sense for news and photographic skill, but a delicate approach to form relationships with the publishers beyond the business itself.... and an instinct for novelty. In response to one of his unnamed former Texas-based subscribers, for example, Bain said, “we can and do supply the best news photograph service in America. But we can’t furnish the brains to appreciate it.” During the conversation, Bain had successfully engaged in selling his one-of-a-kind subscription model for news photographs and creating a life-long friendship. By the time the chat between the two men was done [the publisher] “not only resumed the service—after I had explained to him the news purpose of some features to which he objected—but he came to New York to see me, he bought his first silk hat to wear with me to the opera,” Bain wrote.⁵³ Thus, taken together, his journalistic eye and salesmanship proved to be an effective business formula that helped convince prospective clients of the value of his service.

During the first decades of the 1900s “circulation of newspapers and magazines in America was growing rapidly, reaching unprecedented number of readers, becoming in the process immensely powerful and persuasive institutions,” wrote photojournalism historian Michael Carlebach.⁵⁴ The new service distributed its own pictures, and some purchased from other agencies to about one hundred newspapers. Many of Bain’s images, published under “Bain News Service,” “George Grantham Bain,” “Bain-Photo” and “G. G. Bain,” were featured in prestigious newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *New-York Tribune*, *The New York Herald*, *The Sun* (New York), *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), *The Washington Times*,

Oregonian/Morning Oregonian, Dallas Morning News, Detroit Free Press, The Hartford Courant, St. Louis Post–Dispatch, Boston Daily Globe, and the Chicago Daily Tribune.

Bain had adopted the business model of newspaper syndications, building on to that model the specifics of what a photography syndication needed. For a monthly fee, Bain provided daily newspapers a variety of photographs and as part of the fee structure, publishers in return, were obligated to provide Bain with local pictures of events and personalities that he could further disseminate.⁵⁵ Within the first decade of the twentieth century, Bain News Service had established regular working relations with more than fifty newspapers.

The subscription model Bain News Service used is illustrated in a business agreement between the service and the Canadian newspaper, *Toronto Star* (see image 2). The *Toronto Star* subscribed to the “Daily Illustrated News Service for one year beginning March 29, 1910, at the rate of \$30.00 a month.”⁵⁶ This was done with the understanding that Bain News Service would provide about eight photographs and a card index system for filing them. The photographs were to be sent by mail. The condition for this service was that the photographs the *Toronto Star* received would be exclusive and not sold to or used in any other newspaper. The *Toronto Star* was to supply some special local pictures and a regular Sunday delivery of the newspaper to Bain.

Bain’s business model was original and a success. The venture was, after all, a mutually beneficial arrangement that offered photographers income and a worldwide visibility, gave news photo agency owners a diverse portfolio, and ensured newspaper publishers that they would have a reliable daily visual collection to choose from for a cost-effective monthly fee. Bain’s groundbreaking efforts were endorsed by the publishing world. The *Sunday Oregonian* published a few articles with implied endorsement of his business. “Bain, who had been interested in amateur

photography during his school days at St. Louis University, became convinced of the necessity of some organized system of gathering pictures for illustrating the news in daily newspapers, and established the first business of this kind in the United States. Newspapers were frequently at a loss for pictures to illustrate both domestic and foreign happenings,” the newspaper noted in their November 26, 1911, issue.⁵⁷

As a businessman with a “nose for news,” Bain closely followed the technological progress in the field. Photographic and reproduction technologies were already much more advanced since Bain’s first encounters with the photographic craft at St. Louis University. “When I was learning something of photography in my school days, there were no photographic plates or film to be bought,” he recalled in his writings. “In the laboratory of the Jesuit college in St. Louis we mixed our own solution and coated our plates of clear glass for every picture we made: and the paper on which we made our prints we coated in the laboratory and hung it up till it was dry enough to use. Modern photography is not much older than flying,” Bain noted in an article about aviation written between 1895 and 1935.⁵⁸

year to reach around the world: and of sensitized paper, upon which the photograph is printed from the negative, one company alone makes enough to reach twice around the world and have 12,000 miles left over.” Overall, the article claimed, “this means that a newspaper photographer may take a flashlight of a banquet at midnight, develop, fix and wash his print—all in less than half an hour.”⁶¹



Image 3: Printing the Bain News Service Photos.
Between ca. 1910 and ca. 1915. Glass negative.
Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

The news photo business, however, was not without its risks. Due to the use of highly flammable chemicals, the early photo studios experienced frequent fires. Bain News Service was not spared as the original offices, with its trove of archived photos, burned down in 1908. Yet Bain remained stoic. Upon hearing of the fire over dinner, he calmly continued eating with friends and strolled over to his business to see the damages only after he was done with the evening. But then he moved quickly. By the following morning, he had rented new offices that would come to house a new collection of photographs, a collection which remains intact at the Library of Congress to this day. “By nightfall, the day after the disaster, he had done a good day’s work. He

had fresh file of pictures and he had serviced all his New York dailies and the out-of-town papers as usual, with 400 photographs,” Little wrote.⁶²

Readers were key in determining photographic content, but it was the publishers’ financial frugality that drove the success of the news photo agencies. While large newspapers such as *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* were the main clients of these agencies, smaller daily newspapers that could not afford to bring in national and international visual news coverage reaped the most benefits. As Price noted, for complete coverage of all types of assignments, news photography of the early twentieth century required complex photographic equipment, which only the picture agencies and photographic departments of newspapers could afford to provide.⁶³

Between Bain’s establishment of his news photo service in 1895 and the mid-1920s, news photographs were either taken locally or had to be shipped or mailed.⁶⁴ Since the only distribution means were by messenger within the city, or by mail outside, it often took several days to a week to get photographs sent from one side of the country to the other, let alone internationally. “In the quest to get their photos to the newspapers ahead of the competition,” wrote librarian Laura McCann, “photographers and news agency staff creatively exploited all modes of transportation, including charter planes, trains, motorcycles, speedboats, and carrier pigeons, to transport negatives to the bureau offices and, subsequently, prints to the newspapers.”⁶⁵ The news photo agencies utilized all means available to them including entrusting of packages of film to train passengers or railroad employees making sure they did not get into the rival news photo service or newspaper representative’s hands. In some instances, agencies chartered trains in which an entire car was set up as a darkroom with all equipment

necessary for processing pictures, writing, and captioning the finished prints all ready for delivery the moment the train arrived at its destination.⁶⁶

To sustain and grow the news photo business, Bain and others frequently ran ads in major newspapers, magazines, and periodicals. This signaled that the news photo business was not just a necessary and profitable endeavor, but an endeavor that was expanding and affecting the American economy. The First World War had given the American news photo industry a major advantage. “It is not unlikely that one of the industrial results of the war in Europe will be the establishment of the photographic paper industry in this country,” reported the *Bulletin of Photography* in 1916 in an article titled “New Industry in the United States.” “The requirements of the industry are very exacting, but the manufacture of photographic paper in this country has been neglected simply because the demand has been so satisfactory taken care of abroad.”⁶⁷ Referring to the necessity for water that was clean and free of impurities, necessary for producing prints, the *Bulletin* concluded that American companies had the resources and the business acumen to take care of the growing demand.

Photographic trade publications were often used as the means to promote and connect photo agencies, publishers, and photographers, and to help expand the photo business even further. An article in *The Photo-Miniature* from 1917 offered an extensive list of more than two hundred agencies and publications with contact information and subject assignments needed.⁶⁸ The article suggested, “to first correspond with the editor or publisher, except where haste is essential, stating your special line of work and asking particulars as to his needs, prices, terms of payment, etc. In submitting prints, send all possible data with the prints, and enclose postage stamps sufficient for the return of prints if not used.”⁶⁹

In addition to newspapers, Bain advertised his agency in a variety of trade publications, including noteworthy titles like *The Editor & Publisher (and the Journalist)*. Bain New Service was regarded as a prestigious establishment that “lends eight photographs and letter-press daily. Best in quality, and timeliness of photographs. Widest in range of topics. Cheapest in the world. Used by best illustrated papers in all cities.”⁷⁰ Among the most regularly running ads during the 1910s was one titled “Editors Who Know,” followed by a subscribing publisher’s testimonial praising Bain’s agency—for example, an ad published on June 12, 1915, featured editor C. W. Danziger from the Pittsburg *Chronicle Telegraph*, who was quoted as saying: “The Bain News Service is the best in the world for illustrating current events. Whenever a big piece of news breaks, I go to my file of photographs with the certainty that I will find there a Bain picture which will illustrate the telegraphed story about it.” The ad ended, indicating Bain’s service motto was to “Illustrate Today’s News Today,” followed by the business address of the news photo agency.⁷¹

The Editor & Publisher (E&P) not only ran paid ads for the news photo service, but it also served as Bain’s public relations channel by covering his travels around the United States and abroad. The articles promoted his catalog of photographs, grew his business relations, and gave his agency credibility and exposure. The journal not only signaled Bain’s global grasp, but subtly promoted the span of his work and the prestigious place he held in the political scene too. A June 25, 1910, *E&P* article, for example, made note of his “extensive European trip,” meeting President Theodore Roosevelt in Naples, Italy and accompanying the president on his train journey to Rome.

After the Rome experience, which was full of interest, Mr. Bain went to Florence, Monte Carlo, and Toulon, being the guest at the last-named city of F. M. Mansfield (“Francis Miltoun”), the well-known writer. Mr. Mansfield is American Consul at Toulon. After motoring to Hyroes, Cassis, Marseilles, and Martigues, Mr. Bain went to Paris for the reception of Mr. Roosevelt at the Elysee Palace. From Paris he went with Mr. Roosevelt to Brussels, The Hague, Copenhagen, Christiania. Berlin, London, and Cambridge. Mr. Bain sent back fourteen letters and more than a hundred photographs illustrating Theodore’s Adventures in Wonderland to the *Cincinnati Times-Star*, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, *Chicago Record-Herald*, *Portland Oregonian*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Indianapolis Star*, and other papers.⁷²



Image 4: G. G. Bain. Bain News Service. Between 1915 and 1920. Glass Negative. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

Bain News Service led the way in the news photo business, and it was responsible for many “firsts” in photography, but many of Bain’s photos sadly burned down with the fire at his first office in 1908. Among the files were the first Federal courtroom photos, Octave Chanute’s aircraft experiments that took place before those of the Wright brothers, the first auto races at Newport, and the first photos of the House of Representatives and the Senate in session, among others. Bain’s preserved photographic files contain a myriad of global representations of strikes and demonstrations, women suffragettes, politicians and statesmen, sports events, immigrants at

Ellis Island, kings and queens as witnessed by Bain and his cameramen. “All of these are now gone forever. But enough of equal interest survives in Bain’s files to give a pictorial history of the world during the years since the fire,” wrote Little. “All the personalities, social forces and inventions, fashions and parades, wars and peace movements, the entire sordid and glittering spectacle of life is there for us to see.”⁷³

George Grantham Bain was indeed a “Pioneer News Photographer,” as *The New York Times* called him in his obituary noting his death on April 20, 1944. “The father of photographic news” had captured many famous moments in history, operated his own news service, and owned a large collection of rare photographs that were worth a “considerable sum.”⁷⁴ Bain’s innovative venture during the early years of the twentieth century was an exemplary success story for photography, journalism, and business. Alongside Bain, the first half of the twentieth century saw the rapid rise of many other agencies: Harris & Ewing in 1905, *The New York Times*’ Wide World Photos in 1914, *New York Daily News*’ and *Chicago Tribune*’s Pacific and Atlantic Photo Syndicate in 1921, Scripps-Howard’s Acme Newspictures, also known as United Newspictures in 1923, the Associated Press’s (AP) photo service in 1927 with the most widely used AP Wirephoto starting in 1935, and Hearst’s International News Service’s photo branch—International News Photos (INP) commencing in 1928.⁷⁵

The biggest early photography-only rivals of Bain News Service were Underwood & Underwood and Harris & Ewing. Two brothers, Elmer and Bert Underwood first established Underwood & Underwood in 1880 in Ottawa with door-to-door sales of stereoscopic photographs. As technological and business improvements brought the two brothers enormous success, they soon became the exclusive agency for three prominent stereographic publishers. By the early 1900s, branch offices were established throughout the US, Canada, and Great Britain.

As line drawings and woodcut illustrations in the press became outdated, Underwood & Underwood refocused their work to match the needs of the press, and around 1904 they set up a photo agency that would dominate the field for the next 30 years alongside Bain.⁷⁶

Harris & Ewing began in 1905. At first George W. Harris and Martha Ewing's firm more closely resembled a photographic studio, but they did offer a news photo service, which, like Bain and Underwood & Underwood, employed large numbers of freelance photographers and sold photos to media outlets throughout the nation and world. The news service ran until the end of World War II, and the firm stayed in the studio business until 1955.⁷⁷

The increasing domestic and international demand for photographs to illustrate the news led to a proliferation of more agencies not just within the United States but around the world. The national was becoming global in the business of journalism just as much as in any other business venture. Pacific and Atlantic Photos, Inc., for example, was the first American photo agency to establish its own sales branch in Europe, as noted by the *Bulletin of Photography* in 1922. The agency, which was organized in 1921 by the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Daily News*, "intends to compete with the established agencies in securing pictures and selling them to European newspapers and periodicals. Photos secured by Pacific and Atlantic, Ltd., of London will be syndicated in the United States and likewise pictures secured in this country will be sold in Europe," the *Bulletin* noted.⁷⁸



Image 5: Cartoon Character in Auto, Geo. G. Bain. Between ca. 1915 and ca. 1920. Glass negative. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

In short, as Michael Carlebach put it, a combination of several interconnected developments revolutionized news photography and photojournalism between 1880 and 1930, but they also changed the nature of the news photo industry. The growth of illustrated journalism popularized news and made the printed photograph an indispensable part of the final product. Technological developments in the camera and printing industries made coverage of news events more affordable, sophisticated, and efficient.⁷⁹ As noted by Emma Little, Bain's biographer, the business of news photography has never halted and had enriched life as we know it. The fact remains, Little stated, that the idea behind the news photo agency was thought of by George Grantham Bain, "a well-trained newspaperman with vision." Thanks to Bain, Little wrote, "we are now living in the age of the news snapshot, which promises to be with us for ever with air mail, telephone wires, radio waves, and whatever undiscovered means of transmission may be developed. We salute its founder."⁸⁰

2.3. The Commodification of the News Photograph

In the first half of the twentieth century, the American metropolis saw an expanding middle-class citizenry enchanted by dance halls, movie theaters, and rowdy nightlife. It was a time of radio, movies, celebrities, gangsters, and a dramatic growth of mass media. Leisure and entertainment became important aspects of the daily lives of working citizens and the print media mirrored this cultural shift. The publishers of a new journalistic form—the jazz paper, or tabloid—relied predominantly on sensational, scandalous, and often manipulated photographs to report on controversial topics such as crime, sex, and celebrity gossip. Although denounced as “gutter” journalism by publishers, in 1927 the New York bureau chief of United Press proclaimed that it hardly mattered what newspapermen thought of the jazz press since people were clearly showing that they wanted it.⁸¹ The jazz press, with its use of visuals, proved to be among the more notable journalistic forces of the era. The tabloids influenced the future course of American newspapers by compelling news outlets to adopt a louder tone and to use more pictures than ever before.⁸²

The ongoing global race for visual reporting and representation also accelerated to meet the growing curiosity of audiences in worldwide affairs. “Numerous turn-of-the-century wars and international incidents, as well as the imperial expansion of American national interests into Latin America and the Pacific areas, led to an extension of public interest in world affairs reflected in the growth of newspaper foreign services,” historian James D. Startt noted. “Advances in science and technology relating to communications gave the media the ability to cover national and international events with efficiency and scope previously unknown.”⁸³

Transportation helped with photographic exchange both at home and abroad with sea liners being the main carriers of packages filled with the latest of European news.

A syndicate here will wish to achieve a scoop over its rivals. A radio message will be sent to the London manager of the syndicate that the pictures will be picked up by seaplane off the American coast. A cooper aboard the ship will make a fairly large sized barrel, place the pictures inside, and then solder the sides to make it waterproof. About one hundred miles off the coast, as a seaplane looms in the distance, the barrel is thrown overboard, A.J. Ezickson wrote.⁸⁴

By the mid-20s, the US government and Post Office Department had already begun a regular transport of mail by air.⁸⁵ While airplane travel was expensive, the agencies had the organizational plans and financial means to cover the most outstanding stories with the help of the best pilots they could hire, while spending thousands of dollars to bring the first pictures. “The extension of air mail routes to all parts of the world and the inauguration of the air express service in 1927 helped speed up transportation of the news pictures,” noted Ezickson. Hired motorcyclists would often be used to transport photographs to departing planes, risking their lives on wet, slippery roads just to carry out their jobs. “There is scarcely a picture syndicate motorcyclist who cannot show you marks and bruises on his body, the results of accidents.”⁸⁶

In addition to transportation, expanded communication technology allowed news photo agencies and services to expand beyond national borders: Western Union sent its first halftone photograph telegraphic transmission in 1921, RCA transmitted its first Radiophoto transmission in 1926, and AP’s wirephoto service launched in 1935. Shortly after the end of the First World War, agencies were physically expanding as well: *The New York Times’* Wide World Photos, established in 1919, launched bureaus in Boston, Chicago, Washington, London, Paris, Frankfurt, Rome, and Vienna.⁸⁷ To mark the international expansion of news photography, the European branch of Wide World Photos set a record in sending photographs of the Japanese Emperor’s brother visiting France. “For this rush order to Tokyo the Wide World made use of its

recently installed European telephoto service and of airplanes to cut the mail time to the Japanese capital in half,” *The New York Times* announced in an article from June 15, 1930.⁸⁸ Additional pictures of daily events and royalty appearances were sent from Paris to Berlin and Moscow, a process that would have previously taken twenty-five days by Trans-Siberian train express mail and six weeks via the Suez Canal, the newspaper noted.⁸⁹

Consolidation and the need for regular integration of photography into the press defined the destiny of the news photo agencies as in-house services replaced them. Larger international news agencies, such as Associated Press (AP), UPI (United Press International, formerly United Press or UP), Reuters (founded in London in 1851), and Agence France-Presse (founded in Paris in 1835 as Agence Havas) played a key role in the expansion and globalization of media markets at large.

The Associated Press, first founded in 1846 as a newspaper cooperative, played a major role in the transformation of the picture market and the subsequent demise of the original news photo agencies. “The greatest clearing house for news in the world,” the AP controlled its own wire system that by the 1920s was approximately 145,000 miles long. By the 1930s, the AP represented 1,250 newspapers and its membership spread from Alaska to Argentina and from the Philippines to Puerto Rico.⁹⁰ AP became the first international news service to use wirephoto technology. It transmitted its first image, an aerial photo of a plane crash in upstate New York, using wirephoto on January 1, 1935. The image was transmitted across the country to 47 newspapers in 25 states. Trains and airplanes previously transmitted photos, taking up to three or more days in transit. With the wirephoto service AP could transmit a photo in minutes.⁹¹

With the improvements in photo transmission, publications featuring photographic content grew in popularity, and by the 1930s, magazines saw tremendous growth. Convinced that

pictures could tell a story better than text, Henry Luce launched *Life* magazine on November 23, 1936, following his creation of *Time* in 1928. In a confidential prospectus for his new magazine, Luce proclaimed that his goal was for everyone “to see life.”

[T]o see the world; to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things—machines, armies, multitudes, shadows in the jungle and on the moon; to see man’s work—his paintings, towers and discoveries; to see things thousands of miles away, things hidden behind walls and within rooms, things dangerous to come to; the women that men love and many children; to see and take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed.⁹²

As news photography became more streamlined, commodified, and industrialized, the photographer’s purpose shifted too. “Good procedure requires that the cameraman photograph everything with even the remotest bearing on the assignment, irrespective of its immediate value. He thus fully covers the subject, protects himself, and provides his editor with an array of pictures from which to make desired selections,” wrote photographer Jack Price. “Photographers of the picture syndicates have a finer respect for this requirement than the strictly one-paper cameramen, as the syndicates service papers of many types, each with some characteristic preference for pictures. Their coverage must, therefore, provide for a variety of tastes and fully blanket a story,” Price noted.⁹³

Audiences were able to witness events, people, and things previously unseen; what once was private had become public. A notable example of one of the first almost instantaneously reported events was the 1937 Hindenburg disaster during which the German passenger airship LZ 129 Hindenburg caught fire in Manchester Township, New Jersey during its attempt to dock ashore. “In all pictorial and reportorial respects, the fiery doom of the Hindenburg holds,

perhaps, the most distinguished place among the notable examples of high-speed coordination in news gathering known to modern journalism,” Price wrote in 1937.⁹⁴

The news photo industry was also transformed by an ongoing consolidation among the existing news agencies. On August 1, 1941, the AP acquired *The New York Times*’ Wide World Photos. The transaction was noted in a July 26, 1941 article in *The New York Times*, which suggested the move was in line with the growing acceleration of collection and output of news pictures. The move was also in line with the massive expansion of the Associated Press itself. “The news photo operations of The Associated Press, first begun in 1927, today are by far the most extensive of any in existence,” the general manager of the AP, Kent Cooper stated for *The New York Times*. “It was the only network of news photo wire transmission, regularly maintained and transcontinental in character, in the world. The Associated Press coined the word “wirephoto” to define the transmission of photos by wire, according to *The New York Times*.⁹⁵ Calling AP’s acquisition of *The New York Times*’ Wide World Photos, “an important institutional step,” Arthur Hays Sulzberger, president and publisher of *The New York Times* and a member of the AP, agreed with the vital importance of news photography to news storytelling. As newspapers increasingly turned to the use of photographs to tell news stories, he said, “there seems every warrant for directing the future of news photography toward the goal that will bring the element of its work to a full equality with the scope of the news service itself.”⁹⁶

Other international news organizations, such as International News Service (INS), United Press (UP), and Acme Newspictures, followed suit with the installation of wirephoto systems. The photo services expanded rapidly, in part by swallowing smaller news businesses. United Press launched its wirephoto service in 1952 when it absorbed Acme Newspictures, doing so to better compete with AP. Six years later, in 1958, the larger UP merged with INS to become

United Press International. While the massive consolidation among the large-scale news organizations paved the way for the popularization of international news and the establishment of standards in news photography quality, it also served as a major tipping point for the photo-specific agencies. Businesses like Bain News Service either consolidated or closed.⁹⁷

The technological and business transformations of the news photography industry helped define new global power relations and communication control, but these changes came at a price. By 1953, UNESCO reported that with the exception of the Associated Press, which served as a co-operative body owned by newspaper groups, “all the world agencies, which had started as the personal property of their founders, had been transformed in the course of time into strictly commercial joint-stock companies.”⁹⁸ While the smaller agencies could think creatively and strategically, the larger news services had the ability to finance new technologies and that ultimately became the key to their success. “It was a contest for news and also for business. AP remained the biggest and strongest wire; UP was an aggressive rival; and INS played a weaker third hand by stealing news from AP and by sensationalizing its copy,” wrote AP journalist Walter R. Mears.⁹⁹ The future of the then smaller independent photo-only agencies, such as Bain’s, became grim, as they could not sustain themselves through photographic content alone.

In addition to the news services’ involvement with news photo business, changes in the visual language and storytelling styles due to rapid technical advances heralded an easier and a more cost-effective way for publishers to in-source news imagery. For example, by the 1950s Kodak’s Ektachrome enabled photographers to process color film themselves rather than having to send it to a Kodak processing lab, as was the case with Kodachrome. During that time, publishers were able to use color prints, though still relatively rarely as the industry still required a long time (10 to 14 days) to prepare and proof color photographs for reproduction.¹⁰⁰

Following World War II, the proliferation of cooperative photo agencies such as Black Star and Magnum, dramatically amplified the scope and reach of the news photo. Originally founded in 1935 by refugees from Germany, Black Star or Black Star Publishing Company was closely identified with Henry Luce's *Life* magazine from the very beginning. Black Star's founders, Ernest Mayer, Kurt Kornfeld, and Kurt Safranski, had worldwide connections with contract photographers. "The Black Star photographers who produced photographs for *Life*, many of whom were talented European emigres, applied their knowledge of German photojournalism practices in their work, thus creating another channel through which were carried across cultural boundaries," wrote photojournalism historian Zoe C. Smith.¹⁰¹ Eventually, many of the photographers became *Life* staff members or contract photographers for the decades in which the magazine flourished," Smith noted.¹⁰² In later years, Black Star expanded beyond the photojournalistic market and "transformed the static style of business photography with a unique photojournalistic approach," the agency's website stated.¹⁰³

Renowned photographers Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, George Rodger, and David "Chim" Seymour established Magnum's co-operative in the aftermath of Second World War. Scarred by the war conflict, the photographers began the freelance-centered agency in 1947 to reflect their individuality as both people and photographers, an individuality described as the "idiosyncratic mix of reporter and artist that continues to define Magnum, emphasizing not only what is seen but also the way one sees it."¹⁰⁴ The agency, self-described on its current website, states that it puts news first and serves as a chronicler of "world events, people, places, and culture with a powerful narrative that defies convention, shatters the status quo, redefines history, and transforms lives."¹⁰⁵

As the foreign market for resale of American pictures was steadily increasing, stock photography became a major market player, and photography-driven publications like Henry Luce's *Life* started to decline in readership. "Quite a few of the American agencies have European offices and outlets to which they send materials regularly. American as well as European agencies have a set-up which enables them to market material in many countries from a central base using branch offices," photographer Edna Bennett noted in 1964.¹⁰⁶

The stock industry offered a novel way to conduct business while offering new ways for individuals and nations to see themselves and the world. These stock agencies borrowed many of their practices from the early news photo agencies, such as Bain News Service, but their products went beyond just news. By design, the stock photo agencies supply a large catalog of photographs for both news, publishing, and promotional purposes. They differ from the international news services such as the AP and UPI as they offer strictly visual content and photographic storytelling—an emphasis that was characteristic of the original photo agencies.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the practices of many of the original picture syndicates or agencies shifted as photo business and commerce expansions responded to the rapid effects of globalization. As summed up by journalist Stephen J. Lynton for the February 2, 1977 issue of *The Washington Post*

Yesterday, the photo studio, once frequented by Presidents, Supreme Court justices and many other notables, closed ... the Harris & Ewing's era had already begun of fade. Its prominent place in the world of photography during the first part of the century was gradually whittled away by the growth of wirephoto services run by news agencies, government photo staffs, television, and increasing publication of spot—or candid—photos, rather than formal portraits.¹⁰⁷

The popularization of stock photography in the 1970s, unlike private photography, news image agencies, and picture libraries, was marked by a globally oriented economic desire like that of the advertising and marketing agencies. This in turn contributed to a transformation of photographic practices geared not towards uniqueness, but towards uniformity that is saleable. Cultural theorist Paul Frosh noted that stock photography is a dynamic archival system of “image-repertoires,” informed by a theatrical and rhetorical tradition that is less concerned with truth value. Influenced and governed by the economic priorities of the advertising/consumer industry, its high-quality production values, professional marketing techniques, and the dynamics of global expansionism, the stock photo industry is as a self-enforcing system of cultural production.¹⁰⁸

Jim Pickrell, a photojournalist and stock-photo industry expert, noted that the stock photo agencies at their inception, served magazine publications more than newspapers. The agents of the companies carried packages of images around to various editors in attempts to sell pictures. Eventually, however, the stock agencies housed the images and the editors called with a specific request or sent a staff member to research the agency files. Over the same era— the 1970s and 80s— the stock agencies operated on an equal-share basis with their photographers: the photographers had the freedom to work on their own schedule and covered their costs of production, while the agencies paid for the costs of storing the images, marketing, negotiating rights, tracking of the images, and collection.¹⁰⁹

Photographers’ freedom was further enabled by the advent of digital cameras with their technological advancements that changed the nature of the visual storytelling. In 1975, a young engineer with Eastman Kodak introduced the first digital camera: “Mr. [Steven] Sasson, all of 24 years old, invented the process that allows us to make photos with our phones, send images

around the world in seconds and share them with millions of people ... It started out innocently enough,” wrote James Estrin for *The New York Times*.¹¹⁰

It was another six years before the first fully functional digital camera was built—by a science team at the University of Calgary in Canada. Digital soon became the go-to equipment for journalists. From that point on, film or as it became known, “analog” photographs were slated for replacement by digital images. JPEG and MPEG standards were created for digital image and audio files in 1988 and the next year, in 1989, AP transmitted the first digital photo of president George H. W. Bush’s inauguration. Digital image applications also came to computers: Digital Darkroom became the first image-manipulation program for the Macintosh computer in 1988 and Adobe PhotoShop 1.0 arrived in 1990.¹¹¹ Then, in the 1990s, Apple introduced the first mainstream digital camera (under \$1000), Apple QuickTake, which was designed by Kodak. It was Apple’s first venture into digital camera space. In 1994, Kodak and the Associated Press launched a digital Single Lens Reflex camera designed for photojournalists and *The Vancouver Sun* became the world’s first newspaper to convert to all-digital photography with this camera.¹¹² At the same time, Kodak also released the Kodak Professional Digital Camera System, a device aimed at photojournalists’ need to get their photos back to the publisher quickly. Considered the first digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) camera, this device started the digital camera revolution. The invention of digital compact discs (CDs), the transition of photo “libraries” from physical archives to servers in the mid-1990s, and the introduction of the first mobile phone capable of taking and sharing still photographs in 2000—the Japan-based J-Phone with fully integrated camera—helped advance the photo business even further.

The effects of digitalization and the global expansion of news photography were seen in all areas of business and life. The beginning of the digitization of images and the ongoing

consolidation of photo agencies with media organizations helped further promote the globalization and decentralization of the news photography business. The business practices of existing agencies had to adapt accordingly as modern digital technologies enabled easy digitization of images and delivery of digital files while eliminating the need for film, instantaneous Internet-based online search, and improvement in the quality of digital cameras. Among the more notable global, all-inclusive, and corporate-in-nature stock photo offspring that came out of the changes were Corbis (1989) and Getty (1995).

Over the next several decades, Getty acquired the rights of distribution of major photographic archives, including acquisition of the Hulton library, granting rights to millions of photographs from British press archives dating back to the nineteenth century. In addition, it collaborated with international news services, such as Agence France-Presse (AFP). As noted in an AFP's press release from April 1, 2003, "this blend of news agency quality, combined with wire service speed, relevance, and accessibility, has led to awards, newspaper and magazine covers around the globe and a distinct and compelling look at the news of the day."¹¹³ In 2009, Getty Images and AFP announced an extension of their global relationship with customers in Italy.

Within a few years into the twenty-first century, Getty had become one of the largest worldwide stock image agencies to serve not only the news media, but marketers, designers, book publishers, and advertisers. Getty employed more than 250 staff and freelance photographers around the world covering daily news, sports, and entertainment stories. According to a press release, "This team moves between 700 and 1,000 live photos each day through picture desks in New York and London that operate 24/7."¹¹⁴

In the new century, the original *collaborative* photo agency Magnum, first founded in the 1940s, had also adapted to the changing technological and business landscapes. In a 2019 interview for *The Art Newspaper*, Magnum's CEO, Caitlin Hughes, pointed out that the transformation of Magnum into something that at least in part resembles a stock photo agency had to happen because the media industry "has changed beyond all recognition." In Hughes' words, while editorial assignments for newspapers once "were what Magnum became famous for," the agency had to adapt. "I think people associate Magnum with photojournalism, but my observation coming in is of the breadth of our portfolio, and the number of photographers we represent who can work in a huge range of styles of interest. We have this great variety which I think can sometimes be forgotten about." Ultimately, Magnum's (and Hughes') focus has been to use the agency in a way that it could respond to the needs of partners beyond traditional news media.¹¹⁵

Twenty-first-century publishers now can create the images they need via AI rather than by sourcing them from professional photographers. Amateur photographers and freelancers not only easily participate in the market, they are dominating it, and even average citizens can make a living from online user communities via user-generated content.¹¹⁶ Apple's iPhone, launched in 2007, helped transform everyone into a photographer. Phone cameras continued to improve their image quality, digital memory got bigger allowing for the storage of high-resolution images, wireless networks made it possible for instantaneous photo sharing on photography sites such as Flickr, and on social networks, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.¹¹⁷

Another offspring of digitalization came about in the 2000s—user-generated content professional organizations such as Citizenside and Demotix. Unlike Getty and Corbis, which operated under similar revenue-driven business models as stock photo agencies, Citizenside and

Demotix were cooperatives that followed journalistic principles. The photographers working with Citizenside and Demotix prided themselves on providing newsworthy stories. The coops delivered “objective and real-time” coverage of events with the goal of amplifying underheard voices in a media landscape dominated by media conglomerates.

According to private company database Crunchbase, Citizenside was established in France in 2005 and was among the first news video and photo agencies to tap into the potential of citizen journalism by sharing and selling content produced by amateur and independent reporters. In 2007, the Agence France Presse (AFP) and the holding of Xavier Gouyou Beauchamps (former President of France Télévisions) invested \$800K in the company. Citizenside went into liquidation in May 2013 and was acquired by Matilda Media for \$40K. A decade later, Citizenside had evolved into a major citizen journalism platform, serving 100,000 amateur and professional photographers, freelance journalists, and citizen reporters in more than 150 countries.¹¹⁸

Demotix, a citizen photojournalism agency established in 2008 had similar intent—to connect independent photojournalists with mainstream media, was a short-lived endeavor amidst the photo industry’s consolidation. The agency was initially successful with its user-generated reporting approach, supporting photographers who covered major world events such as the 2009 Iran elections, the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa, the 2011 bombings in Oslo, Norway, the United Kingdom riots in 2011, and more. The agency partnered with a variety of media organizations, including Global Voices Online, the Press Association, and Corbis, and with international news outlets such as *The Huffington Post*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Le Monde*, *Future TV in Lebanon*, and the *Himalayan Times*. But by November 2012, the Corbis Corporation had gobbled it up.¹¹⁹

In an interview for Rising Voices, a project of Global Voices founded in 2004 by a group of international bloggers with the intent to amplify the global conversation online, the founder and former CEO of Demotix, Turi Munthe, noted that Demotix was launched to support freelance photographers who generally do not have sufficient financial backing for travel and photo gear, nor a central institution, or hub, to protect them and to advocate for their release if captured when on an assignment. When Demotix was conceived as an idea in 2007, the founders still believed that groups of people could achieve great success online. “But it turns out that wasn’t true,” Munthe stated. “Poking and updating one’s Facebook status is one thing, and contributing to serious news is a completely different kettle of fish.” Munthe and the Demotix team realized the citizen-journalists who witness news no longer need to post their work via a news- photo-specific platform. “Now, news doesn’t need a contributor to Demotix to be reported because two of the biggest publishers of content in the world run essentially all content: Facebook and Twitter,” Munthe noted. “An enormous amount of raw content is now being produced by everybody ... The key point now is figuring out how to tell the story.”¹²⁰

The rapidly developing digital world allowed for the proliferation of yet another model for digital photo production and distribution. Online image brokers such as iStockPhoto.com, Shutterstock.com and Fotolia.com originally intended to build a community of art buyers around the globe and enable them to share information and resources via the Internet. As Pickerell noted, “this model [of image-brokering] also opened the door to amateur and hobbyist photographers from around the globe and made it possible for them to easily make their images available for consideration by professional users.”¹²¹

The massive shifts in image production and distribution around the turn of the new millennium left the world of news photography in an extraordinary place. As the media saw

unprecedented levels of consolidation, starting in the 1990s, the news photo agencies seemed to be on a downward slope. Photography industry giants like Getty Images and Corbis, that held enormous financial and technological power were able to swallow smaller agencies and photo archives and reward a small group of photographers, which in turn marginalized most others. As a result, the visual representations readers were seeing in the news media began to reflect the growing disconnect between journalism and the giant business organizations ruling the picture market.

In addition, in the twenty-first century—thanks to Sasson’s digital photo-camera invention and Internet technologies—a continuous flood of images circulates online, some coming to the public via journalistic institutions, but others arriving deracinated, via social media. Citizen-produced photographs have contributed to a steepening decline in traditional photo markets and the further directing of the news photo agencies’ activities toward non-media related business users.

For these, among other reasons, the term visual economy, proposed by media scholar Kari Andén-Papadopoulos, is most useful for thinking about the global systems of visual exchange in the twenty-first century. The word “economy,” she wrote, implies that the field of vision is now organized around social relationships, inequality, power, shared meanings, and community.¹²²

In sum, the development of nearly instantaneous news photo reproduction and distribution via digital and Internet technologies has caused a major shift in business practices for both news publishers and photo agencies alike. In a process tied to convergence, news content began merging print and online media. Visual storytelling, its presentation, and its significance in the twenty-first century are all challenged by the overabundance of visual stimuli in the form of

graphics, advertisements, and flashy and often fake, or decontextualized, news images. With the portability of technologies and the ability of individuals to document their lives on a moment-to-moment basis, casual observers of events have transformed into virtual photojournalists, challenging authenticity of news photographs and the reality represented for readers. As Grant Scott, founder and curator of United Nations of Photography noted in 2017, the digital age has granted an enormous power to the photographer.

The role of the photographer today is that of the publisher of yesterday and, as such, the responsibilities of the publisher must be understood and adopted by the 21st century photographer. The role of the photographer has changed from that of creator to creator and disseminator, and it is in that dissemination that the photographer has inherited the power of communication that they have for so many years cried out for.¹²³

2.4. VII Photo—The Visual Muckrakers of the Twenty-First Century

By the turn of the twenty-first century, digital photography, the Internet, citizen-produced photographs and video, and real-time delivery of images around the world had transformed the photographic industry. The market for photographs changed dramatically and so did the news photo agency's structure and practices. The twenty-first century created innovative ongoing producer-audience dialogues and methods of collaboration. The news photo agency's work became driven by audience choice, not by gatekeepers. As the Australian online photo magazine *Capture* noted in 2017, "the influences of citizen journalism, the 'World Press aesthetic' and the epoch of iPhone photography have drastically influenced the discourse of professional reportage, and in place of aesthetic documentation, a mass of shock-value imagery saturates the media." In

response to these changes, seven of the world's leading photojournalists formed a photo agency "dedicated to empowering photographers and preserving the art of reportage."¹²⁴

Three days before September 11, 2001, Ron Haviv, Gary Knight, Christopher Morris, John Stanmeyer, Alexandra Boulat, James Nachtwey, and Antonin Kratochvil announced the formation of a small, independent photo collective. On the morning of September 11, 2001, James Nachtwey was packing his bags for an overseas assignment in his New York apartment when he saw the collapse of the Twin Towers. Five years later, Nachtwey, the most famous of the VII photographers, was to recall "We launched on September 8, three days before the attacks...Then the world changed. And we've been following that story ever since."¹²⁵

Originally influenced by images of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, Nachtwey started his career in photography in 1976. Known for his work on documenting wars, civil strife, and other social conflicts, he worked for *TIME* magazine in the 1980s prior to becoming one of the founding members of VII in 2001.¹²⁶ Nachtwey left the VII agency in 2011.

Christopher Morris started out as a documentary conflict photographer for *TIME* magazine in the 1990s. The focus of his work has been on political coverage in America. At the time of writing he is named as one of Emeritus photographers for the agency and is based in Tampa, Florida.¹²⁷

Like Morris and Nachtwey, Ron Haviv's photographic work has been grounded in documenting conflict and raising awareness about human rights issues around the globe. As noted on his personal website, in the last three decades Haviv has covered numerous conflicts and worked in over one hundred countries. His work in the Balkans, which spanned over a decade, was used as evidence to indict and convict war criminals at the international tribunal in The Hague.¹²⁸

Born in Paris, France, Alexandra Boulat followed in the steps of her father, veteran *LIFE* magazine photographer Pierre Boulat. Much like Haviv and Morris, Boulat covered news, conflicts, and social issues. Among her assignments, she reported on the wars in former Yugoslavia from 1991 until 1999, the fall of the Taliban, the Iraqi people living under the embargo in the 90s, and the invasion of Baghdad by the coalition in 2003. Her work has been featured in *National Geographic Magazine*, *TIME*, and *Paris-Match*. Boulat died in Paris in 2007¹²⁹

Czechoslovakian Antonin Kratochvíl studied photography in Amsterdam. He has photographed Mongolia's street children for the magazine of the American Museum of Natural History and the Iraq War. As a result of allegations of sexual misconduct that were noted in a 2018 announcement on VII's website, Kratochvil is no longer with the VII agency.¹³⁰

John Stanmeyer, an Emeritus member of VII, has dedicated his career to photographing environmental, social, and cultural issues. For more than 15 years, Stanmeyer has worked nearly exclusively with *National Geographic* magazine, producing over 19 stories, 14 of which have appeared on the magazine covers. Between 1998 and 2008, he also worked for *TIME* magazine where his photographic work has been featured in 18 covers.¹³¹

Harvard graduate Lauren Greenfield has published photographic monographs, directed several documentary features, produced traveling exhibitions, and published in magazines throughout the world. Since the 1990s, her work has been centered on consumerism, youth culture and gender.¹³² Greenfield resigned from VII in 2009 to pursue her own documentary career.

Englishman Gary Knight served as a contract photographer for *Newsweek* in the 1990's and 2000's. He has worked as a photographer around the world since the late 1980's, at first

focusing on conflict photography, and more recently on anthropology and socioeconomics.

Currently, Knight resides in Massachusetts and serves as the co-director of the VII Foundation and director of the VII Academy, among his many other roles with and outside the VII agency.¹³³

Canadian-born Christopher Anderson grew up in Texas and began his photographic career at local newspapers. In 2000, while on assignment for the *New York Times Magazine*, he boarded a small wooden boat with 44 Haitians trying to sail to America. The boat sank in the Caribbean. His photographs from the trip received the Robert Capa Gold Medal. Since then, Anderson has worked as a contract photographer for *Newsweek* and *National Geographic* magazines. His work, initially focused in war reporting, later transitioned into commercial, art and fashion projects.¹³⁴ Anderson left VII in the early 2000s to join Magnum Photos.

The VII agency, since its inception, has been composed of leading international photojournalists and documentarians, who attempt to stay ahead of trends in technological and ideological developments while practicing professional skills in digital photography. “The notion behind VII was simple and counterintuitive. As picture agencies became more unwieldy and impersonal, why couldn’t a septet of friends form their own cooperative—maintaining their ethical standards, photographic quality, camaraderie—and share their profits, all while using the World Wide Web to transmit their images digitally from their own corners of the Globe?” noted director of photography at *Life* magazine, David Friend. “Its genesis called to mind not only the creation of Magnum Photos in 1947 but also, curiously, the founding of United Artists in 1919.”¹³⁵ Since VII’s inception, the agency’s photographs have made the covers and front pages of prestigious international publications, including USA’s *Time*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Sunday Times*, France’s *Paris Match* and *Le Monde*, and Germany’s *Géo* and *Stern*. They have won 38 World Press Photo’s awards.¹³⁶

As noted on the VII website, “amplifying local voices and addressing the complex political, environmental, and social questions facing families everywhere” is the driving force behind the agency. VII’s focus, just like that of journalists, is on images that tell important stories.¹³⁷ Serving as the visual muckrakers of the twenty-first century, VII photographers argue that images have the power to make change. The agency’s ethos addresses “the complex political, environmental, and social questions facing people globally,” according to Rosie Torres, a writer for *The Independent Photographer*.

In 2001, VII launched the VII Foundation—an independent, charitable media and education non-profit organization founded by Ron Haviv and Gary Knight to diminish the growing funding gap for long-term projects in today’s media. As explained on the Foundation website, which is separate from the VII Agency’s one: “in order to continue to produce work that addressed complex social, economic and human rights issues [Haviv and Knight] started the Foundation as an independent non-profit structure to secure support for continuing documentary practice and education.”¹³⁸

In a quest for global social justice, the VII Foundation distributes a weekly “Frontline Report,” to its “insiders.” The report features essays on topics of social significance and social justice, updates on projects VII staff is working on, fellowships and education opportunities. In its quest to equip young journalists with skills to combat misinformation, The Foundation’s mission is to “harness the power of first-person visual journalism,” to expose beliefs and actions that are out-of-sync with facts and realities and to put “the story into the hands of people living with those realities.”¹³⁹

Delving into topics such as race, gender, identity, environmental catastrophes and conflict, the VII photographers have covered some major issues of the new century: from the fall

of the Taliban, violence in the Middle East, conflict in Albania and life in North Korea.¹⁴⁰ These issues have also been among the ones that helped establish VII's reputation. The VII agency's more recent diversification with live events, video, and creative partnerships, social media and education are also practices that highlight the changes that have come about in VII and today's news photography business at large.¹⁴¹

"VII was born in a time of dramatic change in the business of photography. The initial impetus to start VII was the consolidation of photo agencies by Corbis and Getty in the late 1990s and early 2000s," said Ron Haviv in an Australian *Capture* magazine interview. "The combination of the market and technology, along with the realization that we needed to be more in control of all aspects of our photography, cemented the need for the creation of VII."¹⁴²

From its inception, VII's innovative business model was set to combat giant corporations that swallow smaller independent agencies, a trend especially evident in all areas of media production since the 1990s' rapid spread of globalization and digitalization. The VII agency's model, just like the original cooperative Magnum, was clean-cut, an agency of member-photographers who work together on assignments they are passionate about, while controlling their own destiny and making a profit. The VII agency and the photographers were also driven by the original intent of journalism—public awareness and education.

VII, unlike Bain News Service, had the advantage of new media technologies, allowing the agency's photographers to work remotely while using the Internet to transmit their images digitally from their own corners of the globe. "Part traditional agency, part global network reliant on the Web—to be based not in Paris or New York, in Seattle, or Silicon Valley, but at their seven separate laptops and computer desktops in their seven home offices, from Manhattan to Provence to Bali," Friend noted.¹⁴³ Over the years the number of photographers in the

cooperative has changed, by 20 years after its founding, more than 30 full time photographers are members of the agency, based throughout the world.¹⁴⁴ The need for photographers to associate themselves with like-minded people, to pool their resources together so they can take on the challenges of an ever-shifting editorial market, has sustained this and other photo collectives throughout the years.

While the first news photo agencies like Bain News Service were solely profit-driven, VII's mission expands beyond that. News photo agencies of the early twentieth century worked with limited resources and news photographs were the main source of revenue. George Bain, for example, focused on building a photographic catalog of newsworthy people and events to service newspapers and popularize visual reporting in an era when images were just beginning to take hold as regular features in the press. VII's scope, on the other hand, expands beyond visual news reporting. A novel photo agency, VII is driven to promote photographic education and social change during a time when visual media is flooding the environment.

Contemporary agencies have adapted. Yet, "as that market continues to suffer the effects of the worst economic crisis in more than 70 years, agencies such as VII Photo have been forced to rethink their business model and structure," stated Olivier Laurent for *1854*, a multi-media company and publisher of the *British Journal of Photography*.¹⁴⁵ VII is more than a mere content supplier; it is a content publisher too. The agency has continuously adapted to the massive transformations of the photo industry while engaging in innovative approaches to generating funding for their photo projects and educational initiatives.¹⁴⁶

From being principally focused on news for editorial clients, VII has collaborated with *The New York Times* in providing content for its photo archives, and it has diversified into social media, live events, video, and creative partnerships with non-government organizations,

colleges, universities, museums, and major art and photo festivals. Their external relationships with publishers and organizations help VII develop opportunities for promising photographers who value the power of news and documentary photography.

To manage the ever-changing market demands while maintaining sustainability, VII Photo uses the syndication model Bain introduced in the early twentieth century. For instance, VII has partnered with another world-wide, award-winning, multi-media photo service, Redux Pictures, that launched in 2003, to provide a wider array of assignments and to streamline the licensing and copyright of photographic work. Among Redux's regular editorial clients are star publications such as *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *ESPN*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Esquire*, *Time*, and *The New Yorker*. While Redux Pictures functions similarly to VII, the focus of Redux extends beyond news and documentary images; they take on ad campaigns and commercial shoots, such as annual reports for financial institutions.¹⁴⁷ Redux is a twenty-first-century stock photo agency.

VII regularly expands its roster of photographers and works to identify and foster fresh talent. In an interview for *Pictureline* blog, former press photographer and managing director of VII Stephen Mayes, described how full members of the agency mentor young photographers through the VII Mentor Program.¹⁴⁸ "First launched in 2008, the VII Mentor program pairs emerging photographers with VII photo's members who, for a period of two years, will help them build and develop their skills and professional practice, as well as create relationships with editors, publishers, and galleries."¹⁴⁹

Ed Kashi, a member of VII since 2010, noted that mentoring emerging photographers who come from troubled parts of the world is mutually beneficial. The mentoring offers the opportunity for both parties to learn from each other and about each other's nations and cultures; it offers unique representations through the lens of a foreign other. "What's exciting about

working with Ali [Arkady] is that he's based in Iraq," says Kashi. "Given how much harder it is for Western and outsider photographers to work safely and freely there, he will have this incredibly unique and intimate perspective to provide for us to see into a country that is so important and going through convulsive changes." He added: "What's more important is that his interests are not only in news but more so in developing long-term stories and projects on environmental and cultural issues—stories that we are not seeing any more from Iraq. So, through his eyes, VII will be able to deliver stories from Iraq that would otherwise go unseen."¹⁵⁰ As part of the Mentor Program, VII Photo distributes the mentees' work, taking a cut on all sales arranged by the agency.

In the twenty-first century's image-driven media environment, VII and the agency's staff are not mere suppliers of news photographs—Bain News Service's primary function. VII is also not a strictly profit-driven establishment—the key driver of most stock photo organizations. But what most sets the VII agency apart and demonstrates its versatility in comparison to other photo agencies, past and present, is its focus on social awareness and change, mentorship, and education—tenets that more closely resemble the purposes of journalism than do those of commercial photo agencies.

Unlike George Bain, who had to advertise his services via newspapers, magazines, and periodicals, the members of VII are engaged in direct communication with their audiences via social media, and in addition to their photos and videos for sale, offer online photo coaching, technology and case studies discussions, photography book reviews and promotions, interactive workshops, blog articles about photography and technology topics, studio visits, and social media outreach of all kinds. "VII Interactive: See through the noise" is the agency's way of creating dialogue and a learning environment where photographers can engage directly, online

with a ‘live’ instructor. With a “user-first” mentality, VII offers some free and some paid group classes, in addition to individual mentoring.¹⁵¹ These initiatives are all part of VII’s continued efforts to elevate the importance of news photography, efforts that greatly differ in purpose from those of Bain and others in the twentieth century. They also help the cooperative turn a profit.

As the globalization of markets, economy, politics, society, technology, and culture continue to pressure and influence photography, the future of the “photo agency” is uncertain. One thing remains true; adaptability, flexibility, and continuous experimentation in the field will dictate the success of the news photo business. In today’s visually saturated world, VII’s Ron Haviv sees the main goal of the photo agency being about reaching audiences and producing stories that have impact. “As our audience becomes more fragmented, we face more challenges in being part of the conversation,” he said in 2014. “This constant struggle of how to rise above and stand out will shape the direction of VII as we move into the future.”¹⁵²

Changes in the photographic industry and media market at large continuously push photographic organizations and photographers to rethink the approaches to their work. It is a highly fluid environment. Since 2014, for example, the VII agency has had to close its gallery and offices in New York and Paris and to let go of some of its staff members. Now VII employs an agency representative and two interns who take care of the agency’s digital archives. Many of the agency’s staff maintains a close-knit network with the rest of VII’s full members and staff. “With a more flexible structure in place, the next step was for the agency to redefine its business strategy without abandoning its journalistic roots,” Ed Kashi told *1854*. “If editorial is disappearing, we have to completely rethink who we are and how we behave, so to speak.”¹⁵³

For Mayes, the agency no longer exists as a collective of photographers. It is about integrating photography into a richer practice with videographers, post-producers, marketing,

and PR specialists. “To make a communication business work, you need an array of skills. You need a range of very different interests, but within shared parameters,” Mayes noted.¹⁵⁴ VII’s ongoing efforts in social media outreach and engagement, live events, video, photography, and social causes, and education has mandated that VII be an “incubator for new ideas,” as noted by emeritus member Tomas Van Houtryve.¹⁵⁵ The traditional agency framework has become unsustainable.

While news photography is still a major occupation for the agency, its focus has shifted to long-form visual storytelling and photographic essays calling for social change. As part of this effort, the VII Foundation in partnership with PhotoWings and VII Photo Agency, has launched the VII Insider, an interactive platform that hosts free bi-weekly online events for photographers, curators and journalists which incorporates various case studies, advice and resources covering technical, ethical, and business practice.

Since the 1990s, many photo agencies either transformed into citizen media news outlets (Citizenside) or were acquired by larger corporations (Demotix). But one of the first born into the digital world, VII is among the longest-standing news photo agencies, still advocating the journalistic values of public awareness and education. As noted on its website, “VII Insider’s aim is to promote debate and discussion to advance the production and analysis of documentary stories addressing complex social, economic, environmental and human rights issues.” Ultimately, as Gary Knight, CEO for the Foundation, stated in an interview for ePhotozine, VII’s goal is to expand the foundation’s reach and in so doing further develop networks globally.¹⁵⁶

With the help of the Internet and social media, photo agencies like VII can self-promote and dialogue with media consumers, engaging in social justice advocacy beyond just breaking news. This is in stark contrast to Bain’s era, when agencies worked directly with publishers,

advertised in trade publications and journals, and supplied timely materials for news stories. Yet, despite the advantages of new technologies and market practices, the news photography business has its daily challenges with the two main ones being the means of production and the sale of product. In the interview for *Capture Magazine*, Gary Knight, another founding member of the agency, stated the agency works more collaboratively with others and now can reach their audience directly, but the cost of that has been a significant drop in revenue from image sales.¹⁵⁷

Moreover, there seems to be an ongoing disintegration of the traditional institution of the news photo agency and a decentralization of the craft. These factors, among others, have also transformed the roles of news photographers and agencies alike. “I used to see my role as a gatekeeper with access to photographers on one side and to the media on the other and my job was to filter, effectively making information choices for people. Thankfully, this has changed and none of us can claim to be gatekeepers anymore,” VII’s Stephen Mayes noted. “This isn’t a top-down culture any more, and the days of experts telling what others what they should know are fading fast. Nowadays, the smart people in the communication business are listening as much as they’re talking, and my job is to facilitate conversation.”¹⁵⁸

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Chapter 3: The Ideological and Representational Powers of News

Photography: Key Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives

“The picture age is here. Everywhere the man with the camera abounds, from the northmost settlement in Alaska down to the tip of Cape Horn,” wrote A. J. Ezickson of Wide World Photos in 1938. Nothing escapes the lens of the “ubiquitous photographer.” “His lens is trained on the passing event, and history is recorded with the unfailing eye of the camera.”¹

By the turn of the twentieth century, the news photograph, commonly recognized as a printed image with a caption depicting real events, people, and places had transformed the world of news and reporting. Photographer Jack Price noted what was true then as much as it is now: “with so many other forms of diversion—radio, talkies, etc.—to lay claim to his attention, the reader demands not only that his news be served quickly, but he wants printed word amplified and accompanied with visualization that is inherent in a spot-news picture of the event. News stories must be brief—and good pictures make textual brevity possible.”²

News pictures became critical for depicting the American nation and the world. Yet, the news picture was not just a selling point for publishers, it was an ideological “selling” point for nations around the globe. A key feature in newspapers, the news picture differs from just any photograph. It is not an advertising or a fine art print, nor a portrait shot or a scientific image. A news picture, in the words of Edward Stanley, former executive news photo editor for the Associated Press, is a photograph typically sold to newspapers that must answer the same questions that a news story does (i.e. not just be a fragment of action). That photograph must also be of news interest, it must have a human appeal, and above all, it must be completely honest.³

In “the picture age,” when images dominate global media, the news photograph serves to create and sustain social constructions, cultural identities, and a status quo, while often

challenging them. An important form of mass communication and an ideologically loaded device, news photography can promote or subvert individual and national interests for viewers at home and around the world. “The photograph not only signals a different relationship to and over nature, it speaks very much to a sense of power in the way we seek to order and construct the world around us,” wrote visual arts scholar Graham Clarke.⁴ Our ways of living, remembering, and being are continuously (re)defined by photographic seeing—a demand of life since the popularization of images at the turn of the twentieth century. In turn, this demand shaped and continues to shape the way we understand our place in the world and our national identity and belonging.

Artist and philosopher Daniel Rubinstein once suggested that photography is an industrial process that shares some key features of the Enlightenment. Photographs, in his view, “captured the key scientific, political, and ethical tendencies of industrial capitalism and presented them to the eye as an image, inaugurating along the way the age of aesthetic modernism.” Photography is the perfect tool for reflecting on the changing face of society, he wrote. “[It] emerged out of this melting pot of bodies, energies, and machines as the visual figuration of a social order that made representation and subjectivity the cornerstone of its scientific, political, and economic activities.”⁵

In the words of Susan Sontag, “a capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex. And it needs to gather unlimited amounts of information, the better to exploit natural resources, increase productivity, keep order, make war, give jobs to bureaucrats.” Referring to the photographic camera, Sontag once proclaimed that the representation-producing device serves precisely these needs and it strengthens them. “Cameras

define reality in the two ways essential to the workings of an advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers). The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology,” she wrote.⁶

As image producers and audiences alike engage in meaning-making through photographs, they engage in cultural production. When looking at historic and iconic photographs of important events in US history, the news photograph takes a powerful position of being a catalyst of new perceptions, myths, and even social change. As art historian and theoretician W. J. T. Mitchell has argued, photographs can evoke powerful fears, and they can seduce, attract, and illuminate our daily lives. In his words, *images* connect to certain symbolic values, and they have long-lasting effects on memory and recollection. Pictures, Mitchell claimed, are not merely descriptions of events and practices, but they are also representations of these events and practices. They are “ways of *worldmaking*, not just world mirroring,” he wrote.⁷

Photographic images hold ideological powers beyond their literal frames and can trigger intense momentary reactions in their viewers—fear, joy, sadness, anger—and long-term effects too, such as changes in one’s ideological or moral orientation. Photographs also allow anyone and everyone to have a personal affiliation with large scale events. “Popular images disseminated, promoted, and repeatedly reproduced by large-scale corporations and seamlessly sutured into material practices of ordinary life – whether documenting victory or disaster, surely these images exemplify ideology at work,” communication and rhetoric scholars Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites suggested.⁸

Look at them critically, and it's all there; the production of truth by a technological apparatus of surveillance; the gaze of social authority and its objectification of the other; fragmentary representations of events that reinforce dominant totalizing narratives; artfully manufactured sentiments ranging from patriotism to grief used to justify state action; the reproduction of exploitative conceptions of race, class, and gender as if they were the natural order of things...”⁹

When one of the twenty-first century's life-altering events, the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York, took place, James Nachtwey, one of the founding members of VII, was packing to go on an assignment. When he gazed out of his New York apartment window, he first saw people looking up at the sky. Then he saw flames coming out of the World Trade Center just a few blocks away. Nachtwey spent the following hours and days photographing the collapse of the Twin Towers and the aftermath of the despair (see Images 6 and 7).¹⁰ Some of his photographs appeared on the front page of newspapers around the world. They became iconic and remain fresh in the memories of many Americans and people around the world. They evoke and sustain what psychologists call a *collective trauma*, or an event or series of harmful or life-threatening events that a group of people experience that has lasting adverse effects on their mental, physical, social, emotional and/or spiritual well-being.¹¹



One of the World Trade Centers crumbles after being struck by a hijacked airplane. Photo © 2001 James Nachtwey / VII

Image 6: [a] “James Nachtwey’s 9/11: Eleven Years Later, Like Night and Day,” September 10, 2012, Reading the Pictures. Screenshot.



Scenes of carnage following the fall of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan, NY. Photo © 2001 James Nachtwey / VII

Image 7: [b] “James Nachtwey’s 9/11: Eleven Years Later, Like Night and Day,” September 10, 2012, Reading the Pictures. Screenshot.

Scholars have studied not only the psychological, but the ideological powers of photographs. French theorist Pierre Bourdieu defined photography as a representation and a record of reality. The photograph, in his words, is neither an interpretation, nor a result of an arbitrary selection and transcription of the social reality. The photograph informs and dictates the ways in which society behaves, which separates photography from other works of art. It also shows whatever the photographer wants viewers to see, and his or her work is judged relative to the function it fulfills for the viewer, Bourdieu wrote.¹²

Or in the words of French literary theorist Roland Barthes, the *denotative*, or purely objective status of a news photograph has a strong chance of being mythical, while connotation is not the immediately “graspable” message in that image. Rather, the message can be “inferred from certain phenomena which occur at the levels of production and reception of the message.”¹³ Producers of news compose, construct, treat, and read photographs according to specific professional, aesthetic, and ideological norms. Photographic connotation, as summarized by journalism scholar Barbie Zelizer, offers a glimpse at broad symbolic systems that provide second meaning.¹⁴ This dissertation is interested precisely in the “second” or “connotative”

meaning of news photographs and it suggests three ways of thinking about news photography: as a visual spectacle, as a tool for surveillance, and as a diffuser of the (ruling) national ideology.

To examine the way photographs have represented American identity over time, this dissertation considered the news photo agency and the dynamics behind the institutional production, distribution, and consumption of news photographs through French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISA) lens and German social theorist Jürgen Habermas' notion of the *public sphere*. The following subchapters engage with these concepts while offering a review of theoretical literature on the concepts of myth, the American Dream, nationalism, exceptionalism, and on photography as a symbolic system for ideological messages and a producer of social discourses. The review illuminates the role of photographic representation in the social construction of reality. It provides a solid base for establishing the notion that news photographs help publicly define what the American nation is and who the American people are.

The following review engages with German cultural critic Walter Benjamin's notion of a *mechanical reproduction of reality*, French philosopher Michele Foucault's *knowledge/power* interplay, British cultural scholar Stuart Hall's idea of the *politics of representation*, and art critic Jonathan Tagg's ideas of institutionally "burdened" representations that are in part based on ideas presented by Benjamin, Foucault, and Hall.

These theoretical frameworks offer the basis for the visual discourse analysis of news images produced by Bain News Service and VII and point to how news photographs became critical components in the establishment and reinforcement of ideas, ideologies, and myths about the United States and its place in the world. The theoretical frameworks guide this dissertation's discussion about the ways Bain and VII have photographically represented the concepts of the

American Dream, nationalism, and exceptionalism. The frameworks also undergird the exploration of how those baseline conceptions of “America” have been differently depicted in the early twentieth century and the early twenty-first century.

3.1. Photography, Meaning-Making, and Cultural Production

The emergence of news photo agencies as centralized institutions holding a monopoly on visual representations of society, culture, politics, and a nation at large, is a prime example of an advanced industrial society at work. Between 1900 and 1920, Bain News Service was among the first such establishments that offered an abundance of photographic content for newspaper publishers in the United States and abroad. Bain’s business was empowered by the growing demand for visuals in the press. In the early-1900s, Bain’s agency was an endeavor that helped spread news photographs globally, all while establishing a springboard for the spreading of American ideology around the world. With the help of visualizations of Americanness in the press, Bain News Service helped fuel a global American cultural production and played a role in the shaping of America’s reputation during the first half of the twentieth century.

In addition to the impact of economic and business developments, cultural production with the aid of photographs has been complicated by technological progress. Even though technology was not as advanced during Bain’s time at the turn of the twentieth century, the growing mass production of photographs had already begun challenging representations of people, cultures, and nations alike.

According to German cultural critic Walter Benjamin, technological changes in the production and consumption of visual art and media, including news photographs, are burdened

with a concealed political agenda and profound social significance. Referring to photographs of the streets of Paris in the early 1900s, Benjamin wrote, photographic records began “to be evidence in the historical trial. “They [photographs] unsettle the viewer; he feels challenged to find a particular way to approach them,” he wrote.¹⁵ Benjamin pointed to an important aspect of photography that makes its communicative power complex. A photograph has pre-determined framing (based on genres, conventions, categories) that intervenes with the authentic representation of reality as it directs the eye towards a specific place and a specific story and/or to a side of a story, and leaves other parts out—like journalistic “framing,” or the angle a news story undertakes. In Benjamin’s view, photographic technologies have altered the sense of perception and have enabled newspapers and magazines to reproduce reality in a specific way with photographs; “[Such] adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception,” Benjamin wrote.¹⁶

An example of Benjamin’s mechanism at work can be found in George Grantham Bain’s photographs of women. The abundance of women in Bain’s photographs reveal that early twentieth-century women were gaining prominence in public in general and society specifically; what women were doing was of interest to audiences and therefore to publishers. The Bain photographs depicted the women’s suffrage and civil rights movements, women’s progress in education, in employment, and their involvement in political activities, sports, and social life. In hindsight, Bain’s images documented the shifting gender roles and made plain that the modern American women in the WWI era were gaining agency in society (see Images 8 and 9).

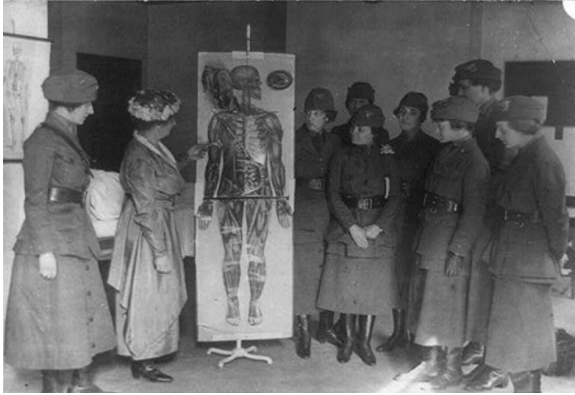


Image 8: Women in School of Anatomy at YWCA for Motor Corps of Nat'l. League for Women's Service, New York City. Bain News Service. May 22, 1918. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 9: Police Women; Capt. Edyth Totten and women police reserve. New York City. Bain News Service. June 25, 1918. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

Such photographs featured in the daily press reached millions of readers nationwide, thus helping solidify the changing status of women and (re)constructing the social and cultural reality at the time. In this sense, cultural production is first a complex process of meaning-making, in which the boundary between cultural ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’ is blurred; and, secondly, in the realm of culture both production and consumption are intrinsically bound up with the articulation and negotiation of identity—individual and national—in their existing historical context.¹⁷ As culture and identity scholar Ana Cristina Correia Gil wrote: “national character and cultural identity are two concepts closely related to national identity. While the last one includes political and sociological factors, national character has to do with psychological traits of certain people.”¹⁸

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall and art historian John Tagg have offered useful insights into the effects of visual representations in their relation to photography, culture, institutions, and authorities. Although in different ways and to different degrees, Hall and Tagg have both delved into the Foucauldian notions of *discourse* and *knowledge/power* to highlight important ideas

about the effects of representational practices. According to French philosopher Michel Foucault, power is based on knowledge and knowledge is produced through discourse, i.e. discourse is the means of constituting knowledge. Foucault also suggested that discourse consists of culturally specific sets of rules for organizing and producing knowledge.¹⁹ “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it,” Foucault wrote.²⁰ News photographs represent culturally specific sets of rules and serve as building blocks in the discourse production process since audiences engage with the consumption of news (images) daily. In Foucauldian sense, news photographs transmit, visualize, and reinforce power, but they also undermine and expose that power, rendering it fragile and making it possible to thwart it.

In a way, news photo agencies, such as Bain News Service and VII, have served as the institutional producers of knowledge in society and Foucault’s concept of *truth regime* or *politics of truth*, further explains the changing role of these agencies in society. Foucault suggested in *Discipline and Punish* that “truth” is “a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements” that is linked to systems of power that produce and sustain it.²¹ The early twentieth-century Bain News Service, as a centralized journalistic institution, is an example of Foucault’s “system of power” in charge of an “ordered” production of visual statements.

Furthermore, institutions and governments often focus on dominant systems of representation and work to sustain them in order to support the broader nation-state ideology. According to French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, these systems are separate from the government, yet they are indirectly related to aid the expression of dominant ideologies. In turn, news images produced by journalistic institutions should be considered key sources of

ideological and symbolic representation, and the news photo agency should be considered an institution that helps the processes of meaning-making and cultural production. In Althusser's words, among these systems are the cultural, news, and informational apparatuses, including the news photo agencies. He defined these institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses, or ISAs.

[I]t is "of our own free will" that we go to church or school (although school is 'mandatory'), join a political party and obey it, buy a newspaper, switch on the TV, go to a cinema or a stadium, buy and "consume" records, paintings or "posters," and literary, historical, political, religious, or scientific works. This is to say that Ideological State Apparatuses are distinguished from the state apparatus in that they function, not "on violence," but "on ideology."²²

Drawing from both Althusser and Foucault, art historian John Tagg has argued that the photograph is not simply a "magical emanation" whose form explains its meanings. Instead, he suggested, what makes the link between the pure content of an image and its possible ideological burdens are "discriminatory technical, cultural and historical process in which particular optical and chemical devices are set to work to organize experience and desire and produce a new reality—the paper image which, through further processes, may become meaningful in all sorts of ways."²³ The analysis of representations of American exceptionalism, nationalism, and the American Dream in news photographs from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries shows that Bain's and VII's photographs successfully bring certain power relations and imbalances into focus all while helping (re)construct the social reality of their respective historical times.

Ultimately, according to Tagg, photography (and the news photo agency), has the means for control and surveillance of society, and thus it has the means to control the meaning of a given photograph. This form of representation is determined by institutional and social forces that play a role in the entire representational process—from the moment of production of the

news photograph through (by the photographer), to its distribution (by the news photo agency), to the exhibition (by the news publication), and finally, to the consumption (by individuals and nations alike). Twenty-first-century political, technological, economic, and cultural developments have undoubtedly complicated the work of the news photo agency as an Althusserian ISA and a Foucauldian “system of power” in charge of an “ordered” production of visual statements.

Everyday representations or visual statements found in the media, including news photographs, also play an important part in what cultural theorist Stuart Hall has defined as the *politics of representation*. In Hall’s view, those who work in the media are directly involved in the production, reproduction, and transformation of the field of ideological representation itself. The media help define the social reality through processes of representation by bestowing meaning and validity upon objects [and subjects] in line with specific ideologies of discourses.²⁴ As prime producers of visual content, news photo agencies are crucial to the supply of cultural or symbolic visual resources globally and integral to the display of power and power imbalances. For Hall, cultural texts and images are a primary vehicle in the power struggles between groups over meaning, and texts and images are central to the global information flows.

Our lives have become transformed by the struggle of the margins to come into representation. The emergence of new subjects, new genders, new ethnicities, new regions, new communities, hitherto excluded from the major forms of cultural representation, unable to locate themselves, except as decentered subaltern, have acquired through struggle sometimes in very marginalized ways, the means to speak for themselves for the first time. And the discourses of power in our society, the discourses of the dominant regimes, have been centrally threatened by this de-centered cultural empowerment of the marginal and the local.²⁵

As the historiographical analysis of the developments of the news photo agencies shows, the proliferation of photographic exchanges around the world in the early twentieth century was among the first globalizing efforts. Along with the expansion of international news services, such as the Associate Press, Reuters, and United Press International, news photography agencies dominated information and communication channels around the world that served to facilitate a global dialogue and the spread a global agenda across national borders. As Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser), the news photo agencies and the international news services played a critical role in the global flow of images. These images helped reveal the global powerful elites, including the United States, and highlighted global differences and inequalities. Examining news photographs produced by centralized news photo agencies in the early twentieth century and news photographs produced by the decentralized, digitalized, globalized agencies of the twenty-first century helps illuminate the role news photographic representations have played into (re)shaping one's national identity—in the case of this study, the American identity.

Chapters 5 and 6 of this dissertation consider the original news photo agency through Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses lens by connecting the dynamics behind the institutional production, distribution, and consumption of news photographs to the development and transformation of individual and national identities. While engaging with Hall's idea of the *politics of representation* and Foucault's *knowledge/power* interplay, the analysis shows how news photographs have represented American identity over time while arguing that these representations have been “institutionally burdened” (Tagg).

3.2. Photography, Myth, and the American Dream

“If photographs can create defining images for people, places, and events, they can also contribute to the formation of myths,” wrote visual communication scholar David Weintraub. “Myths are nothing more than stories that have an especially strong hold on the public’s imagination. These stories often concern socially important goals and values, and they are frequently used to transmit messages about the way things ought to be in society,” he stated.²⁶ News photography, as a source of representation and a system of knowledge, is inscribed in discourses that help build a nation’s image, and its myths and symbols.

As noted by mass communication scholar Bruce J. Evans, “current research relating mass communication to national character argues that the ‘American mind’ is powerfully shaped by the ‘myth-making power’ of the media.”²⁷ From the myths of the Promised Land and the melting pot to the myths of the self-made man and the American Dream, the United States has a long history of establishing itself as a nation with exceptional qualities.

Myths are part of language and culture and can be found in almost any nation’s collective history. Social and political theorist Montserrat Guibernau defined nation as “a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future and claiming the right to rule itself.” She suggested that territory, history, culture, language, and religion are all building blocks of the term nationalism.²⁸ Yet, as political scientists Geoff Andrews and Michael Saward noted, when it comes to defining a particular nation, potent mixes of historical fact and myth are common. “Beliefs do not need to be true for people to hold to them and act as if they were true; ‘A group of individuals united in and by the false belief that they share a common history might act collectively and thereby initiate a common history,’” the authors observed.²⁹

Undoubtedly, myths are key references to discourses of Americanness, both past and present, and visual images have aided the spreading of these ideas and ideologies both at home and abroad. As noted by American studies scholar Heike Paul, “the United States as an ‘imagined community’ is constructed and affirmed by way of this repertoire of a foundational mythology that entails the creation of a ‘usable past and the ‘invention’ of a ‘tradition’ for the new American nation complete with a national ideology of past and present heroes.”³⁰

The mechanisms of “myth-making” and the role of news photography in creating and sustaining certain views and visions of the American nation are closely intertwined. The news photographs produced by Bain News Service during the early 1900s and by VII in the early 2000s, embody ideological symbolisms that represent the American nation and its identity. Many of these images represent the notions of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream, but the depictions do not simply mirror what Americanness is and means to the nation’s citizens—these images have created and continue to (re)create the American identity for global audiences too. Ultimately, in this process of cultural production, news photographs simultaneously frame and construct the nation’s myths and its *truth regime*.

Myth, according to French literary theorist Roland Barthes, is a form of speech or language—both visual and textual—that is made of materials that have previously been worked on one way or another. Barthes’ analysis of popular myths as embedded in media messages is an effective analytical approach to unmasking dominant cultural and political ideologies. He outlines his framework in his seminal volume *Mythologies* and is a valuable starting point in establishing the broader role of news photography in creating, perpetuating, or even annihilating myths in society. The myth of the American Dream, for example, is an idea or ideology

constructed by the nation's elites and a cultural product that has been tightly woven in the American nation's fabric and identity.

Barthes's work in *Mythologies* focused precisely on the notion that ideology and reality are distorted by socially/culturally constructed (visual and textual) sign systems. To him, these *myths* manifest in the form of language, including that of photographs, and its "utterer's" manner of expression, and they help a given culture to create a meaning of the world in and around it. For Barthes, cultural products, such as news photographs, carry meanings that are conditioned by ideology therefore anything can be a myth if it is appropriated by society. *Myth* is historically produced and always evolving as it reflects power and ideology and is conveyed by the discourse at a given moment in time. "Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no "substantial" ones," he wrote.³¹

One such myth is the myth of the American Dream. American writer James Truslow Adams formally introduced the American Dream and described it in his 1931 book titled *The Epic of America* as allowing life to be "better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."³²

The American dream that has lured tens of millions of all nations to our shores in the past century has not been a dream of merely material plenty, though that has doubtlessly counted heavily. It has been much more than that. It has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in the older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class.³³

Scholars have argued that the myth of the American Dream had existed before the American nation even became one. Cultural scholar Lawrence R. Samuel, for example, suggested the Dream had originated with seventeenth-century Puritanical notions of America as “the city on a hill,” and a century later, it was formally articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.³⁴ In his view, the American Dream is about the American experience, about freedom, about hard work leading to wealth and success, about the sacredness of family and home, and most of all, about “our perverse fascination with ‘hope’ and ‘change,’ and the belief that ‘anything is possible.’”³⁵ Photographs produced by two news photo agencies set a century apart illuminate how these American values embedded in the Dream have been represented over time.

Newspaper illustrations and later, photographs, have depicted all these features of the American character for centuries now. As art historian Andreas Blühm had suggested, photography helped Europeans to get to know America. He also pointed to an important trait in photography—the closer the camera is to its subject, the harder it is to generalize attitudes and their origins. Convictions that characterize the American “turn of mind,” such as a “pioneering spirit, self-confidence, a desire for liberty, individualism, sometimes even brutality, arrogance and ignorance—or all of them at once,” are made visible in photographs of the nation.³⁶

While American political leaders have attempted to reinforce the ideals of the Dream through various diplomatic efforts, the daily news and photography helped to introduce and strengthen the notion of the Dream in the nation’s people. Moreover, as news and images began to move readily across national borders in the early 1900s, the United States gained the ability to display its values and strengths to many other around the world, propelling a desire in national leaders and common people to achieve America’s worldwide prestige.

Historians have often explored the American nation's political, ideological, and material progress, but, as philosophy scholar Frederick Sontag suggested, "you can understand neither America's past nor its present without comprehending the religious origins of the dreams that have animated our spirit."³⁷ In his view, American missionary efforts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were all part of the America's dream to create a new and ideal civilization. "'The nation emerged as the primary agent of God's meaningful activity in history.' Many fled to our shores seeking haven. Even if they came for economic benefit or political freedom from oppression, they often stayed on to be caught up in the vision of America's religious mission to build a great society," Sontag claimed.³⁸

Sontag further argued that the main themes in the American Dream stem from its religious sense of mission, an abundant land, a noble hero, and a favoring Providence. "As they arrived, the new Americans hardly thought of themselves as 'Americans.' America began as the great frontier of Western Christendom, not as a nation on its own. Nationalism arose only when the achievement of the dream seemed to fail and we had to locate outside hindrances which we could blame," Sontag noted.³⁹

Historian Ian Tyrrell also suggested that transnational religious work has contributed greatly to the global expansion of America and American ideology. In Tyrrell's view, the work of moral or religious reformers contributed to the growth of America's "external footprint" and the all-around expansion of translational networks (i.e. globalization). The building and sustaining of these networks that circumvented the globe between 1880 and the 1920s, demonstrates the efforts involved in the showcasing of America's exceptionalism. While Tyrrell consciously avoids terminology such as "cultural imperialism," "soft power," and "cultural

hegemony,” his scholarship on the transnational influences of America’s morality and religious “workers,” is a valuable contribution to the dialogue on the spread of the Dream ideology.⁴⁰

As these and other accounts suggest, the American Dream has been and to some extent still is a way of life. It is closely tied to nationalism, patriotism, exceptionalism, and power. In fact, these notions are embedded in and inseparable from the Dream. In the words of early twentieth-century political philosopher, journalist, and co-founder of *The New Republic* magazine, Herbert David Croly, “the faith of Americans in their own country is religious, if not in its intensity, at any rate in almost absolute and universal authority. It pervades the air we breathe.”⁴¹ Published in 1909, Croly’s *The Promise of American Life* proposed that Americans “had to overcome their Jeffersonian heritage, with its emphasis on minimal government, decentralized authority, and the sanctity of individual freedom, in order to deal with the unprecedented problems of an urban and industrial age.”⁴² For Croly, the only meaningful “national promise” for an individual or a nation is a promise that is determined by an ideal, such as the American Dream.⁴³

A connection between nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream can also be found in Croly’s words on some of the privileges and ideals found in the American nation. “The American economic, political, and social organization has given to its citizens the benefits of material prosperity, political liberty, and a wholesome natural equality; and this achievement is a gain, not only to Americans, but to the world and to civilization” he noted.⁴⁴

At the turn of the twentieth century the American Dream was a powerful cultural export and an inspiration for millions around the world. How are the American nation and American Dream currently represented? How may have everyday news photographs helped change a view about the nation and its people? To help address these questions, Bain’s and VII’s news

photographs are examined as Barthesian mythological devices used to define the American nation and dream. High rises, bustling streets, modern men, industrialism, monumental landscapes, the land of liberty, opportunity, and material success have frequented media portrayals of the United States around the world. Many of these examples are featured in Bain's images, including an image of the iconic Dreamland amusement park on Coney Island, New York (see Images 10 and 11).

To describe the way the American promise and the American Dream were promoted in more contemporary terms, historian Emily S. Rosenberg coined the phrase *liberal-developmentalism*. In her volume *Spreading the American Dream*, she broke down the ideology of liberal-developmentalism into five elements, all connected to nationalism, exceptionalism, and power, and all of which represent the American nation's worldwide prestige. The elements of liberal-developmentalism, according to Rosenberg, are:

1. belief that other nations could and should replicate America's own development experience
2. faith in private and free enterprise
3. support for free or open access for trade and investment
4. promotion of free flow of information and culture
5. growing acceptance of governmental activity to protect private enterprise and to stimulate and regulate American participation in international economic and cultural exchange

“To many Americans, their country’s economic and social history became a universal model,” she wrote.⁴⁵ Essentially, Rosenberg suggested that America’s exceptionalism and world power were supported by the nation’s ideological goal for globalization under the American leadership.



Image 10: On 5th Avenue, Easter. Bain News Service. Between 1908 and 1920. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 11: Dreamland, Coney Island, New York City. Bain News Service. Between 1908 and 1915. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

Since the colonial era, the American Dream has been defined in various ways, but the Dream’s overall ideological meaning is in synchronicity among American Dream accounts. Generally, these interpretations suggest the United States is a “magic environment or society that has the power to transform people’s lives, the idea that the United States is not merely a new world, but a different kind of world, a unique place where limitations, boundaries, and inequities” do not exist. American Studies scholar James Guimond referred to this belief as “exceptionalism,” or the assumption that the American nation is unlike any other and will never be like any other.⁴⁶

3.3. Photography, Exceptionalism, and Nationalism

Just like the American Dream, many in the Western world, not just Americans, have shared the concept of American exceptionalism. According to American historian Daniel T. Rodgers, exceptionalism differs from difference. “Difference requires contrast; exceptionalism requires rule. Difference claims feed on polarities and diversity; exceptionalism claims pin one’s own nation’s distinctiveness to every other people’s sameness—to general laws and conditions governing everything, but the special case at hand.”⁴⁷

While historically a certain degree of discontent with the United States has been expressed in journalism, politics, and even literature, exceptionalism has undoubtedly been a guiding symbol and a dominant ideological paradigm found in US history and in various forms and discourses of the American nation’s self-representation. “Cultivation of sentiments of difference and superiority has been, from the early modern era to the postcolonial present, at the heart of the project of nation-state formation,” Rodgers noted.⁴⁸ American exceptionalism, as predominately expressed by the nation’s elites, is not only about *what* is being represented (historical figures, incidents, interactions, achievements) but also about *how* American matters are depicted, or the politics of representation (Hall).⁴⁹

Expanding on Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 thesis of *The Frontier in American History*, political scientist Charles Murray claimed foreign observers were among the first who began describing the United States and Americans as being unlike any other countries and people.⁵⁰ Emphasizing the importance of the frontier in shaping the American character, Murray noted that the early notions of exceptionalism rested greatly on America’s geographic setting. In time, however, what truly helped define American exceptionalism were the American ideology, the traits of the American people, and the operation of the American political system.⁵¹

The discourse of the term “exceptionalism” is best characterized by the account of the United States’ unique place in world history as a “redeemer nation,” a “conqueror of the world’s markets,” and a “global security state,” cultural critic Donald E. Pease pointed out. “But this discourse drew its structure out of its difference from the historical trajectories that it attributed to Europe, the Soviet Union, and the Third World,” Pease wrote. “The exceptionalist paradigm represented US uniqueness in terms of absent and present elements—the absence of feudal hierarchies, class conflicts, a socialist labor party, trade unionism, and divisive ideological passions; the presence of a predominant middle class, tolerance for diversity, upward mobility, hospitality toward immigrants, a shared constitutional faith, and liberal individualism,” he noted.⁵²

In the words of political scientist Paul R. Viotti, exceptionalism is “a highly subjective national self-image,” including the belief that the US is “the model republic for the rest of the world to emulate.”⁵³ The sense of uniqueness and superiority of the United States are a fundamental part of the nation’s identity. At the turn of the twentieth century, America was still growing, and its people searched for a national identity and a place in the world. The visual depictions and reiterations of the exceptionalist character of the nation in the press were an effective way to do so. The need for “seeing” the greatness of America was recognized by many at the time and it is also exemplified in “The Greatest Nation on Earth,” an essay by William George Jordan featured in *The Ladies Home Journal* in 1897.

Few Americans fully realize how great their country is: how magnificent in territory; how wondrously blessed in natural advantages; how varied and great its products; how marvelous its progress; and how firm and certain its position among the great powers on the earth. The intensity of the figures in the statistic tables mean little to us because we have no basis for

comparison. It is only by testing them in relation to other nations, comparing them, and by graphic illustration, that we can comprehend them and see the nation in its true condition.⁵⁴

Calling the United States “the wealthiest nation of the world,” “the centre of gravity” of the world, and the unmatched progressive nation in history, Jordan implied that America and its power serve to balance the rest of the globe. “Thousands may drop by the wayside; political discord, and human weakness, and sin and error may seem to dim our prosperity; but still the great Republic moves ever on to higher planes of acquisition and conquest—material, mental, and spiritual.”⁵⁵

Historically, American exceptionalism has indeed been rooted in geography, resources, economic opportunity, progress, equality, individualism, and liberty, and it has often been so represented in news photographs at home and abroad. Some of Bain’s photographs, for example, contain depictions of the progressivism and power of the American nation, including the nation’s military strength, industrialization, and modernization (see Images 12, 13, 14). The United States has needed both to convince the entire world and its own people of its power, and media aimed abroad have been among the tools used to convey the nation’s strength and exceptional character.

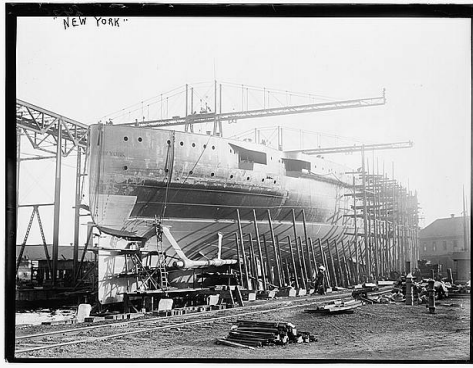


Image 12: USS New York. Bain News Service. October 30, 1912. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

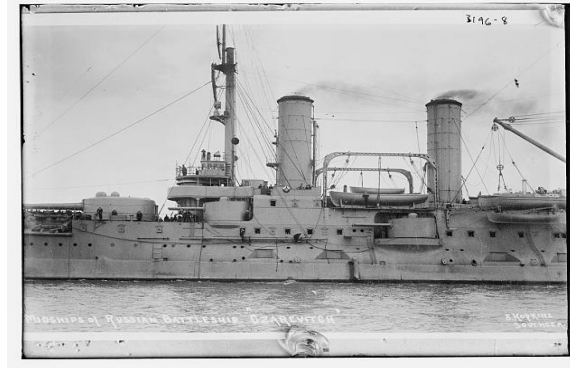


Image 13: Olympia [Ship]. Bain News Service. ca.1915-1920. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 14: New York from Tower of Brooklyn Bridge. Bain News Service. Between 1907 and 1915. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

Just like exceptionalism, nationalism has often been associated with geography and resources. Historian Benedict Anderson, who convincingly proposed the notion of “imagined communities,” or the sense of belonging to a nation, however, has argued that such belonging and nationhood are powered and sustained by spoken or printed language.⁵⁶ As printing gained an industrial strength in the nineteenth century when the hand-operated Gutenberg press was replaced by a steam-powered one, the media became central to the informational and ideological

exchanges within and between nations. The popularization of the press and the greater reach of publishing helped individuals learn about fellow community members by reading with and about them and imagining them.⁵⁷ The press played a critical role in the transcending of borders, challenging political and religious powers, and fostering a new sense of nationhood.

In Anderson's view, then, 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 a community.⁵⁸

In accord with Anderson, German social theorist Jürgen Habermas has argued that communication technologies changed the way people exchange ideas and opinions, and how they come together to debate matters of political or societal interest. According to Habermas, mass media allow for the voices of intellectuals and the elite to dominate the social discourse. The downside, however, is the lack of a true dialogue with the audience. "Mass communication divides the public sphere into a minority of experts and journalists who keep the conversation going, and a silently observing majority," Habermas noted.⁵⁹ "The shift in function of the principle of publicity is based on a shift in function of the public sphere as a special realm. This shift can be clearly documented with regard to the transformation of the public sphere's preeminent institution, the press."⁶⁰

Photographic technologies, as an emerging force in mass communication, were no exception. With Bain's agency at the forefront, the news photo agency not only provided a visual record of the world and its people, but it also placed the United States, for both foreigners and nationals, in a global context. In doing so, the news photo agency, as an Ideological State

Apparatus, provided the cultural products that introduced, at least visually, the American nation on the global public sphere, while further extending Anderson's notion of an "imagined community" to a globally visualized one.

Both nationalism and exceptionalism, as many other social constructs, change their meaning based on historical circumstances and dominant ideologies. In "What Makes an American," an essay on what it feels like to belong to the American nation, published in *The Atlantic*'s March of 1939 issue, French journalist Raoul de Roussy de Sales claimed that "to define precisely what nationalism means to each individual would fill a volume."

A Frenchman once said that nationalism is a certain number of illusions shared by a group of men and women concerning their origin, combined with a common hatred for any other group of men and women sharing another set of illusions. To most people, however, it is something much more noble than that because it represents an extension of the natural love of man for the country where he was born. It implies devotion, duties, and sacrifices under the general assumption that there is some sort of sacred link between each man and a definite spot on the planet.⁶¹

Political science scholar Bart Bonikowski has pointed that the United States is one of the first nation-states in the world primarily founded on civic ideals rather than homogenous heritage. "Throughout American history, the state has repeatedly employed nationalist discourse to galvanize its citizenry in times of economic crisis, military struggle, or national mourning, as well as during more mundane occasions, like electoral campaigns or national holidays," Bonikowski noted. "From presidential speeches and commemorative rites to public debates about the justness of particular policies, issues of national destiny and good citizenship have never been far from the center of public attention."⁶²

While Bonikowski acknowledged that the term is often viewed in accordance with exclusionary tendencies such as xenophobia, nativism, chauvinism, or out-group hostility, by and large, nationalism should be assumed as

the self-understanding of individuals and groups framed in terms of their membership in a broader collectivity coterminous with the territorial, social, and legal boundaries of an actual or potential nation-state. This self-understanding is produced through the interaction of individual cognitive schemata, shared cultural understandings contained in various forms of public discourse, and institutional rules and conventions...The widespread identification with and loyalty toward the nation has been the result of a historical process of nation-state development, understood both as a conscious project of nationalist elites and an emergent consequence of economic and political transformations constitutive of modernity.⁶³

Furthermore, according to leading nationalism scholar Anthony D. Smith, the meaning of nationalism is developed through

1. a process of formation, or growth, of nations;
2. a sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation;
3. a language and symbolism of the nation;
4. a social and political movement on behalf of the nation;
5. an ideology of the nation.⁶⁴

Smith, whose views of nationalism align closely with those of Bonikowski, further proposed a working definition of nationalism that embody these varied meanings; “An ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation.’”⁶⁵ Smith further noted

that “the nation’s culture demands public expression and gives birth to political symbolism...The nation is therefore characterized by a ‘political culture,’ with its distinct political roles and institutions and its unique symbols—flags, anthems, festivals, ceremonies and the like,”⁶⁶ United States, among other countries around the world, displays its national flag frequently and prominently and this is well represented in news photography.

News images from Bain’s archive, featured in Chapter 5, show the uniting of people under the American flag and suggest the existence of a strong national spirit and value system, regardless of gender, race, class, and ethnicity. Such depictions were strategic, as news photography at the turn of the twentieth century had joined the mass communication infrastructure of the nation. At the time, governments often combined both “objective” historical experience and myths to form a “package” that meets the current needs of the state. “The importance of myths of the past for power relations is, then, clear,” political scientist, John Coakley, pointed out. Brokers of power possess the capacity to shape the ideological perspective of those whom they seek to lead.⁶⁷

Mediated content serves to shape political and social discourses with the help of free-flowing information that can readily mobilize ideas and ideologies of nationalism, exceptionalism, and power that are in support of the state. Thus, the printed words and news photographs “packaged” myths of nation-states in ways suitable for those in charge. Social media and citizen-driven media content, however, have complicated these efforts. By looking at the ways in which photographic intra- and inter- cultural dialogues have expanded into multiple cross-cultural channels, subsequent chapters serve to illuminate the ways in which such exchanges help establish or challenge myths about the American nation. The present analysis

contributes to scholarship by illustrating how news photographs and visual technologies can produce, sustain, destroy both myths and culture, and to (re)construct reality.

With the proliferation of Internet and digital technologies, the twenty-first century world has witnessed a rapid intensification of cultural destruction and production, of reimagining of communities, of reinvention of myths and realities. As Daniel Rubinstein put it, “within this absorbing ‘always on’ and ‘everywhere at the same time’ anamateriality³ [today], the world does not come before the image, nor is it produced by the image. Rather, photography is the visual figuration of a new layer of consciousness—in which new relationships to space and time, and therefore new categories of thought, play, art, and agency are emerging.”⁶⁸

Endnotes

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Chapter 4: Those Who Photograph Americanness

4.1. Agencies and Archives

This dissertation already took a close look at the historical developments of news photography and the news photo agency as a business and an institution. More specifically, it focused on Bain News Service and VII and their structures, practices, technologies, and techniques. As business entities and gatekeepers of visual information, both agencies were producing and selling photographs that served the needs of publishers and their audiences. In both cases, they were proactive in identifying what they thought news outlets were interested in, but were very much businesses and acted as such to support their own interests.

Chapters 5 and 6 in this dissertation analyze the photographic archives of Bain News Service and VII and in so doing illuminate the way the American “character” and the “nation” represented their two distinct periods of time—the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries respectively. The photographic examples included represent a sample of the agencies’ images and some of the dominant subjects they worked with.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyze the images disseminated by Bain News Service and the VII agency—an analysis that is grounded in the following: 1) what social reality is being constructed; 2) how are the photographs used to portray that social reality; and 3) what or whose ideologies are being represented. Note that this dissertation is interested in the broader themes the agencies engaged with, therefore the analysis does not consider aesthetics of the technical composition of the images, including such concerns as positionality of the subject, depth of field, lighting, etc. This study focused on the archives because it was interested in what photographs were taken by the agencies, as gatekeepers of visual information, rather than what was published in the press.

The Library of Congress purchased Bain's collection in 1948. The description of the collection states:

Available online are 39,744 glass negatives and a selection of about 1,600 photographic prints for which copy negatives exist. This represents all of the glass plate negatives the Library holds and a small proportion of the 50,000 photographic prints in the collection. The Library purchased the collection in 1948 from D. J. Culver. (Bain also deposited photographs for copyright during his career; photographs clearly acquired by the Library of Congress through copyright deposit are generally considered outside the scope of the George Grantham Bain Collection.).¹

Most of the photographs and negatives date from the 1900s to the 1930s, but some early images date back to the 1860s. The collection includes a wide variety of subjects such as immigration, street life, police matters, sports events, theater, celebrities, crime, strikes, disasters, politics, conventions, public celebrations, and more. The Bain photographs have little description and most of the glass negatives are presented primarily with the information that came with them. The headings are standardized, used by Prints & Photographs Division catalogers taken from the Thesaurus of Graphic Materials. As noted in the collection

In an effort to make digital images of this large body of materials available as quickly as possible, most of the glass negatives are presented primarily with the information that came with them. The Bain News Service provided some information on the glass negatives and on caption cards. While entering the data, no attempt was made to standardize names, spell out abbreviations, or to research the image. Additional descriptive information and subject terms will be added to the records as more resources are available. Corrections to miscaptioned and misdated photos are generally made as they are reported.²

The Library of Congress' Bain collection allowed for search by subject, by format, and by creator. Due to the fact that at the time of writing the search could not be narrowed further down by year and location, the featured photographs were selected from the first page of the search results and were examined within the context of the political, cultural, and societal climates at the time of their production and consumption. The photographs were downloaded in April 2022 and warrant a word of caution—due to digitalization, the same archives' pages may differ in the future.

The photographs Bain produced and distributed through his news service were worldwide in their coverage, but they focused on New York City.³ Out of the more than 2000-subject categories listed in the Library of Congress' Bain Collection, approximately 500 categories feature international type news images involving foreign dignitaries, immigrants, cities, and countries. Bain's photographs offered visual information not only about the United States, but also about the world and the people living in it at the turn of the twentieth century.

Bain also focused on sports, entertainment, and human-interest stories, which were all topics that aligned with the changing journalistic values and audience demands of their time. Photographs of various political powers and industries from around the world also indicated that political, cultural, and economic ventures across national borders were being represented. Images of distant and exotic lands were no longer simply circulating in forms of *carte-de-visite*, but also in daily publications. Furthermore, and perhaps because of his close relations with American political figures, Bain displayed interest in foreign governments and state officials. As a consequence, the catalog of Bain's work in the Library of Congress features images of government-related people and places: royals, kings, emperors, shahs, palaces. Those photographs were typically published under "Bain News Service," "George Grantham Bain," "Bain-Photo" and "G. G. Bain." Such photographs appeared in prestigious newspapers such as

The New York Times, New-York Tribune, The New York Herald, The Sun (New York), Evening Star (Washington, DC), The Washington Times, Oregonian/Morning Oregonian, Dallas Morning News, Detroit Free Press, The Hartford Courant, St. Louis Post– Dispatch, Boston Daily Globe, and Chicago Daily Tribune.

As per the conventions of the day, the news outlets used Bain’s photographs to illustrate breaking and feature newspaper articles—but per usual, the contents of the images that accompanied stories did not always align with the focus of those articles and their headlines. Additionally, as the images were primarily included for illustrative purposes, newspaper photo captions also did not reliably align with the news stories (or even with the contents of the images themselves). Photo captions that appeared in the early twentieth-century newspapers were typically short and literal in their description, often only noting the names of the significant people pictured or even more briefly denoting only the news photo agency credit line.

In order to identify the original people, places, and events attached to the photos, this study pulled its images from the Library of Congress’s Bain archives because those archives include the original caption material that accompanied the photos that the Bain agency sent to its subscribers. That caption material is searchable on the LOC’s site.

VII agency’s archives from a century later, from 2001-2020, are housed on VII’s website. This dissertation mined the website that included VII’s photo archives of more than 100,000 photographs and its “storied” image catalog. This study also extensively drew from external to the archives information and oral interviews with VII’s founders and/or photographers.⁴ The images featured in this dissertation represent themes VII prioritized during the first two decades of the twentieth-first century, but it is to be expected that those foci will change over time as the photographers of the agency change.

To determine the dominant subjects photographed by VII's photographers in the first two decades of the century, this dissertation examined VII's archival collection following the methodology used to evaluate the photographs taken by Bain News Service. In both cases, this evaluation determined what the agencies believed was newsworthy, and as a function of the success of both agencies, could extrapolate what publishers and audiences alike would find of interest. In comparison to the Library of Congress's archive of Bain's catalog, VII's archive could be searched with more filters, e.g. the option to search by date and location. The longer, more descriptive photo captions found in VII's archives, also allowed for captions to be searched. But because VII's captions were longer and more descriptive in comparison to Bain's short and literal ones, VII's archive could be examined in greater detail.

The sample images that appear in this dissertation were pulled from the archive after a 5-year date delimited search was undertaken (2000-2005, 2006-2010, 2011-2015, 2016- 2020) and then further filtered by location (United States). The photos that are reproduced in this dissertation were selected from the first page of each of the search results. (The photographs were selected in May 2022 and warrant a word of caution—due to digitalization, the same archives' pages may differ in the future). The photos reproduced in these pages are used for illustrative purposes; they represent a sample of the subjects VII worked with, but are certainly not exhaustive of these subjects.

This dissertation examined VII's images—like those of Bain's— through the lenses of the political cultural, and societal climates at the time of their production and consumption. The VII website offers visitors more than 100,000 digitized images to look through. However, that vast archive, albeit recent, is not complete. Unlike in Bain's time, VII's images are owned by the photographers who took them, not by the agency. When VII's photographers depart the agency, their images are no longer part of VII's archive. That fact meant that this dissertation's search in

VII's archives was circumscribed by the current roster of photographers of the agency. This also resulted in an additional limitation to this dissertation's search of VII's archives: this dissertation could not in most cases determine which publications published VII's images. And if that information was available in some cases, the study was rarely able to determine how that photograph, or set of photographs, appeared when published. Therefore, as in the case with Bain, this dissertation studied VII's agency view of the American Dream and its corollaries. Through a deep investigation of its archive, this dissertation determined what VII photographers (and collectively the VII agency) believed were the most salient stories to cover in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, and what were the most critical frames of those stories.

Like its investigation of the Bain archive, this dissertation conducted numerous searches of the images' photo captions. While VII's captions are longer than Bain's from 100 years previously, VII's captions do not necessarily correspond to the literal content of their individual images. Most images in VII's archives have lengthy captions with commentary on the context in which the images were taken—they often serve to reveal the “mood” of the time or “tell” the image subject's personal story.

Another difference between Bain and VII is that the modern agency, while run as a business, is run by photographers who are committed to social justice. A core agenda of VII is to encourage news publishers to feature both straight news (disasters, elections, crime, etc.) and human interest stories. Forthcoming chapters therefore discuss several of VII's documentary projects: *Newest Americans* and *Lost Rolls America*.⁵ If Bain News Service undertook any similar documentary projects, they have not been identified.

Please note: VII's images included in this academic work are screenshots of photographs as this was the only format permitted by the VII agency's staff; the VII agency required high copyright fees for reproduction of its original images.

4.2. Images and Image Categories

To assess how Bain News Service and VII represented Americanness, the subsequent two chapters comment on the content of these agencies' photographs, describing the context of the agencies' production of their images, and explaining how their photographs constructed and represented both the contemporary social reality and the ideology of their times — “ideology” defined here as those shared beliefs and values diffused throughout society by images, myths, ideas, and concepts.

This dissertation's commentary focuses especially on how the era's political rhetoric is inscribed in the photographs. The commentary highlights each era's *power relations*, bearing in mind Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye's observation that “political leaders commonly define power as the possession of resources. These resources include population, territory, natural resources, economic size, military forces, and political stability, among others.”⁶ This dissertation takes note of American power relations and “resources” in the first two decades after the turn of the twentieth century and the turn of the twenty-first century; it does so by its selection of the image categories it uses to analyze Bain's and VII's photographs. These “categories” highlight how Bain's and VII's images reacted to their era's political rhetoric referencing American exceptionalism and nationalism, and their era's interpretation of the American Dream.

The categories were loosely adopted from *The Photograph and the American Dream*, art curator Stephen White's book on photography of the United States between 1840 and 1940. White noted that “The half-tone printing process, making it easy to print pictures with text, allowed photography to participate in the selling of the Dream, ads filled the pages of magazines, newspapers, and catalogues.”⁷ The book became more resonant because of a coincidence in time— it was a photographic compilation from White's private gallery

collection exhibited in Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum in September, 2001, shortly after 9/11. Following the moment when the United States and all that it symbolized was under attack by terrorists, Americans and the rest of the world considered what had made the country so exceptional. To answer that question, White divided his book into sections that he believed represented the American Dream:

1. The American Identities
2. All Men are Created Equal
3. Men to Match My Mountains
4. Manufacturing the Dream
5. New Frontiers
6. The City Rises.

In this dissertation's analysis of the Bain and VII archives it became clear that the categories of images the agencies frequently featured — photos of the land, the city, and businesses—were in short, categories very similar to those created by Stephen White (see Tables 1-5). In the case of early twentieth century's Bain News Service, it was a sign of its "progressive" times that photographs of urbanizing America and its business and industry were of great interest, while photographs in VII's archives of similar subjects were equally perhaps a sign of the turmoil of the early twenty-first century. The rallying images of patriotism in the post-9/11 era, and then the similar patriot images of flag and country became the markers of partisan fault lines.

To stay viable, both news photo agencies had to be responsive to their subscribers. Photo agencies, then and now, need to respond to the demands of publishers and audiences. Yet, it is also accurate to say that the photo archives of Bain and VII also showcase what the news photo

agencies themselves found to be worthy of photographing. Both agencies played gatekeeping roles: the economic and socio-political decisions both Bain News Service and VII made colored their photographic choices. Indeed, the two agencies' archives capture that duality: news photo agency images may be facilely understood by audiences as simple illustrations of people, places and events, but in the double-choices behind their appearance in the news—the choice of a photographer to take “that image” in “that way” and the choice of an editor to publish “that image” with “that story” —one can read the signals of ideological messages.

Table 1. The American Identity: Number and percentage of photographs featured in the Library of Congress' Bain Collection and VII Photo's archives according to individual search terms.

Image Category: The American Identity	Bain News Service (1900-1920) 40,000 photographs		VII (2001-2020) 100,000 photographs	
Search Terms	% of all photographs	# of photographs	% of all photographs	# of photographs
Immigrants	1%	49	4%	155
People		256		3,475
Family		279		369

The American identity, or the immigrants, individuals, and families who, starting in the early twentieth century, came to the United States in search for a better life, and who helped build the nation's character through hard work and dedication. The study of immigrant representations in the news is important because immigrants were considered the building blocks of the nation. They were the ones who were influenced by tales and communications about the opportunities available to them on American soil. The image search terms in this category included “immigrant(s),” “people,” “family.”

Bain News Service’s archive contained 49 images categorized as “immigrant(s),” 256 images of “people,” and 279 images of “family.” The photographs of immigrants displayed groups of foreigners arriving in the United States and immigrant life in the country. The images of people displayed both foreign and domestic entities with domestic being the majority. The images of families were mostly of foreign entities such as royals, czars, emperors. Many of the images were portraits—a photographic genre characteristic of the early twentieth century.

VII’s archive contained 820 images of “immigrants” of which only 155 featured immigrants in the United States. There were also 18,862 images of “people” globally, out of which 3,475 were in the United States, and 9,780 images of “family” of which only 369 were in the United States. Many of the photographs displayed close-ups of people and told individual stories about their lives and livelihoods.

Table 2. The American Land: Number and percentage of photographs featured in the Library of Congress’ Bain Collection and VII Photo’s archives according to individual search terms.

Image Category: The American Land	Bain News Service (1900-1920) 40,000 photographs		VII (2001-2020) 100,000 photographs	
Search Terms	% of all photographs	# of photographs	% of all photographs	# of photographs
Mountain	2.5%	34	1%	111
Park (National)		620		49
River		188		522
Lake		70		185
Beach		100		472

The American land, or the photographs that capture the magnificence of the country and its natural resources, to help build on Frederick Jackson Turners' idea about the country's exceptionalism. The image search terms included "mountain," "park (national)," "river," "lake," and "beach."

Bain News Service's archive contained 34 images categorized as "mountain," 620 images categorized as "park (national)," 188 images categorized as "river," 70 images categorized as "lake," and 100 images categorized as "beach." The search terms revealed a mixture of foreign and domestic subjects, with domestic being the majority. Many of the photographs depicted tourist destination, natural resources, and engineering wonders, such as the building of ships and dams—highlighting not only the magnificence of the American land, but the progressive nature of the United States.

VII's archive contained 1,659 images categorized as "mountain," of which 111 were in the United States, 523 images categorized as "national park," of which 49 images were in the United States, 2,833 images categorized as "river," of which 522 were in the United States, 1,053 images categorized as "lake," of which 185 were in the United States, and 1,635 images categorized as "beach," of which 472 were in the United States. The search in VII's archive also utilized the term "environment"—a more modern look at the "land"—yet one in line with conservation and preservation activities found in the twentieth century. This search term yielded 908 images shot in the United States, most of which featured nature and environmental distress, modern sustainability and safety practices, as well as pollution/chemical hazards and their detrimental effects on Americans.

Table 3. The American City: Number and percentage of photographs featured in the Library of Congress’ Bain Collection and VII Photo’s archives according to individual search terms.

Image Category: The American City	Bain News Service (1900-1920) 40,000 photographs		VII (2001-2020) 100,000 photographs	
Search Terms	% of all photographs	# of photographs	% of all photographs	# of photographs
City	9%	2,671	8%	5,705
Street		670		2,406
Bridge		143		172
Skyline		4		40

The American city, or photographs of “the great cities that united the country and gave it power and focus.”⁸ America’s progressive nature could undoubtedly be seen most effectively in the rapid growth of the city and urbanization at large. Architectural shapes have been staples in establishing the economic and industrial powers of the United States, and often, symbolic of the American Dream as well. The image search terms in this category included “city,” “street,” “bridge,” and “skyline.”

Bain News Service’s archive contained 2671 images categorized as “city,” 670 images categorized as “street,” 143 images categorized as “bridge,” and 4 images categorized as “skyline.” All search terms yielded a mixture of foreign and domestic subjects, with domestic being the majority. Urbanization and architectural wonders appeared as the more frequently photographed topics.

VII’s archive featured 15,443 images categorized as “city,” of which 5,705 were in the United States; 7,833 images of “street,” with 2,406 being in the United States; 886 “bridge,” with only 172 being in the United States; 246 images categorized as “skyline,” of which 40 were in

the United States. Many of these images denoted economic or social inequalities and depicted the lives and experiences of individuals in the city.

Table 4. The American Business and Industry: Number and percentage of photographs featured in the Library of Congress’ Bain Collection and VII Photo’s archives according to individual search terms.

Image Category: The American Business and Industry	Bain News Service (1900-1920) 40,000 photographs		VII (2001-2020) 100,000 photographs	
Search Terms	% of all photographs	# of photographs	% of all photographs	# of photographs
Ship	4%	821	3%	145
Airplane		352		200
Automobile		218		297
Railroad		175		82
Industry		41		806
Factory		34		294
Business		43		1,406

The American business and industry, or the national industrial growth and progress beyond what other nations had achieved at the time. News photographs highlighting the nation’s industrial achievements, expanded transportation, and available land for foreigners further helped perpetuate the myth of the American Dream. The image search terms in this category included “ship,” “airplane,” “automobile,” “railroad,” “industry,” “factory,” and “business.”

Bain News Service’s archive contained 821 images categorized as “ship,” 352 images categorized as “airplane,” 218 images categorized as “automobile,” 175 images categorized as “railroad,” 41 images categorized as “industry,” 34 images categorized as “factory,” and 43

images categorized as “business.” All search terms generated a mixture of foreign and domestic subjects, with domestic being the majority. Many of the photographs depicted industrial progress and engineering wonders.

VII’s archive featured 937 photographs of “ship,” with 145 images from the United States; 547 photographs of “airplane,” with 200 of them being in the United States; 486 photographs of “automobile,” with 297 being in the United States; 165 images of “railroad,” with 82 in the United States; 2,985 photographs of “industry,” with 806 from the United States; 1,178 images of “factory,” with 294 from the United States; 3,588 images featuring “business,” with 1,406 from the United States. Many of the photographs depicted depreciated cities, failing industries, and environmental hazards.

Table 5. American Nationalism and Exceptionalism: Number and percentage of photographs featured in the Library of Congress’ Bain Collection and VII Photo’s archives according to individual search terms.

Image Category: American Nationalism and Exceptionalism	Bain News Service (1900-1920) 40,000 photographs		VII (2001-2020) 100,000 photographs	
Search Terms	% of all photographs	# of photographs	% of all photographs	# of photographs
America	15%	4,608	19%	16,061
American Flag		44		781
Parade		558		545
National		629		1,736

American nationalism and exceptionalism, or the character of the American nation in terms of its unity, progress, and diversity. The image search terms in this category focused on national symbols and included: “America,” “American flag,” “parade,” and “national,” as these terms can help delve deeper into the state of the collective American identity.

Bain News Service’s archive contained 4608 images categorized as “America,” 44 images categorized as “American flag,” 558 images categorized as “parade,” and 629 images categorized as “national.” All search terms, except the ones containing the words “America” or “American,” featured an equal mixture of foreign and domestic subjects. Photographs of the American flag were often captured during parades and/or national celebrations.

VII’s archive displayed 16,061 under the category of “America” for the United States only, 824 images of “American flag” with 781 of them being in the United States; 925 images of “parade,” of which 545 were taken in the United States; and 7,633 images of “national,” with 1,736 featuring subjects within the United States. The American flag was often featured in photographs documenting times of protests, turmoil, and/or war.

Endnotes

¹ Bain Collection, *Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ VII, accessed February 23, 2018, at <viipphoto.com>.

⁵ VII, Newest Americans, <newestamericans.com>; VII, Lost Rolls America, <lostrollsamerica.com>.

⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 26.

⁷ Stephen White, *The Photograph and the American Dream, 1840-1940* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2001), 30.

⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 5: Bain News Service and Representation in “The American Century”

Following the successful sales of Admiral Dewey’s voyage pictures from 1898, including a photograph of the Admiral sold to *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* for the record-price of \$100, Bain’s photographic reach expanded in size and scope. The increase of photographic output and reproduction speed were critical to the success of Bain’s business and he continued building up an extensive catalog of people, events, and places around the world. Under the name of “George G. Bain,” “Bain Photo” or “Bain News Service,” Bain News Service sold news photographs to book publishers and magazine and newspaper editors throughout the United States and the world.

While Bain collected most of his images with the help of his staff, when it came to international photographic subjects, he was often contacted directly by elites and royals from around the world who craved publicity. The *Oregonian*, for example, frequently featured full-page photo spreads of prominent people and happenings at home and abroad. In its February 28, 1909 issue, the newspaper included a page depicting the Queen of Romania. The two images included were titled “Queen of Roumania Takes Great Interest in Her ‘City of the Blind,’ and in the caption, the newspaper noted, “these pictures of the Queen of Roumania in her socialist blind colony, near Bucharest, were sent to the Bain News Service by the Queen herself.”¹ In another issue from May 9, 1909, the *Oregonian* featured a “Group of Women Prominent at Home and Abroad.” The photo spread included a photograph of Alexander Roediger (or Rödiger), a Russo-German General, and his wife and according to the newspaper, the photograph was given directly to Bain News Service for distribution by the general himself.²

These high-ranking individuals sought to gain access to the American press and publicize their countries and peoples in the most celebratory fashion, further suggesting that the news media and the news photo agencies in their early days functioned as centralized or national journalistic institutions as well as venues for public relations—and consequently, one could argue that they embodied Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses or entities that serve to disseminate the ideology of the elites.

In addition to foreign dignitaries, Bain worked closely with other photo services, spreading visual news in an impressively rapid manner. For example, as Little had noted, “by arrangement with a London photographic firm, the photos of the coronation of England’s Edward VII [in 1902] reached Bain News Service three days before anyone else had them for release.”³ The world’s interest in all things American was growing too. As the news service expanded in scope, editors worldwide called on Bain to provide shots of landscapes and landmarks. “He was happy to oblige, and directed his photographers to augment their assignments with feature shots that could be combined with text and sold as special packages, further broadening the appeal of the agency,” Carlebach wrote.⁴

Naming Bain “a pioneer of current event illustration in the United States,” a 1911 article in *The Sunday Oregonian* stated that Bain, who had for many years engaged only in news reporting on political topics, found it obligatory to obtain news photographs. “These were not easy to secure because news photography was in its infancy and there was no organized agency through which pictures could be obtained,” the article stated.⁵ Simply put, the daily press demanded a service such as Bain’s that could offer a collection of photographs “covering the news activities of the world—portraits of public men, views of great cities, illustrations of

foreign armies and navies,” enabling him to “illustrate on a moment’s notice almost any current event of great importance.”⁶

Bain’s catalog, available at the digital archives of the Library of Congress, consists of over 40,000 photographs grouped in more than 2000 subject categories. Outside of breaking news and stock photos of “evergreen” places and events from around the world, Bain covered entertainment and human-interest stories. The abundance of photographs featuring foreign leaders and business elites also indicates that interest in political and economic powers across national borders was growing in the first decades of the twentieth century. From portraits of royalties, immigrants, and common folk to scenes of cities, aerial shots, and landscapes, Bain’s photographic catalog offered a wealth of national and global visual information.⁷

Bain’s news photographs featured depictions of the massive economic growth and expansion of the young American nation and were characteristic of the illustrated press of the early twentieth century. At the time, picturing the rest of the world in photography did not just involve the documenting of exotic lands. There was a growing interest in ethnographic images of “foreigners” fueled by American and European imperialism and colonialism. As news photographs traveled around the globe, the American nation took the opportunity to demonstrate its progress and power both at home and abroad.

Bain’s news photographs featuring the vast American land, diverse peoples, progressive cities, rapidly expanding business, and America’s national unity were instrumental in the process of not just imagining, but visualizing the American character. These photographs were a powerful cultural export and an inspiration for millions of people around the world—they served as building blocks for the twentieth century’s American Dream.

5.1. The Exceptional American Landscape

A desire to express the greatness of America was recognized by many as early as the turn of the twentieth century. In his 1897 essay titled “The Greatest Nation on Earth,” for example, writer William George Jordan had noted that America’s higher standing must be pictured and witnessed by both Americans and the world. Among the exceptional assets of the United States, Jordan suggested that Americans should take special pride in “Our Great Territory,” “Great Inventions,” “Our Great Trade,” “The Nation’s Forests,” “Our Manufacturers,” “Mineral Wealth,” “Gold Production,” “Our Farm Lands,” “Uncle Sam’s Wheat Fields,” “Railways,” “Exports and Imports,” the nation’s schools, libraries, mail, churches, banks, and government.⁸

Americans’ appreciation for their country and its prominent position in the world comes as no surprise given that in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century the young nation was prosperous, confident, and attractive to many. In a time of transnational flow of people and goods, immigration, and a growing interest in international affairs, America’s imperialistic ventures, although skeptically viewed by some, were an expression of a growing national power on the global scene that was deeply satisfying to most Americans. “International prestige was greatly enhanced with overseas possessions, and it was gratifying to have the European powers acknowledge the new role of the United States in world affairs,” historian Foster Rhea Dulles observed.⁹

America’s exceptionalism in the early 1900s was partly defined by vast lands and natural resources. Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 thesis of *The Frontier in American History* was among the first to emphasize the importance of the frontier in shaping the American character. In Turner’s view, some of the earliest notions of exceptionalism rested on America’s geographic setting.¹⁰ Furthermore, as noted by political scientist Joseph Nye, national power is often equated

with the possession of territory and natural resources and news photography was a way to document the greatness of the American land.¹¹

Images featuring mountains, valleys, rivers, and oceans found in Bain's archival collection successfully constructed a view of the nation's geographical advantage, land possessions, and spirit of discovery (see Images 15-18). Bain's photographs illustrated Frederic Jackson Turner's thesis that the frontier was a feature of the nation's exceptionalism—both Bain and Turner had intuitive senses for the direction of American ideologies at the turn of the twentieth century.

Land management took center stage on President Roosevelt's agenda. In line with his goals to promote the importance of the land and resources, the press during the Roosevelt administration often featured photographs that captured the magnificence of the land—the “promised land.” Influenced by American naturalists, the Roosevelt administration was responsible for creating an environmental conservation movement whose words and actions continue to be heard and felt throughout the nation today.¹² “After becoming president in 1901, Roosevelt used his authority to establish 150 national forests, 51 federal bird reserves, four national game preserves, five national parks, and 18 national monuments on over 230 million acres of public land.”¹³

As noted by the editors of photography website *Aperture*, “over the course of their history the national parks have faced numerous threats, both political and environmental. Over six generations of photographers were subsequently drawn to the parks, bearing witness to their changing landscapes, examining the implications of public land use, and capturing their grandeur.”¹⁴ In sum, thanks to the early news photo agencies and later, to landscape

photographers such as Ansel Adams, the once “imagined” American community (Anderson) was becoming visualized.

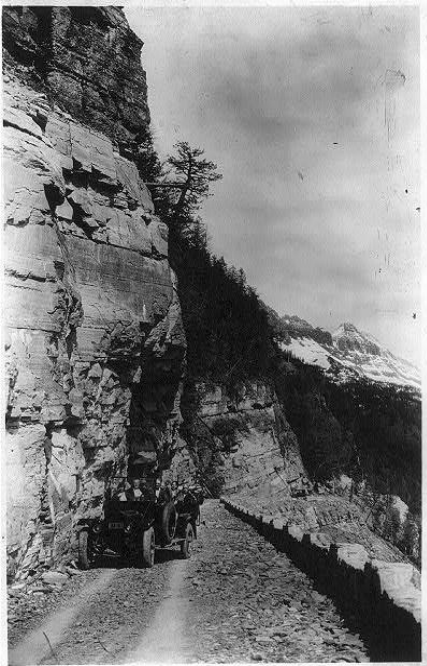


Image 15: Glacier National Park—Crystal Point. 1920. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 16: Fannie Bullock Workman Posed on Mountain with Mountain Climbing Gear. n.d. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 17: Sky Line Drive, near Canon City, Colorado—on the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. Between 1900 and 1930. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 18: People on Beach and Boardwalk at Asbury Park, New Jersey. Between 1908 and 1922. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

5.2. Immigrants and the American Dream

Bain News Service prioritized its audience and business before social, political, or environmental reform, so it supplied photographs of whatever matters struck the interests of readers. “While current events—breaking and feature news—remained the principal focus of the News Service, they could not by themselves sustain the business,” Carlebach wrote. “Newspapers and magazines now offered their readers much more than just straight news, adding pages devoted to fashion, entertainment, and especially sports.”¹⁵

Bain quickly discovered that the main subjects of interest in the market of news photography included four basic themes: people and personalities; urbanization and urban life; performing artists and sports; and major national events such as parades, strikes, riots, and celebrated murders.¹⁶ Bain’s news photographs helped entice thousands of foreigners to seek a better life, to realize their American Dream. As gallery owner and curator Stephen White pointed

in *The Photograph and the American Dream 1840-1940*: “photographs lured immigrants to our shores, tempted those already here, laid out the path for our ‘manifest destiny’ and broadened our vision of the future. They became our hope and glory—our inspiration.”¹⁷

Between 1880 and 1930 over 27 million people entered the United States. Immigrants from the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Southern and Eastern Europe, Canada, and Asia, especially China, poured into the United States in search for a better life. During that time, about 12 million came in through the newly opened Ellis Island in New York. There stood the Statue of Liberty to greet the newcomers and to continue to inspire their American Dream. “The United States had opened its doors to unrestricted immigration as American capitalists were in need of cheap labor in the growing industrial nation. In part this is precisely what the American Dream served to promote—the idea that hard work leads to success.”¹⁸ These immigrants had followed the promise of American life that entails economic self-improvement and gain, or the myth of “rags to riches” found in the popular writings of Horatio Alger. The popular myth of the American Dream, thus, positioned economic success within the framework of national belonging.¹⁹

The immigrants who came to the United States in search of a better life were featured in hundreds of photographs in Bain’s archives—their arrival into the United States, their daily lives, their dwellings, their diverse communities (see Images 19 through 22). News photographs of the newly arrived often signified the American Dream and the American national character and were in line with the ruling ideology at the time. More notably, as then vice president Theodore Roosevelt stated at the Minnesota State Fair in St. Paul on September 2, 1901, the immigrants represented the strength of the nation and embodied all that was thought of as being American. Touting the American Dream, Roosevelt noted;

Our country has been populated by pioneers, and therefore it has in it more energy, more enterprise, more expansive power than any other in the wide world. [...] They have shown the qualities of daring, endurance, and far-sightedness, of eager desire for victory and stubborn refusal to accept defeat, which go to make up the essential manliness of the American character. Above all, they have recognized in practical form the fundamental law of success in American life—the law of worthy work, the law of high, resolute endeavor. We have but little room among our people for the timid, the irresolute, and the idle; and it is no less true that there is scant room in the world at large for the nation with mighty thews that dares not to be great.²⁰

The newcomers were often recognized as vital to the nation's success even while they were relegated to the bottom economic tier, grossly exploited, and targeted for racism. While the American "promise" was prominently featured in Bain's news photographs and the press at large, the "promise" did not reflect the reality at the time. Famous turn-of-the-century photographers, such as Jacob Riis who presented first-hand accounts of poverty and dismay amongst the newcomers' settlements in the New York City slums, were often denied publication. The changing tastes for news content, more so than expensive image reproduction, were amongst the main reasons Riis' photographs were not featured in the press. "For more than a year I had knocked at the doors of the various magazine editors with my pictures, proposing to tell them how the other half lived, but no one wanted to know," Riis wrote in 1901.²¹ Due to the lack of interest in his social reform work, Riis took on a different approach—magic lantern slide presentations and public lectures. In the early 1900s, journalism was clearly growing as a business more so than as a service to society and Bain's innovative news photo agency met that need.



Image 19: Immigrants from “Prinzess Irene” Going to Ellis Island. 1911. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 20: Immigrants Carrying Luggage, Ellis Island, New York. n.d. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

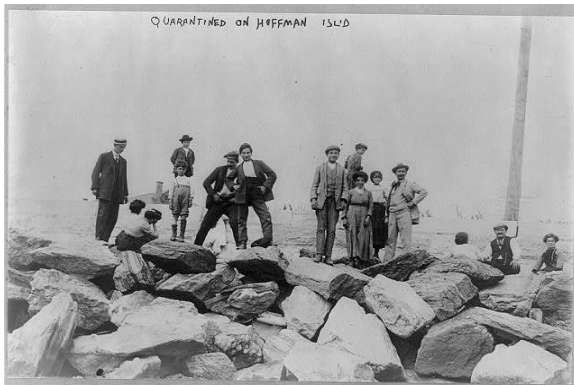


Image 21: Group of Immigrant Men, Women, and Children Standing on Rocks; Quarantined on Hoffman Island, N.Y. n.d. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 22: Com'r. Wallis & Immigrants. ca. between 1915 and ca. 1920. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

5.3. Progress in the City

Most immigrants to the United States settled in American cities where jobs were located. In the nation’s growing urban centers, factory output grew, small businesses flourished, and incomes rose. As the promise of jobs and higher wages attracted people into the cities, the US

began to shift to a nation of city dwellers. By 1900, 30 million people (30 percent of the total population) lived in cities, as urbanization expanded rapidly.

Bain's news photographs of the American city featuring breathtaking skylines and high rises among other engineering innovations and architectural wonders symbolized both the progress of America and the nation's exceptionalism. President Roosevelt's first annual message to the US Senate and House of Representatives, on December 3, 1901, reinforced the notion that the growth of US cities meant America was "progressing":

The growth of cities has gone on beyond comparison faster than the growth of the country, and the upbuilding of the great industrial centers has meant a startling increase, not merely in the aggregate of wealth, but in the number of very large individual, and especially of very large corporate, fortunes. The creation of these great corporate fortunes has not been due to the tariff nor to any other governmental action, but to natural causes in the business world, operating in other countries as they operate in our own.²²

The twentieth-century American city became a stronghold of commerce, reflected in its cityscape as towers, skyscrapers, and high-rise office buildings replaced smokestacks. "Nowhere in the world had the center of a city ever become so identified with a single building type and, for that matter, a brand-new type—created only in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The new skyscrapers—enabled by the invention of the elevator and steel-frame construction—housed corporate headquarters, newspapers, lawyers, accountants, etc.," wrote architectural historian Mitchell Schwarzer. "Soon the high-rise skyline became the visual symbol of the American city. When office skyscrapers were later built in Paris, Milan, Mexico City, or Tokyo, et al., their presence signaled Americanization—an intrusion into the old, historic city much like the American imprint on cuisine made by soft drinks, fast food, and supermarkets."²³

Spectacular skylines with high rises, bustling street scenes featuring modern automobiles and fashionably dressed walkers, and unique architectural shapes proliferate Bain's catalog (see Images 23 through 26). The news photo agency readily obtained these depictions and distributed them both at home and abroad. Bain's photographs reinforced the status quo of the progressive twentieth-century nation while at the same time suggesting its blindness to economic inequalities. In the words of art historian Peter Bacon Hales,

Bain's photograph had assembled it all: the architecture of the grand style, now a trope for modernity and the modern fashion rather than a sign of conservatism and civility; the energy and activity of the street; the city as spectacle and as festival, both—a place where the voiceless and the marginalized might find voice and a new community, even a chance to change the larger civilization; a place where nature and culture still met, where the local and the global still assembled; a White City transformed from Dream City to dynamic reality, gaining flesh, color, energy in the process.²⁴



Image 23: Skyline—NYC: Woolworth Bldg., Singer Bldg., Bankers Trust Bldg. Bain News Service. 1912. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 24: NYC Street Scenes Million Dollar Corner, 34th St. & Broadway. December 21, 1911. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 25: Footpaths of Manhattan Bridge [when the bridge was being built]. Bain News Service. Between ca. 1907 and ca. 1915. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 26: New York City Street Scenes—5th Avenue. Bain News Service. December 18, 1913. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

5.4. Business First

Expansion became a key feature of American life between 1890 and 1920; the efforts of growing America's power became evident in commerce and investment, in cultural outreach, and in government policy. "Whether Americans favored formal territorial colonialism or simply an expansion of private economic and cultural ties (sometimes called neocolonialism), most believed in America's superiority and the urgent need to spread its products and messages to the world," wrote historian Emily S. Rosenberg. "Gradually, the balance swung away from formal colonialism toward the belief that private institutions—especially businesses and voluntary associations—would spread the American Dream more effectively than conquering armies."²⁵ The early 1900s economic climate in America, and the photographs representing it, resonate with Rosenberg's concept of liberal developmentalism founded in the faith in private and free enterprise, support for free or open access for trade and investment, and the promotion of free flow of information and culture.

As the cities expanded and modernized, a new middle class saw growing incomes and a growing demand for material goods. In turn, the middle class also saw increases in leisure time, which could be spent at newly built department stores, shopping centers, amusement parks, and baseball stadiums. Transportation systems improved, as did the general infrastructure, better meeting the increased needs of the middle- and upper-class city dwellers.²⁶ The mass influx of people into the cities transformed the image of the nation in many aspects and Bain News Service was there to (re)present America's new social reality (see Images 27 and 28).

The national industrial growth and progress featured in Bain's news photographs of the early twentieth century suggest America's progress went far beyond what other nations had achieved at the time. The photographs supported the "belief that other nations could and should replicate America's own development experience," to quote Rosenberg.²⁷ Along with the influx of immigrants and urbanization, new patterns of living and new forms of pleasure emerged. The American nation witnessed a growing demand for mass-marketed goods and a boom of consumerism. In turn, news photographs highlighting the nation's industrial achievements and mechanization perpetuated the myth of the American Dream.

News photographs frequently featured business and industry sectors even outside of urban areas. Bain News Service provided images of the New York stock exchange, for instance, but also of the country's railroads and stations, ships and shipyards, airplanes and airports, automobiles and their factories, and more. Bain gave attention to mechanical/technological developments that demonstrated the industrial, military, and business advantages of the United States (see Images 29-32). As President Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921) stated in a speech at the Annual Banquet of the Economic Club held at New York's Hotel Astor on May 23, 1912, "Business underlies everything in our national life, including our spiritual life."²⁸

News photographs of the growing industrial state exported abroad helped “Americanize” the world and to motivate others to mirror the American progress. “Around the turn of the century, the rapid spread of Frederick Taylor’s ideas of efficiency refined the techniques of mass production and revolutionized factory labor (see Images 33 and 34). ‘Taylorization,’ a system of rationalized movement and rigorous work discipline, lowered production costs still further, thereby improving the American competitive edge,” observed Rosenberg.²⁹

Business and economic opportunities were embedded in the myth of the American Dream, which according to James Truslow Adams implied that “life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.”³⁰ While Adams’ admitted the Dream was not just about material prosperity, material and financial progress played a big part in the myth of the self-made man. The myth perpetuated the notion that the United States gives every individual the opportunity “to grow to fullest development as man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in the older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class.”³¹

Material success was a highly-sought part of life in the early twentieth-century life and, as shown in some of Bain’s photographs, people took on every opportunity to achieve that success—from working in factories and plants, to engaging in free trade on Wall Street, to selling goods on the streets (see Images 28, 32-34). As a result, by the early 1910s, the liberal tenets of “free enterprise, free trade, free men” embedded in mid-nineteenth-century domestic politics had reached maturity and helped bolster the myth of American exceptionalism across the globe.³² During the 1910s, President Woodrow Wilson’s foreign policy was heavily guided by American ideals, morality, and the spread of the nation’s democratic tenets. Wilson articulated

his vision of American exceptionalism in a Sioux Falls address on September 8, 1919, describing the American character, or at least a popular idea of it at the time, as he expressed a desire for other nations to aspire to be like America. “Sometimes people call me an idealist,” Wilson said. “Well, that is the way I know I am an American.”

America, my fellow citizens—I do not say it in disparagement of any other great people—America is the only idealistic Nation in the world. When I speak practical judgments about business affairs, I can only guess whether I am speaking the voice of America or not, but when I speak the ideal purposes of history I know that I am speaking the voice of America, because I have saturated myself since I was a boy in the records of that spirit, and everywhere in them there is this authentic tone of the love of justice and the service of humanity. If by any mysterious influence of error America should not take the leading part in this new enterprise of concerted power, the world would experience one of those reversals of sentiment, one of those penetrating chills of reaction, which would lead to a universal cynicism, for if America goes back upon mankind, mankind has no other place to turn. It is the hope of nations all over the world that America will do this great thing.³³

Business, in the first few years of the twentieth century, was part of America’s concerted efforts to expand its (inter)national prestige. The nation’s imperialistic ventures expanded beyond just the control of foreign lands. This so called “Open Door imperialism” was an American manifestation of the imperialism of free trade, wrote historian Marc William-Palen. “Owing to the distinctive nature of American capitalism, imperial presidents embarked upon a bipartisan quest for foreign markets with broad business and agrarian support, culminating in the acquisition of both a formal and informal American empire,” William-Palen noted.³⁴ Bain News Service photographs were supportive of these efforts by promoting business, industry, and trade.



Image 27: Streetcars—Getting on Broadway Car. Bain News Service. July 11, 1913. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 28: Selling Sox, Hester St. Bain News Service. July 11, 1913. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 29: Laying the Keel of the North Dakota at Fore River Yards, First of the Amer. Dreadnoughts—20,000 tons. 1907. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 30: Automobile and Motor Boat. n.d. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

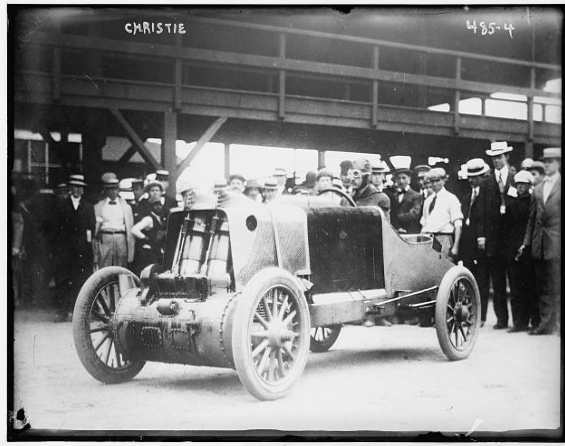


Image 31: Christie [racing automobile]. n.d. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 32: Crowd on Wall Street before Trinity Church, New York City. 1911. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

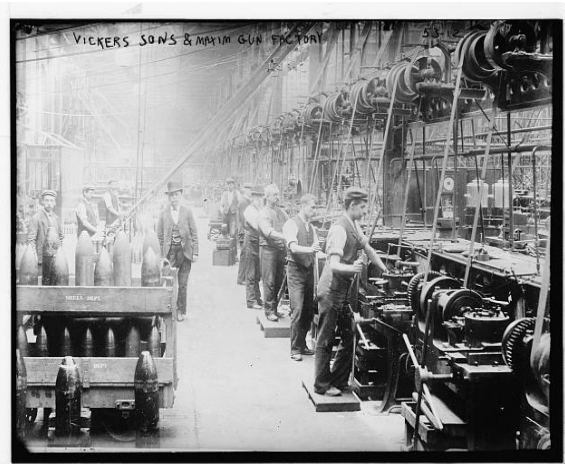


Image 33: [Assembly line] Vicker Sons & Maxim Gun Factory. n.d. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

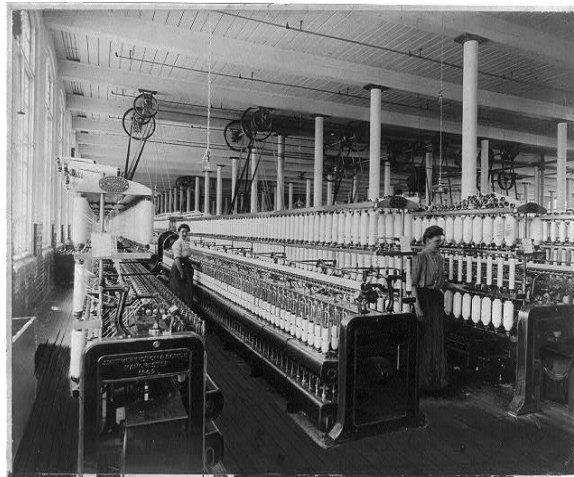


Image 34: Textile Factory with Two Women at Machines. 1910. Bain Collection, LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

5.5. The Big “National” Picture

While national unity and a promise of a better life in a land of opportunities may have fueled migration desires, starting a new life in a new land was a challenge. To offset the difficulties in becoming assimilated in the United States, news photographs helped integrate immigrants into society, by introducing the newcomers to those who had already succeeded and were living the American Dream. Through the representation and promotion of national ideals, as found in national symbols, news photographs served to promote a sense of national belonging. In sum, the twentieth-century American Dream was closely associated with the notions of nationalism, patriotism, exceptionalism, and power—all concepts embedded in and inseparable from Americans’ version of the Dream.

National symbols such as the American flag and celebration parades were commonly featured in the press. Among such images promoting nationalism and unity, alongside diversity are Bain’s photographs of women waving flags at a parade (see image 35), New York’s famous Chinatown where dozens of flags are hanging from storefronts and residential windows (see image 36) and New York’s Ebbets Park, where men from all lifestyles haul the nation’s flag together (see image 37). These images represented America’s exceptional character as the world’s “melting pot,” as a united nation under one flag, and as a country whose citizens would readily sacrifice for. American nationalism, though not realized in its full potential, was intended to unite the citizens of the “melting pot” and to inspire a collective dedication to the exceptional nation. As stated by communication scholar Mingsheng Li too, nationalism largely is a “political ideology or set of ideas designed to unite and sustain ties between diverse ethnicities, mobilize the masses through its political power, create a strong sense of shared national identity, and provide a solid basis of trust between citizens who are willing to sacrifice for others.”³⁵

The idea of putting the state or nation before the individual, thus focusing immigrants' attention on the big national picture vs. individual success, was also inscribed in a speech given by President Roosevelt. On August 31, 1910, Roosevelt visited Osawatomie, Kansas and laid out his vision for what he called a "new nationalism." The president stressed national unity and the importance of both individuals' and the state's mutual dedication to one another. Roosevelt declared that hard work would allow Americans to provide for themselves and their families; he argued that not one person should receive special privileges over another. What the president intended and said, as well as what was shown in news photographs, was not the reality for millions of Americans

"The New Nationalism puts the national need before the sectional or personal advantage," Roosevelt stated. The American Dream "opportunities" for a good life on American land should be equally available to all and equally supported by the government too.³⁶ In his view, nationalism, exceptionalism, and patriotism went hand in hand in the constructing of a vision of the American Dream and the mechanisms of promoting the nation's power and unity were especially evident in images featuring diverse groups of people unified through one common national goal (see Images 37 through 42).

"The growth of the nation-state fusing nationalism and state structures coincided with international competition over resources and political influence and in response to transnational economic and cultural pressures such as immigration," historian Ian Tyrrell observed. "The practice of nationalism was local and that was both its strength and its weakness."

Fourth of July celebrations in the smaller towns and hamlets featured fairs, greased pig catching, bands and logrolling; more important orators retold stories of the Revolution. Election contests reproduced a veritable spectacle of democracy as citizens turned out in festive style not only to listen to candidates, but also, consciously or not, to celebrate a nation

where (white male) people could vote. The national flag gave American citizens a symbol of their shared identity and the 'Star Spangled Banner' reinforced this symbolism."³⁷

In the 1910s, President Woodrow Wilson helped spread America's ideals around the world. He was instrumental in the development of both nationalism and internationalism, observed foreign relations scholar Lori Fisler Damrosch. "Wilson gave expression to the nationalist aspirations of peoples around the world, through his endorsement of the principle of self-determination. He also initiated the first institution that had as its objective the organization of the international community [League of Nations] to apply concerted power in support of universal values," Damrosch wrote.³⁸

Both Roosevelt's and Wilson's political ideals and ideological approaches to building America's reputation were supported by the media. Bain's photographs depicting an idealized American national identity were among many others that proliferated in the press. The image of America as a progressively minded home for both freedom and business received favorable attention internationally, and American national symbols appeared around the world (see Images 41 and 42).

These depictions were not surprising given that "of all the countries in the world, we and only we only have the need to create artificially the patriotism which is the birthright of other nations," American essayist Agnes Repplier wrote for *The Atlantic* in 1916. "Into the hearts of six millions of foreign-born men—less than half of them naturalized—we must infuse that quality of devotion which will make them place the good of the state above their personal good, and the safety of the state above their personal safety," Repplier noted.³⁹

While it may be difficult to tell with certainty if a sense of America's nationalism was strengthened with the global expansion of news photographic exchange, Bain's abundant representations of America's progress in terms of immigration, urbanization, industry, and business, suggest that exceptionalism and nationalism (alongside imperialism) may have been a driving force behind news values and content. On one level, Bain's approach was in tune with the values of the nation's leadership in the first two decades of the twentieth century. On another level, his growing integration of photography featuring foreign people and places signaled the beginning of a change in representation that extended beyond national borders—the news photo agency was beginning to visually “globalize” the world.

Bain News Service's images and practices highlight the vital role of news photography and its representational power at the turn of the twentieth century. As an Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser) and a business that dealt with global photographic purchase and exchange, Bain News Service was instrumental in the growth of the movement of news photographs within and beyond the confines of the American nation. In turn, Bain's news photographs, as influenced by the economic, political, societal, technological, and ideological forces at the turn of the twentieth century, not only broadened Americans' knowledge about themselves, but helped shape the global community's view of America. In other words, the community was no longer just imagined (Anderson), but visualized with the help of news photographs. As worldwide visual producers and press audiences engaged in meaning-making through news photographs, they also engaged in the larger “construction” of the twentieth-century's American character.



Image 35: Group of Women Standing on Top of Vehicle Waving Flags, New York City, ca. 1907-1916. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 36: Chinatown, N.Y. January 1, 1913. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 37: Hauling Flag Ebbets Park. April 14, 1914. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

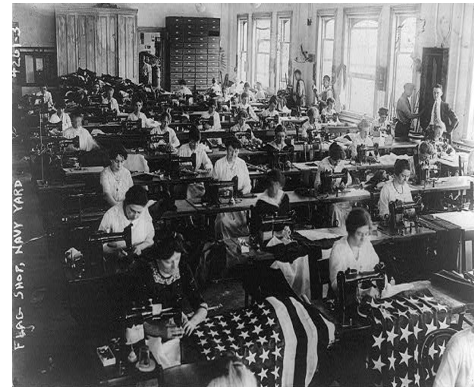


Image 38: Flag Shop, Navy Yard. ca1917. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 39: Negro G.A.R. Veterans Parading, New York City. May 30, 1912. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 40: Parades-1918. 4th of July Parade, N.Y. 1918. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 41: American Flag Day in London. April 20, 1917. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.



Image 42: Paris, France. Rue de la Paix Decorated for Theodore Roosevelt. 1910. Bain Collection. LOC Prints and Photographs Division.

Endnotes

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² “Personal Items about and Photographs of a Group of Women Prominent at Home and Abroad,” *Oregonian*, May 9, 1909, Readex America’s Historical Newspapers, accessed July 12, 2020, at <readex.com>.

³ Little, “The Father of News Photography,” 205.

⁴ Carlebach, *Bain’s New York*, xxi.

⁵ “Bain Service Quick with Newspictures,” Readex America’s Historical Newspapers, accessed May 1, 2020, at <infoweb-newsbank.com>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bain Collection, *Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog*

⁸ Jordan, “The Greatest Nation on Earth,” 7, 8.

⁹ Dulles, *The United States Since 1865*, 178.

¹⁰ Murray, *American Exceptionalism*, 8.

¹¹ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 26.

¹² “Conservation in the Progressive Era,” accessed July 28, 2022, at <loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/progressive-era-to-new-era-1900-1929/conservation-in-progressive-era>.

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¹⁵ Carlebach, *Bain’s New York*, xxv.

¹⁶ Peter Bacon Hales, *Silver Cities: Photographing American Urbanization 1839-1939* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 403.

¹⁷ White, *The Photograph and the American Dream, 1840-1940*, 19.

¹⁸ “Immigrants in the Progressive Era,” *U.S. History Primary Source Timeline*, LOC, accessed May 2, 2022, at <loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/progressive-era-to-new-era-1900-1929/immigrants-in-progressive-era>.

¹⁹ Heike Paul, *The Myths That Made America*, 13, 14.

²⁰ *Address of Vice President Roosevelt, Minnesota State Fair, Minneapolis, Sept. 2nd, 1901*. Theodore Roosevelt Collection. MS Am 1834 (1084). Harvard College Library.

²¹ Jacob Riis, (1901). *The Making of an American* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901/1959), 191.

²² Theodore Roosevelt, First Annual Message, December 3, 1901, Presidential Speeches, Miller Center, National Archives, accessed March 2, 2022, at <millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-3-1901-first-annual-message>.

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²⁴ Hales, *Silver Cities*, 413.

²⁵ Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 62.

²⁶ “Cities during the Progressive Era,” *U.S. History Primary Source Timeline*, LOC, accessed May 2, 2022, at <loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/progressive-era-to-new-era-1900-1929/cities-during-progressive-era>.

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²⁸ Woodrow Wilson, *Woodrow Wilson on Government in Relation to Business*, New York City (1912), 16, LOC, accessed March 2, 2022, at <lccn.loc.gov/12022586>.

²⁹ Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 20.

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³¹ *Ibid*, 318.

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³⁴ Marc William-Palen, “The Imperialism of Economic Nationalism, 1890-1913.” *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 1 (2015): 158.

³⁵ Mingsheng Li, “Nationalism and Imperialism,” in *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*. Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler, eds. (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2014), 670.

³⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, New Nationalism, Presidential Rhetoric. August 31, 1910, accessed October 21, 2020, at <presidentialrhetoric.com/historicspeeches/index.html>.

³⁷ Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789* (London: Macmillan Education, 2007), 119.

³⁸ Lori F. Damrosch, “Nationalism and Internationalism: The Wilsonian Legacy,” *N.Y.U. Journal of International Law and Politics*, (1994), 26, 493. Accessed October 26, 2022, at <https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/faculty_scholarship/3141

³⁹ Agnes Repplier, “Americanism,” *The Atlantic*, March 1916, accessed October 24, 2019, at <theatlantic.com>.

Chapter 6: VII and Representation in the Global Century

The photographs sold by Bain News Service in the first twenty years of the twentieth-century became, in effect, a “public relations” tool for American business and government interests. The images Bain took and sold promoted the nation’s values and ideologies in ways similar to how Althusser described the roles of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), or the non-governmental social and cultural institutions, including the press, that are unified by subscribing to a common ideology in the service of political leaders and business elites. While Bain may have carried out his work trusting that his photographers were neutrally covering breaking news, in hindsight (and perhaps visible at the time, even if not remarked upon), Bain had an agenda that bought into the American Dream ideology, and in so doing proselytized for that vision and those values.

Because of technological and business advancements within the first two decades of the twenty-first century, however, institutional forces struggle to remain relevant in asserting their ideology via news photographs. The images taken by individuals that circulate online today have diluted the messages of traditional news photographs and have complicated the values of the mainstream news outlets. In turn, visual representations that circulate via the Internet and social media have begun to challenge not only the existing social reality in the United States, but also the nation’s historical experience. Twenty-first century photographs complicate the way individuals and groups understand themselves and their sense of belonging. Political division and violence, environmental campaigns, and race and gender inequality struggles found in social movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, are just a few examples of the complex shifts in ideological messaging within the American nation.

The VII Photo agency—a decentralized and global journalistic institution—closely aligns with the ideological and the visual landscape demands of the twenty-first century. In contrast to Bain News Service (an Althusserian ISA), VII’s autonomous creatives strive to challenge the dominant ideology and status quo. VII’s photographers have an activist agenda they are candid about, but that emerges via the subjects they select to cover and how they frame, photograph, and caption the images they take. “[The VII founders] were looking for more independence and a place where they could share their ideals,” said Stephen Mayes, former executive at the VII agency. “The mission of VII boils down to photography for change.”¹

VII of the “Global Century” from its launch chose to invest in individual and human-interest stories both at home and abroad. The VII agency’s photographs zoom in on American individuals which, on one level, speaks volumes about the effects of technological advancement (improved camera lenses, portability of photo equipment, etc.). On another level, the abundance of close-ups of people suggests that VII’s focus is on the individual rather than the crowd. Such intimate portrayals and approach to visual storytelling also imply that individuals welcome and often even seek opportunities to have their voices heard with the help of the media.

This rather personal style of representation of American people is in stark contrast with Bain’s photographs that focused on America’s idyllic landscapes, the nation’s assimilated immigrants, the progressive American city, and the massive economic and industrial growth of the country. During the “American Century,” the nation took the opportunity to display its progress and superiority both at home and abroad, and Bain News Service visualized an American Dream as articulated by elites and political leaders. In contrast, part of VII’s predominantly “global” photo archive serves to demonstrate the American land in a face of a peril; to illuminate the trying lives of immigrants in a light previously unseen; to show America’s

business and industry sectors in times of uncertainty; and to bring into view the poverty and inequality in the country's ever-expanding cities.

6.1. The Decaying American Landscape

The natural resources of the United States have long been a defining feature of American exceptionalism, and Bain and other early twentieth-century photographic agencies celebrated those riches in the images they sold. By the twenty-first century, however, the centuries of industrial exploitation of American land and water prompted a new generation of photographers, such as those in VII, to document the environmental decay in its photographs.²

America's exceptionalism in the twentieth century was in part defined by its the nation's vast territory and extraordinary natural resources. While Bain News service had recognized the significance of visualizing the greatness of the American land to build that "exceptional" image of the nation, VII's photographs aligned with the growing global concerns for responsible land management, resource preservation, and environmental protection.

Much like in the early twentieth century, American political leadership had investigated preserving and conserving resources; however, since then the focus on the environment has grown to be global. This is evident in the types of images VII has focused on producing and distributing. Among them, one can find multiple photographs displaying the ongoing global ecological catastrophe while witnessing America's role in it. While Bain's photographs served to emphasize the importance of the frontier in shaping the American character and to demonstrate the vastness and magnificence of the American land, VII's archive features a

multitude of images depicting the decay and degradation of America's landscape because of human activity. The images themselves still reveal the vastness of the land, but the lengthy descriptive captions tell a different story — one of abandonment, depression, and degradation (see Images 43 and 44).

America's image is also disrupted by the fact that the country consumes large amounts of energy and natural resources, and it is a large-scale emitter of carbon dioxide that contributes to climate change. While the United States is not the only nation with such a precarious environmental profile, the country is in focus because of its image as a global leader. "American individuals and households, through their pursuit of the American Dream, have created a lifestyle inimical to combating climate change," wrote Jack Barkenbus, a political scientist and climate change researcher. "The "supersizing" of the American Dream—that is, the building of larger dwellings accompanied by the accumulation of more and larger household possessions—has taken place relatively recently and seriously diminishes our ability to reduce our collective carbon footprint."³

The concerns over the environment were reflected in President George W. Bush's remarks on Conservation and the Environment Tuesday, January 6, 2009, as he noted, "We have pioneered a new model of cooperative conservation in which government and private citizens and environmental advocates work together to achieve common goals. And while there's a lot more work to be done, we have done our part to leave behind a cleaner and healthier and better world for those who follow us on this Earth."⁴

Following Bush, between 2009 and 2017, President Barack Obama introduced a number of initiatives and global efforts on climate change, resulting in a historic Paris Climate Agreement, with more than 190 countries coming together to adopt the most ambitious climate

change agreement in history. The Paris Agreement establishes a long-term, durable global framework to set the world on a course to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the most dangerous levels of climate change.⁵

Although the Trump Administration (2017-2021) withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord, the administration did reduce carbon emissions more than any country in the agreement. Under Trump, the United States continued to lead the world in greenhouse gas and energy-related emissions reductions.⁶

With the world pointing fingers at the United States, remedial efforts and innovative approaches are abundantly depicted in VII's archive to highlight the nation's dedication to the global vs. the domestic (see Images 45 and 46). And while the original version of the American Dream might be growing more elusive in terms of upward mobility and material possessions, a version of the Dream more focused on the global community has taken shape.



Image 43: “Bombs in our Backyard. Abandoned structures on marshland once part of the Navy’s Mare Island Naval Ship Yard, California. Ashley Gilbertson/VII. April 13, 2017.” Screenshot.



Image 44: “Badlands National Park. The South Dakota Badlands are surrounded by one of the US’s most economically depressed regions. Danny Wilcox Frazier/VII. March 27, 2009.” Screenshot.



Image 45: “Windpower. Three-bladed wind turbines can be seen on the Biglow Canyon wind farm near the city of Portland, Oregon on February 9, 2008. Joachim Ladefoged/VII. February 9, 2008.” Screenshot.



Image 46: “Katrina Cleanup. Work crews at the Gentilly Landfill empty foodstuffs from thousands of refrigerators left by Hurricane Katrina in Slidell, La. Ed Kashi/VII. December 11, 2005.” Screenshot.

6.2. Immigrants and the Paradox of the American Dream

Global communications and the emergence of a trans-national community through the twentieth century transformed the character of the United States, while immigration waves characteristic of the twentieth century continued to define the American nation as a destination

for those seeking a new life. In 2000, immigrants comprised 11.1 percent of the US population (a demographic numbering 31.1 million), and by 2019, they composed 13.7 percent of the total US population, or 45 million immigrants, a figure that remains short of the record high of 14.8 percent in 1890, noted Cecilia Esterline and Jeanne Batalova of the Migration Policy Institute.⁷ Bain's news photographs of the early 1900s helped entice thousands of foreigners to search for their American Dream. They were featured and, in a way, celebrated in many of Bain's visual accounts—their arrival into the United States, their daily lives, their dwellings, their diverse communities, the overall process of immigrants becoming Americans. A century later, VII's close-up and intimate representations accompanied by detailed captions, on the other hand, starkly contrast with Bain News Service's catalog.

For generations, immigrants have added their skills and labor to the country, and have been seen by some, if not all, as assets to the American labor force, society, and nation. That was true in 1900, and was still true a century later. What had changed was who cared. Both eras saw years of economic growth and of distress, unemployment, and shrinking public funds. By the mid-2010s, news outlets had turned to cover immigrants via the lens of social justice. VII's photographers investigated stories of immigrants viewed as a drain on resources and as competitors for jobs, noted immigration policy specialist Audrey Singer⁸ (see Images 49-52).

While historically immigrants have sought a better life in America, the past several decades have faded the belief that achieving the American Dream is possible. The idea of upward mobility through hard work and education has taken a different turn in the twenty-first century as newcomers face severe roadblocks: controversial immigration policies, stagnant wages, an increasing cost of living, student debt, economic instability.

Journalist and culture writer Anne Helen Petersen wrote that conversations about the immigrant experience of the American Dream center the label of “immigrant,” alternately portrayed as a problem (overwhelming the border, sucking up governmental resources, taking American jobs). Alternatively, she stated, the immigrant story may be looked upon as a model success story, but “with very little, if any, attention to the paths that open or close to migrants from different home countries and circumstances, from different racial and educational backgrounds, with profoundly different levels of societal and governmental support.”⁹

VII’s visual “story” on immigrant Alicia Valeriano represents the dynamic described by Petersen. Captioned “Freehold’s Pandemic,” the photograph describes the immigrant’s struggles on American soil, different from the depictions of opportunity and success Bain News Service provided in the twentieth century. The photograph’s description of a one person’s immigrant experience encompasses that of many that have remained silent but hopeful.

A mother of three, Alicia is working almost 80 hours every week at three different jobs and is currently pursuing a GED. Since the pandemic, she’s lost 2 of her 3 jobs, but still has 40 hours of work weekly as a full-time employee of CVS. Because she doesn’t have a social security number, her family did not qualify for the federal government’s bailout under the CARES Act, even though she has paid taxes for 18 years. Her dream of buying a home has been put on hold due to the loss of income from the pandemic. Alicia and her husband Manuel, a day laborer, met in Mexico City. They immigrated to the US in 2000 for economic reasons. Alicia has worked since her first day arriving. Two of her kids are US citizens, one is a DACA recipient, and she and her husband have ITIN numbers. Alicia has health insurance from her job at CVS ... the rest of her family does not (see image 47).

By and large, immigrants in the United States are represented by VII with a much greater focus on individual experiences. Much like Jacob Riis’ lantern slide presentations from the early 1900s, VII’s focus on the trials and tribulations of immigrant life indicates the changing news

values and approaches to news photography in the twenty-first century. Unlike Bain's images of hopeful crowds on Ellis Island and joyful immigrant life in the "promised land," VII's close-up shots with storied descriptions of individuals and families are highly emotional and personal. VII's photographs and their detailed captions more accurately reflect the American immigrant experience in the US while giving voice to the (often) voiceless (see Images 47 and 48). Such subjective approach to visual storytelling speaks volumes about the changing representation techniques that digital and social media have bestowed upon news photography and the news photo agencies of the new millennium.



Image 47: "Freehold's Pandemic," Alicia Valeriano, 43, originally from Mexico City, pictured at home in Freehold, New Jersey, May 21, 2020. Ed Kashi/VII. Screenshot.



Image 48: "Immigrants. Kids from diverse backgrounds play outside while attending an after-school program at the Boys & Girls Club, in Nashville, Tenn. On March 26, 2007. Ed Kashi/VII." Screenshot.



Image 49: “Inmigracion Topografia [flag]. A US flag tethered to a gatepost flutters in the afternoon breeze on the road between Arivaca and Amado, Ariz, February 7, 2012. Gary Knight/VII.” Screenshot.



Image 50: “Inmigracion Topografia [clothes].” Trails littered with clothes discarded by migrants. Women’s underwear is sometimes found, as they are often raped and their underwear hung on trees as trophies. Gary Knight/VII. September 14, 2012. US-Mexico Border.” Screenshot.



Image 51: “LA Immigration. Demonstrators walking along Wilshire Blvd., in Los Angeles. Protesters held American flags after previous demonstrations were criticized for not being pro American. Ron Haviv/VII. May 1, 2006. Los Angeles, California.” Screenshot.



Image 52: “‘No Ban. No Wall’ Protests in New York. People rally in New York’s Battery Park in New York, protesting President Donald Trump’s immigration order Ron Haviv/VII. January 29, 2017. New York.” Screenshot.

6.3. The Declining American City

The architectural splendor of the American metropolis has long been a staple image in photographers' establishing of the economic, cultural, and industrial power of the United States. What differs in Bain's and VII's representations of the city, is this: Bain News Service focused on highlighting the grand architecture of the American city, while VII focused on the individuals who live in the city. VII's images illustrate how rampant are urban development, metropolitan expansion, and the pressures countering homeownership, and how those have redefined the American character. Bain's photographs predominantly featured architectural wonders and by so doing championed American progress, VII's city photographs, many of which also depict modern buildings and architectural features, tend to zoom in more intimately on individual experiences, highlighting the economic struggles and inequalities present in urban environments (see Images 53-58). The twenty-first century metropolis is no longer held up as a status symbol in VII's photographs. VII found its calling in highlighting societal issues, and often captured urban ills, such as homelessness and poverty.

While the early twentieth-century American city and downtown had a stronghold of industry, commerce, and residences for poor immigrants, by the turn of the twenty-first century, the downtown became the greatest transformation to the American city. These changes were reflective of shifting societal values and family structure. "Men and women, straights and gays, the elderly, students, people with disabilities, dwelled in an increasingly diversity of households, and demanded an equally diverse range of building types. Rentals and condominium ownership in apartment buildings or townhouses were sought after," architectural historian Mitchell Schwarzer noted.¹⁰

A growing desire of Americans to live in the city replaced the suburban ideal that dominated the second half of the twentieth century. “Although many complexes were still built in the suburbs, a growing number were constructed downtown. Soon, formerly vacant downtown streets began to acquire a wholly novel residential cachet,” noted Schwarzer.¹¹ In his view, despite of these transformations, the American promise of economic and geographic mobility—for people, businesses, and institutions—does not stand out as it once did.¹²

Job availability, especially opportunities related to new technologies, and amenities like restaurants, bars, gyms and beauty salons, reintroduced the appeal of city life to the American nation. The Millennial generation was relocating to re-developing downtown areas, but this urban revival resulted in rapid gentrification and rising spatial inequality, observed economic researchers Victor Couture and Jessie Handbury.¹³

Homeownership—a major aspect of the American Dream and the myth of the self-made man—was heavily promoted in the early 2000s via President George W. Bush’s American Dream Downpayment Act of 2003. During his December 16, 2003, speech, Bush reiterated, “the dream of homeownership should be attainable to every hardworking American...In this act of Congress, I’m going to sign, the regulations that I hope are finalized soon will help thousands of families fulfill the dream,” he said.¹⁴ VII’s photographs capture these developments and ideals, while pointing to the idea that the American Dream of homeownership does not apply equally to everyone (see Images 53 and 54).

As home prices increased and student debt accumulated, however, the median age of the average American homebuyers rose dramatically by the 2010s. In turn, the American Dream of homeownership has veered into the distant future. “Buying their first home used to be a milestone that many Americans achieved by the time they were 30. But a shortage of homes for

sale is driving up prices and making it harder for younger consumers to break into the market,” wrote Howard Schneider and Jonnelle Marte for Reuters on December 30, 2019, quoting Jessica Lautz, vice president of demographics and behavioral insights at the National Association of Realtors.¹⁵

The growing city centers and high rises undoubtedly continued to be symbolic of the progressive American nation and the American Dream well into the twenty-first century. As reflected in both Bain’s and VII’s photographs, urban developments, city growth, and economic expansion were major driving forces for both Americans and foreigners to want to continue or pursue a life of prosperity in the United States and to attain the American Dream. Bain’s news photographs of the American city featuring breathtaking skylines and high rises among other engineering innovations and architectural wonders were highly reflective of elite attitudes about America’s values of progressivism and exceptionalism during the twentieth century. However, VII’s photographs more accurately depict the economic and class disparities of the American nation that were present both in the early 1900s and in 2000s.

In both eras, immense sectors of poverty and homelessness existed in many U.S. cities—a reality ridden with inequalities, but not documented by Bain’s photographers. Bain’s photographers took photos, it appears, of a white-washed city, populated by happy immigrants waving an American flag, VII, however, showed a more objective view of the American city and nation by including individuals and focusing on personal stories. VII’s photographs suggested that American (city) life was an isolating and lonely experience (see Images 55 and 58). Even those photos of slick glass buildings or well-tended suburbs were tempered by their captions: skyscrapers were built on tragic land of New York’s 9/11 Ground Zero and homes were shadowed by the ominous steaming of nuclear power plants.



Image 53: “Montgomery County, PA. Exelon Nuclear’s Limerick Generating station backdrops a housing development. Danny Wilcox Frazier/VII. April 7, 2008.” Screenshot.



Image 54: “Yvonne Grissett. Yvonne Grissett walks around in Washington, DC. Yvonne Grissett is an army veteran that is dealing with PTSD. Ed Kashi/VII. May 17, 2019.” Screenshot.



Image 55: “iPhoneography 12. A man sits on the rocks overlooking the NYC skyline in Brooklyn, NY on September 25, 2016. Ed Kashi/VII.” Screenshot.

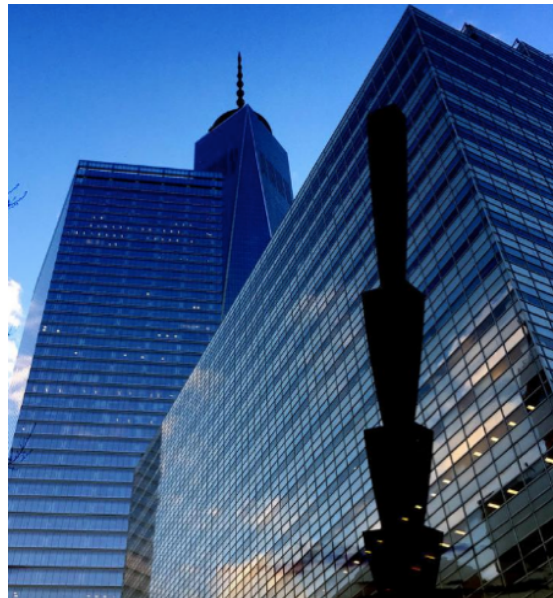


Image 56: “EK-Personal-iPhone. The new One Financial Center building rises from Ground Zero in lower Manhattan, New York on December 25, 2014. Ed Kashi/VII.” Screenshot.



Image 57: “New York. View from a taxicab driving past the Manhattan Bridge, left, and the Brooklyn Bridge, right, which extend into New York City. The taxicab is currently driving on Franklin D, Roosevelt Drive along the East River. Ashley Gilbertson/VII. November 4, 2008.” Screenshot.

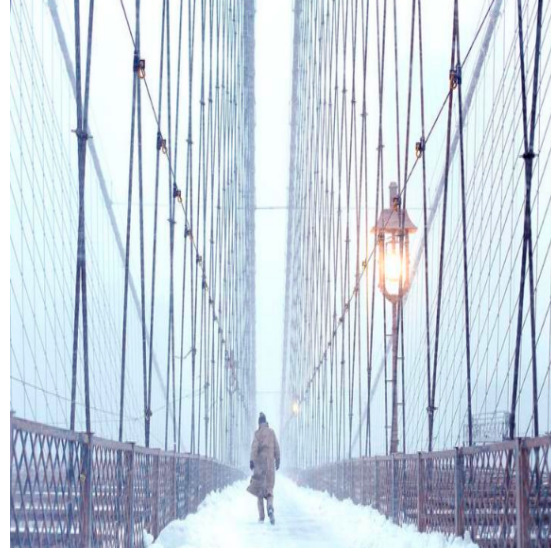


Image 58: “NYC Snowstorm. Phil Phillips walks over the Brooklyn Bridge through snow, sleet, and ice on The Brooklyn Bridge in the Financial District. Phillips is part of a group that call themselves ‘The Bridge Walkers.’ Ashley Gilbertson/VII. February 13, 2014.” Screenshot.

6.4. The Trouble with Business

Bain’s news photographs from the twentieth century highlighted the nation’s industrial achievements and technological advancements while helping perpetuate Americans’ race for material success embedded in the American Dream myth of the self-made man. Many of VII’s photographs from the first two decades of the twenty-first century in the United States, on the other hand, highlighted the lives of individual Americans and their struggles to achieve the Dream. VII’s photographs featured people, within the context of societal and economic issues—inflation, unemployment, pollution, poverty, destruction/desolation, disease, crime. Photos of factories do not appear as a source of community pride, national prosperity, or individual job security, but as a source of financial uncertainty and a threat to the environment. Automobiles no

longer appear as a celebrated luxury, but as sources of an incoming ecological catastrophe. Ships are no longer a source of pride for the military, but as controllers of global trade and means of protecting the borders from unwanted immigrants. Trains and railroads are no longer sleek means of travel and leisure, but environmental eyesores, crime zones, and desolate shelters for the underprivileged.

During Obama's November 7, 2007, campaign speech in Bettendorf, Iowa, the incoming president pointed to crises threatening the unity and the Dream of the American nation in all sectors of American society—in the economy, employment, education, and housing. "Today, the cost of that dream is rising faster than ever before" he said. "While some have prospered beyond imagination in this global economy, middle-class Americans—as well as those working hard to become middle class—are seeing the American dream slip further and further away ... I don't accept this future. We need to reclaim the American dream."¹⁶

Following Obama's presidency, the American economy shifted upward and achieved its desired expansion. By the late-2010s unemployment rates fell to a 50-year low under President Trump's Administration, but a number of global socio-economic developments disrupted American life—from a soaring number of opioid overdose deaths to record levels of student debt to more issues with job security due to the Coronavirus pandemic in 2019 and 2020.¹⁷ Annie Lowrey, politics and economic policy writer for *The Atlantic*, noted that during the 2010s "in many ways, the American economy became more sclerotic. Corporate concentration increased, with more industry sectors dominated by a small handful of firms. In household terms: The rich had it great, growing richer than they have ever been and accounting for a greater share of American wealth than at any other point since the Gilded Age."

[T]he 2010s were a decade that left families fragile, unequal, and divided. These years made clear, if it wasn't already, that the system is rigged for big businesses and the already-rich. They demonstrated that even a very good economy does not necessarily work for the middle class. The 2010s showed how bad everything could feel when everything was going great. This decade, we made it to late capitalism. We became late capitalism. We are late capitalism.¹⁸

Unlike Bain's photographic archive, VII's images taken together are not showcases for the "greatness"—of individuals, of industry, or even of America. VII's images depict a country facing tragedies—industrial decay and pollution, the failing auto-industries, massive job loss, abandoned communities, where poverty, crime, and economic inequalities are evident (see Images 59-65). The visual pessimism was not surprising; during the first two decades of the twenty-first century the United States was a victim of a major terrorist attack, a housing meltdown, a severe economic recession, race and gender inequality struggles, and a global pandemic.



Image 59: “Louisiana Cancer Alley. Views of petrochemical facilities in ‘cancer alley,’ in St. James, Louisiana. In the heart of ‘cancer alley’ or ‘death alley’ where more than 200 industrial facilities have polluted the local environment for decades, and where cancer, asthma and other ailments are some of the highest in the country. Ed Kashi/VII. August 13, 2020.” Screenshot.



Image 60: “Pontiac-2008. Railroad tracks seen outside General Motors, GM, Pontiac Stamping Center in Pontiac Mich. The center employs 1,200 workers today, a fraction of what it once did. Pontiac is a city of 62,000 people just outside of Detroit. If the GM plants shut down, the city will likely be abandoned. Ashley Gilbertson/VII. December 8, 2008.” Screenshot.



Image 61: “Ironbound [project]. A benefit basketball game and block party in honor of two dead residents, Waheed and Squeak, at the Pennington Court housing project in the Ironbound. This is the 22nd benefit thrown since the two men died. The court is regarded by police as a particularly dangerous area of the Ironbound district. Ashley Gilbertson/VII. July 10. 2016. Newark, New Jersey.” Screenshot.

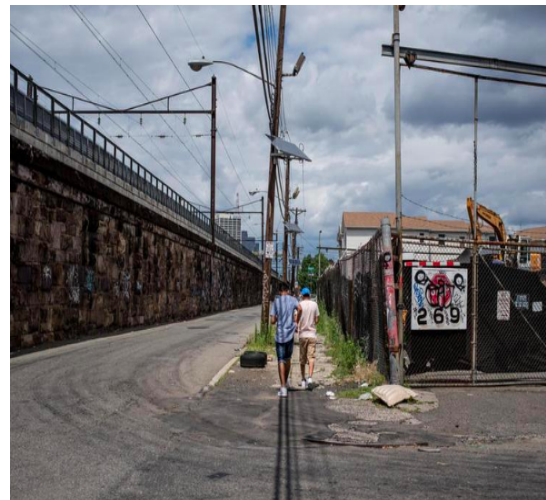


Image 62: “Ironbound [corner]. The corner of Johnson Street and New Jersey Railroad, on Sunday. Rosie’s Palace has been on this corner for 26 years. The neighborhood is home to a community of Portuguese and Brazilian people. Ashley Gilbertson/VII. July 10. 2016. Newark, New Jersey.” Screenshot.



Image 63: “A Hungry Line. Cars line up for miles and wait for hours to pick up food from the Meadowslands YMCA in East Rutherford, NJ. Ed Kashi/VII. December 15, 2020.” Screenshot.



Image 64: “Atlanta. Reputed to have the worst commuter traffic in the US, cars line the highway near downtown Atlanta, February 9, 2006. Ed Kashi/VII.” Screenshot.



Image 65: “General Motors 2008. Kevin Melton works inside the General Motors Delta Township Assembly plant in Lansing, Mich. Melton has been employed by GM and a member of the United Auto Workers union for 27 years, besides having been laid off between 1984 and 1986. On February 17, 2009, General Motors announced it would cut 47,000 jobs globally (20,000 in the US) by the end of 2009 and close an additional five assembly plants by 2012. Christopher Morris/VII. December 3, 2008, Lordstown, Ohio.” Screenshot.

6.5. The Big “Un-national” Picture

The United States entered the twenty-first century deeply divided about what it meant to be American. The nation’s debates over racial inequality, free speech, and LGBTQIA+ rights became more intense; its arguments over citizenship and abortion rights grew more partisan; its political tensions became more volatile; allegiances to faith and science clashed over climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Symbols such as the American flag and celebration parades that had denoted shared patriotism in Bain’s photographs appeared in VII’s photos as emblems of disaster and tragedies. Bain’s photographs of the American flags and parades were unabashedly celebratory, and taken to represent American progress, success, national pride, and unity. VII’s photographs of flags and banners and urban crowds were more likely capturing protests or even riots. VII’s photos included images of police violence and social justice movements. The turmoil and uncertainty the nation was faced with after 9/11 and in the wake of the war with Iraq, were inscribed in VII’s intimate, close-up portraits of Americans. Photographs also show both Americans and foreigners holding on to the American flag with faith in the nation and hope that national leaders will do “the right thing” — the American flag embodied and represented the United States’ power and leadership (see Images 66-71).¹⁹

While the promise of the American Dream and a better life in a land of opportunities may have fueled migration desires at the start of the twentieth century, the twenty-first seems to embody more challenges, inequalities, and hostility towards the foreign-born—issues, not frequently addressed in and by news photographers or the press at large. The American nation, once welcoming to crowds of foreigners, was in need of a comprehensive immigration reform starting in the 2000s. President George W. Bush emphasized this point during his address to the

nation on May 15, 2006 in response to recent protests and rallies. In his speech, the president continued the American Dream rhetoric.

Our new immigrants are just what they've always been—people willing to risk everything for the dream of freedom. And America remains what she has always been—the great hope on the horizon, an open door to the future, a blessed and promised land. We honor the heritage of all who come here, no matter where they come from, because we trust in our country's genius for making us all Americans—one Nation under God.²⁰

The goal to rebuild and unite the American nation by putting it before the individual, as inscribed in Roosevelt's 1910 speech on "New Nationalism" in Osawatimie, Kansas, was revisited once again in the 2010's by then president Barack Obama. The ideal of one nation united under one flag has been part of the nation's exceptionalism and American Dream rhetoric for centuries, and on December 6, 2011 President Obama traveled to Osawatimie to remind Americans of their nation's exceptionalism.

The world is shifting to an innovation economy and nobody does innovation better than America. Nobody does it better. No one has better colleges. Nobody has better universities. Nobody has a greater diversity of talent and ingenuity. No one's workers or entrepreneurs are more driven or more daring. The things that have always been our strengths match up perfectly with the demands of the moment ... And we still believe, in the words of the man who called for a New Nationalism all those years ago, "The fundamental rule of our national life," he said, "the rule which underlies all others—is that, on the whole, and in the long run, we shall go up or down together." And I believe America is on the way up.²¹

History scholar James Curran noted that Obama began his presidency by questioning the exceptionalist tradition and putting American exceptionalism "on a par with that of other countries," but he was heavily criticized for it. "Former Republican presidential candidate Mike

Huckabee argued that ‘to deny American exceptionalism is, in essence, to deny the heart and soul of this nation,’” Curran stated. “Obama then spent much of the remainder of his presidency using the rhetoric of exceptionalism—trying, in effect, to be more exceptional than the exceptionalists.”²²

As suggested by Greg Jaffe of *The Washington Post* in an article from June 3, 2015, Obama had searched for an American exceptionalism that felt true to his life experience. He once stated that he believes in American exceptionalism with every fiber of his being and has discussed it on both small and big occasions.²³ These sentiments are evident in the fact that between 2009 and 2017, VII captured the happy American life and the united America proselytized by President Obama. VII’s photos during that time feature the flag as a national symbol in a positive light and with positive messages of hope (see Images 72-79).

Following Obama’s two-term presidency, Donald Trump, elected to be the 45th president of the United States in 2016, became a highly controversial figure. Trump’s policies showed an inward, nation-focused approach, which was offensively deemed “nationalistic” or “fascist,” by many. Trump’s enduring vision of America was inscribed in nationalism, in one’s identification with one’s nation and support for its interests, regardless of the interests of other nations. This was especially true for political leaders prior to the twenty-first century, who sought to protect the American nation’s people and culture, all while displaying the nation’s progress and seeking to influence others to follow its national agenda. Yet, the American nation saw a growing division during Trump’s presidency—from the eruption of the Black Lives Matter Movement, an anti-racism movement originally formed during Obama’s presidency, through immigration restrictions, and the globally devastating Coronavirus pandemic.

Focusing on aiding American-born nationals, Trump imposed tight immigration laws and restrictions such as the building of walls along the US-Mexico border and the separation of children from families crossing illegally into the United States. Trump's foreign policy was defined by the idea of "America First," which largely meant a US retreat from its long-standing global leadership. Jackie Calmes, an opinion columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* noted, "to many Americans who were weary of years of military action and US interventions abroad, Trump's message was a welcome one. Many felt that globalization had put American workers behind international interests, and they supported what they saw as Trump's defense of their livelihoods."²⁴

Trump's presidency was often criticized for being focused on domestic (national) vs. foreign (global) politics and affairs. During his first State of the Union address on January 31, 2018, Trump, just like many of his predecessors, appealed to the nation with the myths of the self-made man and the American Dream, but strongly noted that the Dream belongs to Americans; "This is our New American Moment," Trump said. "There has never been a better time to start living the American dream."

If you work hard, if you believe in yourself, if you believe in America, then you can dream anything, you can be anything, and together, we can achieve anything...All of us, together, as one team, one people, and one American family. We all share the same home, the same heart, the same destiny, and the same great American flag. Together, we are rediscovering the American way.²⁵

While presidential rhetoric, by and large, bears no direct resemblance to what was or is happening in the country, the messages serve as the nation's public relations efforts to boost America's image both at home and abroad. A centralized institution and visual information

gatekeeper, Bain News Service helped these efforts. Bain's news photographs from the early twentieth century closely mimicked the highfaluting tone of the speeches supporting America's greatness, its status as a welcoming "melting pot," a progressive city builder, a land of beauty and abundance. In contrast, VII's photos showed images that more closely resembled American reality—a reality of poverty, homelessness, and rampant inequalities in the cities and a land defined by decay and pollution. Many of those images revealed the sore division within the American people—on one hand violence and protests undermined the American flag, on another, the American flag still symbolized faith and hope for the American nation (see Images 80-84).

As evident in VII's photographs, the agency, as a decentralized journalistic entity, helped deconstruct the idyllic image of America that Bain helped build in the early twentieth century. A "new" image of the nation is now being manufactured with the help of global photo contributors, along with ordinary citizens, and distributed hastily via social media channels. The new American image appears to conflict with the nation's leadership and more often represents the varied views of the American people.



Image 66: “NY Post 9-11 [vigil]. A woman cries during a prayer vigil in the Yankee Stadium in New York City, which is held for the Victims of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, September 23, 2001. Christopher Morris/VII. September 23, 2001.” Screenshot.



Image 67: “NY Post 9-11 [flag]. An US National Guard soldier stands in front of an American flag close to the remains of the World Trade Center in New York City on the days following the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. Christopher Morris/VII. January 9, 2001.” Screenshot.



Image 68: “NY Anti-War Protest 2003. Two protestors pretend to drink from fuel canisters at a demonstration by tens of thousands of anti-war protestors near United Nations headquarters in New York City. Thousands flocked to a huge rally against a possible war with Iraq, after a New York judge denied organizers a permit for a march through the city’s streets. Ron Haviv/VII. February 15, 2003. New York.” Screenshot.



Image 69: “Afghanistan. A soldier holds US propaganda, with the watchful eyes of a local Afghani boy nearby, in the village of Goranda, Afghanistan on April 24, 2003. Civil affairs units have handed out the propaganda to Afghan civilians, it is used to explain the military position and to win hearts and minds of local Afghanistan villagers. Ed Kashi/VII. April 25, 2003.” Screenshot.



Image 70: “Kurds. Kurdish children pose in front of graffiti of the American flag and the Kurdish flag in a camp in Kirkuk, Iraq. This camp is for internally displaced persons, victims of Saddam Hussein’s “Arabization” program. Ed Kashi/VII. April 2, 2004. Iraq.” Screenshot.



Image 71: “Hispanic US Soldiers. A Puerto Rican girl carries a sign that says “My father is in Iraq defending federal welfare,” during the US Independence Day parade in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Tomas van Houtryve/VII. July 4, 2003.” Screenshot.



Image 72: “East Village. An American flag waves in front of Schaffer’s, a clothing store in the East Village of Des Moines. The historic neighborhood was threatened with demolition, until a group of preservationists and business people came together to refurbish and update the area as a hip, mixed-use space with many restaurants and specialty shops. Danny Wilcox Frazier/VII. July 2, 2008.” Screenshot.



Image 73: “New York Business District. Buildings from the New York business district after the financial meltdown in New York city on April 1, 2009. Ziyah Gafic/VII. December 17, 2010. New York.” Screenshot.



Image 74: "Iowa Caucus. Senator Joe Biden greeting participants of the Memorial Day parade in Waterloo. Democratic and Republican presidential hopefuls descend upon the state of Iowa to win support in the Iowa caucus. Danny Wilcox Frazier/VII. May 27, 2007." Screenshot.



Image 75: "Fourth of July Parade. A float in the Independence Day parade in Clear Lake, Iowa. Over the Fourth of July weekend, three presidential candidates campaigned across Iowa, the leadoff state in the nomination process. Danny Wilcox Frazier/VII. July 4, 2011." Screenshot.



Image 76: "Dayton Ohio. A patriotic sign hangs outside of a local parking lot. Ed Kashi/VII. October 20, 2012." Screenshot.



Image 77: "California Drought. Doyle McGill photographed at home. Ed Kashi/VII. June 29, 2014. Farmersville, California. Screenshot.



Image 78: “Personal. An American flag is reflected in the window of a storefront. Ed Kashi/VII. July 4, 2014. Central Valley, California.” Screenshot.



Image 79: “Mustang 50th Anniversary. Fans gather to see the display of a new Mustang at the Charlotte Motor Speedway for the 50th Anniversary celebration of the Ford Mustang. Ed Kashi/VII. April 18, 2014. Charlotte, North Carolina.” Screenshot.



Image 80: “Newark, New Jersey George Floyd Protest. More than 3,000 protesters converged on downtown to protest police violence, triggered by the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Ed Kashi/VII. May 30, 2020.” Screenshot.



Image 81: “Black Lives Matter Protests in NYC and DC. Black Lives Matter painted on an American flag from a protest in Washington, DC. John Stanmeyer/VII. June 6, 2020.” Screenshot.

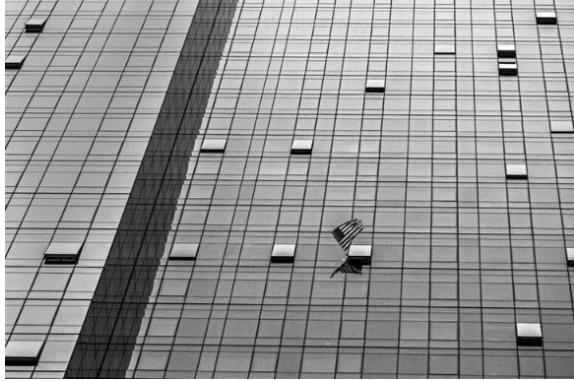


Image 82: “Groundhog Day. New Yorkers join the ritual from around the world celebrating front line workers every evening at 7pm. Ron Haviv/VII. April 14, 2020. New York.” Screenshot.



Image 83: “Latinx Workers. Guatemalan field workers harvest cantaloupes on the outskirts of Maricopa County. Ed Kashi/VII. July 29, 2020. Aguila, Arizona.” Screenshot.

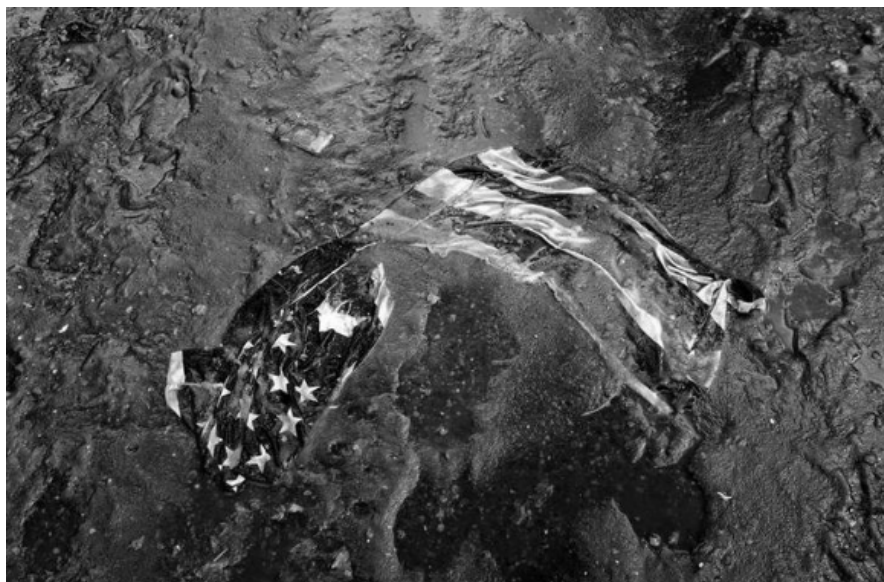


Image 84: “Labyrinth. After a snowy night on the 40th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the American flag has been thrown into the mud of the street in Tabriz, Iran. Farshid Tighehsaz/VII Mentor Program. February 11, 2020. Tabriz, East Azerbaijan.” Screenshot.

While most of the news photographs held in VII's archive have a global nature and scope, the agency's individual photographers' focus on the American nation has been clear since the inception of the agency and is evident in some of the photographic book titles offered in the agency's online bookstore. "Dispatches in America," (2008) features an essay on exceptionalism and a photo essay titled "In God's Country," produced by photographer Antonin Kratochvil in which he takes his critical eye from coast to coast. "My America" (2006), by founding member and photographer Christopher Morris, takes the viewers through George W. Bush's "Republican America and American nationalism." "Hopefully," Morris said, "you will see what I saw and feel what I felt a nation that has wrapped its eyes so tightly in red, white and blue that it has gone blind. This is 'My America.'" The second book in the series, "Americans," (2007) has Morris presenting a nation in a state of perpetual loss and its people searching for an identity.²⁶

VII has sought social change for both the divided American nation and the world. As a result, in addition to news photography and books, VII has initiated several long-term projects many of which have focused on the United States and its need to unite its people.

In 2014, VII launched the "Newest Americans: Stories from the Global City," a three-year longitudinal study at Rutgers University, Newark that documented the lives of university students, immigrants, and general ideas about American identity.²⁷ "Newest Americans" was conceived in a moment when immigration was "cresting a wave in the public consciousness." By 2016, cities and counties across New Jersey and the country were shifting to minority majority populations, DACA was altering the lives of hundreds of thousands of young people, and a backlash against immigrants helped fuel a presidential campaign.²⁸ The project "honors the past, present and future of our migrating identities" as a multimedia collaboration of "journalists, media-makers, artists, faculty, and students telling the stories that radiate from the most diverse

university in the nation and the global city of Newark, NJ (see image 85).²⁹ As part of the project, VII launched the Newark Story Bus, a mobile lab for sharing and collecting stories that make Newark a global city. The city was promoted as one “defined by immigration and the Great Migration—by the movement of people from across the globe and around the country who have sought opportunity here and left their imprints in return” (see image 86).³⁰

In 2017, to rediscover the American identity and Americans’ sense of belonging, VII’s Ron Haviv invited citizens to share photographic memories from unprocessed film rolls. With over 300 images “The Lost Rolls America” project asked contributors to provide one roll of film and choose one image. The contributors were then asked to offer a brief write-up while sharing the meaning of their chosen photo and the significance of re-viewing a piece of their personal, sometimes lost past. These observations, as noted on the “Lost Rolls” website, “offer points of identification, through descriptions of similar memories or associations, for other viewers of this collective experience.” The goal of “Lost Rolls America” is the creation of a national archive of images from the lost rolls of the public. “It is a form of collective memory that prioritizes the role of photos in constructing our personal and shared pasts. In revisiting the past, this project also encourages contemplation of how the present and future will be remembered” the project website noted (see image 87).³¹

One year before Election Day on November 3, 2020, VII began its year-long election coverage, “America, Again.” With this project VII photographers intended to focus the voters’ attention on the nation’s issues vs. the political candidates. The project also aimed to “produce stories on material issues that people worldwide are wrangling with, not only Americans,” according to a VII online statement. “We’ll cover issues that are used to divide us, and that allow populist politicians to undermine the values that are foundational to our societies.”³²

In 2020, Ed Kashi, another VII member, “took the pulse” of the “troubled” American nation in his journey through the country. Kashi covered the first 30 days of a 100-day journey across America, from Los Angeles and Southern California to Arizona, then New Mexico, Texas, finally ending in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the run-up to the 2020 elections. The stories covered by the team of photographers, headed by Kashi, engaged in some of the most critical issues in the social and political makeup of twenty-first century’s United States—the politics, the border wall, immigration, the homeless, the LA porn industry, the weed industry, religion, culture, school reopening, and what daily life during the pandemic is like.³³ Kashi compiled his photographs in a photo essay titled “America Again,” with chapters on individual states, the environment, the American dreams, myths, hopes, and fears. The photographs are featured on both VII’s blog site and Ed Kashi’s personal portfolio.³⁴

Another member photographer, Ashley Gilbertson, spent eight months documenting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy with focus on New York City. Titled “A city ruptured: The pandemic’s toll on New York City’s economy and way of life was laid bare on its streets,” *The New York Times* featured the project photographs to expose widening inequality, the changing ways of life and work for Americans (see image 88).³⁵



Image 85: “Newest Americans,” *Stories* page from August 1, 2022, <newestamericans.com/stories>. Screenshot.



Image 86: “Newark Story Bus” homepage from August 1, 2022, <newestamericans.com/experiences/newark-story-bus>. Screenshot.



Image 87: “Lost Rolls America” website from August 1, 2022, <lostrollsamerica.com/about>. Screenshot.



Image 88: “A City Ruptured,” *The New York Times*’ August 1, 2022, <nytimes.com/interactive/2021/03/09/business/economy/covid-nyc-economy.html>. Screenshot.

Since its inception in 2001, VII has successfully adopted numerous innovative practices and storytelling avenues, making it a unique, multi-faceted organization and a fascinating case study of a business that has dramatically had to pivot in response to digitalization and globalization. In an interview with the VII agency's staff in 2018, writer and photographer Sam Edmonds noted that the world of photojournalism had changed to the point where it was "practically unrecognizable." "The influences of citizen journalism, the World Press aesthetic and the epoch of iPhone photography have drastically influenced the discourse of professional reportage and in place of aesthetic documentation, a mass of shock-value imagery saturates media," Edmonds stated.³⁶ The main driving force behind these transformations has undoubtedly been the advent of mobile phone photography that has allowed private images to become public and to circulate around the globe without attracting too much attention to the photographer. In turn, the intricacy of the public sphere in terms of techniques, styles, genres, and themes exploded.

In a 2012 interview for *Wired*, Stephen Mayes of the VII agency suggested, "given that an image is defined by its context it exists in a perpetually fluid environment in which the context is never fixed. Images' meanings morph, move and can exist in multiple places and meanings at one time."³⁷ As a result, the way audiences relate to imagery is changing too. While in the past, photographic images were about being an evidentiary, today photos are more about making connections, via sharing and streaming. What Mayes is alluding to is the fact that historical conditions and economic, political, societal, technological, and ideological forces have affected news photography and content, and news photo agencies, as independent suppliers of photographs to the press, have been fundamentally entwined in those forces, too.

The "new" image fluidity comes with implications for authenticity and accuracy of photographic representations. This, in turn, intersects with issues in representation of values,

attitudes, and ideologies, both locally and globally. As noted by visual anthropologist Zeynep Devrim Gürsel, “certain photographs become news images, acquiring and, occasionally, losing value and credibility through their circulation. Even in a digital age, their production and circulation is far from automatic; it is determined by image brokers.”³⁸

Andy Patrick, former CEO of VII, summed up the situation in a 2017 interview for *Capture Magazine*.

With the billion or so images uploaded to the Internet every day, it is now even more important that a distinction be made between being able to “snap a picture” and being able to develop a visual story that has intimacy with its subjects, authenticity in its approach, and heart at its core. The younger generations in particular now use images as their primary means of communicating. Details of this vernacular are still evolving, but the requirement for authenticity is a key element. As some of the most authentic humans on the planet, photojournalists and documentary photographers are central to our understanding of what it means to be alive. In this sense, there could not be a more important time for our craft.³⁹

While early twentieth century photographers’ voices were “silenced” by publishing moguls like William Randolph Hearst and Rupert Murdoch, photographers of the twenty-first century are faced with a situation in which there is a perception of free speech and wide access to information, when the “strangle hold” has just been replaced by giant technology companies like Google, Amazon, and Apple. “We are increasingly finding that our image is being misrepresented, or represented on our behalf,” Mayes wrote, “and probably more than it was before because journalists used to be the gateway into magazines and distribution.”⁴⁰

As the control of photographic representation by the news photo industry moved into the hands of a global multitude of independent image brokers, stock photo agencies, and ordinary citizens, new representational practices began to wreck a havoc on America’s image. Stuart Hall,

then, had rightfully suggested that “people who work in the media are producing, reproducing, and transforming the field of ideological representation itself.”⁴¹ Hall’s observation is true not just for news outlets and photo agencies, but also for individuals. In the twenty-first century, John Tagg’s idea that photography is an *institutionalized* practice—one endowed with the means for control and surveillance—has also begun to fade away. The power and control of representation, which used to be a prerogative of the centralized news photo agencies like Bain News Service, are slipping away. In turn, changes in representational practices are affecting the global cultural and political fronts, which the next chapter discusses in detail.

Endnotes

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Chapter 7: Towards Diplomacy of “The Public:” News Photography and the Networked Politics of Representation

News photographs offer worldviews to their audiences, helping them make meaning of their lives, surroundings, and experiences—giving their audiences context, showing them what is happening in their own communities, and giving them a glimpse of events far beyond what they are able to see for themselves. By depicting everyday life and extraordinary situations, publically seen occasions, and hidden affairs, images in the press play the role of catalysts not only for individual identity formation, but also for cultural and ideological production.

During George Grantham Bain’s era in the early 1900s, the worldviews in syndicated news photos expressed the ruling American elites’ imperialistic, exceptionalistic, and nationalistic ideals. As the founder of the first news photo agency in the United States, George Grantham Bain was central to the nation’s image-building efforts. 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. Bain News Service was among the first commercial global visual representation providers in the early 1900s. His photography service began its “journey” in international relations and global ideological exchanges years before major players such as Western Union transmitted the first halftone photograph by wire in 1921 and the Associated Press’ commenced its wire photo service in 1935. Bain’s news photography not only represented the agendas of the president and other leaders, but it also revealed national ideals that circulated beyond the nation’s borders. Bain’s early twentieth-century news photographs depicted elite’s values and ideals of exceptionalism, nationalism, and the American Dream.

In Stuart Hall's view, news values are evident in the operational practices of "editors, working over a set of prints, to select, rank, classify, and elaborate the photographs" in terms of the "knowledge" they hold and in terms of the readers' consensus about the world around them.¹ In these terms, early twentieth-century news photography, and the agencies that enabled the connections among governments, photographers, publishers, and audiences worldwide, can be seen as key players in the process of globalization, with Bain News Service being an early American example.

Bain furnished carefully crafted and selected images that framed the American nation as prosperous and united. Bain's photographs were powerful tools of representation; they aligned with status-quo values and political ideologies of the American presidents of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Bain's news images advertised a growing and already mighty nation at home, united in its purpose, exceptional in its morals and imperialist in its missionary zeal to bring those values to the rest of the globe. The photos helped build broad support for the economic and political goals of the nation, highlighting a knowledge/power discourse (à la Foucault) in favor of an exceptional United States. By visually "confirming" America's national character and power, Bain's photographs helped build those.

7.1. The "Globalized" Eye

Representations of national power are part of the agenda of diplomats and the military, of journalists and social scientists, of economists and psychologists. In a process referred to as "soft" diplomacy, the cultural and ideological messages featured across all media—and perhaps

especially in the visual medium of news photographs—mobilize minds.⁴ Globalization and international communication provide the backdrop for technologically driven constructions of individual identities. Public debates on such issues as policy formations, nation-state relations, identity politics, often taking place in the media, continually define global culture. “Culture as modernism, assumes the primacy of the institutional and cultural/communicative practices that emerge within the socio-economic space of European industrial and urban growth, and then becomes transmuted as a mediated vocabulary for cultural and economic development globally,” wrote communication scholars Anandam Kavoori and Kalyani Chadha.

[C]ulture as postmodernism is reflected in the emergence of not only a new kind of social and economic accounting (culture as consumption) but also a specific semiotic universe (a globally interconnected, rapidly mobile landscape of signifiers) and new vocabularies for cultural mediation. At the heart of this process is the articulation of identity politics (race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity), which is reflexively engaged within the associated realms of technology, performance, cross-cultural transference and regulated violence (across both state and non-state actors).²

As defined by globalization scholar Malcolm Waters, globalization itself is “a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding” and argued that there are human forces beyond the expansion of capitalism and commodification.³ These forces transform nations and their citizens worldwide. Waters suggested that no matter the fluidity of the term, globalization is always grounded in three “fundamental regions” of social life:

⁴ George Creel and Newton D. Baker, *How We Advertised America*, 1920 Reprint (New York: Forgotten Books, 2012), xiii. Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War, at a dinner given to George Creel, head of the Committee on Public Information, in 1918, targeted efforts in the dissemination of strategic information about the American involvement in the First World War. The event illustrates the ways ideologies can influence and manipulate media messages.

1. the economy, or the social arrangements for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods;
2. the polity or the social arrangements for the concentration and application of power;
3. the culture, or the social arrangements for the production, exchange and expression of symbols that represent facts, affects, meanings, beliefs, commitments preferences, tastes, and values.⁴

Waters claimed that while material exchanges localize and political exchanges internationalize, symbolic exchanges—such as those seen in visual representations—globalize. News photographs, as powerful vehicles for symbolic exchanges, serve to spread ideas and ideologies embedded in nations' political and diplomatic practices. As Bain's agency made evident, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, news photographs played a central role in the way elites presented positive nation-focused ideological representations. By the latter twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, photographers used news photographs to make audiences around the world visibly aware of the failures of governments to guarantee the advantages of nationhood.

Technological advancements in the twenty-first century have bridged the space/time gap among nations and in so doing have accelerated the phenomenon of globalization, with all its accompanying problems and benefits. As communication scholar Guo-Ming Chen noted, globalization has changed the representations and perceptions of nations, societies, communities, groups, and individuals around the world. It has re-configured the way cultural identity, or the feeling of belonging to a group, is (re)created. "In other words, the use of new media is shaking the root of cultural identity by weakening or strengthening the intensity of the relationship

between people and community. The time and space compression caused by the convergence of new media and globalization creates a universal cyberspace in which new cultural identity is emerging in different virtual communities.”⁵ The notion of national character is being reshaped. The changes have been reflected in and affected by the pictorial transmission of national ideas and values both to domestic and international audiences. News photography and journalism have been central to these efforts.

Over a century ago, news photographs, such as those provided by Bain News Service, were key players in the state’s information infrastructure used to communicate *strategic narratives* in an international relations setting—a practice intended to influence the behaviors of others at home and overseas.⁶ As noted by political communication scholars Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, each nation’s information infrastructure, or the organizational structure of communication and information dissemination, is at the center of these strategic narratives. Not surprising then, that political leaders in 1900 and still a hundred years later, have striven to secure information infrastructure. Mass media play critical roles, as they serve to project strategic narratives.

As Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle argue, the development of media technologies has not been solely for governance and administration purposes; they have created a “qualitative sense of community, nationhood, and identity...It stands to reason, then, that information infrastructure must be central to any account of international society and identity, of international norms, beliefs, and habits, or of how leaders and citizens experience international relations.”⁷ Bain’s news photo agency at the start of the twentieth century helped promulgate the strategic narratives that projected America’s exceptional image and reputation abroad.

7.2. News Photographs as Strategic Narratives

The press alongside the large-scale news services such as AP, and the first news photo agencies such as Bain's, aided America's strategic communications and "diplomatic" efforts prior to the First World War. By then, news photos had become a regular part of the repertoire of every print publication both at home and abroad. As the war commenced, however, the visual messages of and about the United States had shifted. In the estimation of the White House, the press was not providing enough positive information to the world, so a week after the United States entered the war, President Wilson ordered the Committee of Public Information (CPI) or the Creel Committee—to be created to provide government-sanctioned messages about the United States. The CPI appears to have been the first formal government organization to export words and images overseas to garner support—and admiration—for the United States government.

In *How We Advertised America*, George Creel, a journalist and the head of CPI, pointed to the importance of not merely imagining a nation's strength, but witnessing it with the help of the press and images. By showing the foreign press everything and concealing nothing, the foreign press would become enthusiastic believers not only in America's power, but in the nation's idealism, Creel wrote.⁸ His role, under President Wilson, was undoubtedly grounded in the idea to spread "the gospel of Americanism," and represented one of the first official attempts to convince the world to follow American idealism. With the help of the mass media, "Creel worked to project America's image as powerful, industrialized, free, and just society that others should emulate. Explaining the American dream, Creel assumed, would promote converts and imitators and accelerate global acceptance of than international order based on American values" wrote historian Emily Rosenberg.⁹

At least since the formation of the CPI in 1917, however, the United States government has been conflicted about how to best explain and export the American versions and values of freedom, democracy, and peace. As the First World War intensified, for instance, the federal government's control of communication strengthened and that control, together with the war itself, strengthened the government's belief in national exceptionalism. The end of the war did not put a period to those beliefs, instead they "spurred vigorous projection outward of new forms of cultural, economic, and political expansionism in the period after 1919," historian Ian Tyrrell wrote. "The increasing role of (American-led) transnational organizations, the policy of formal and ideological anti-colonialism and the extension of American media and communications pointed towards this new post-imperial world order. At the same time, international forces accentuated the tendencies of Americans to retreat behind a cultural as well as political wall of their own making," Tyrrell noted.¹⁰

As a public diplomacy tool of representation, news photographs of the first decades of the twentieth century were influential. Public diplomacy at its core is the idea that governments and institutions use various communication techniques to portray a certain image of a nation and attract foreigners to it. The tools of public diplomacy include using media messages and images with the central purpose to infuse a positive view of a nation, its people, policies, culture, and way of life. Another critical part of public diplomacy is cultural diplomacy. While a political system produces public diplomacy for a political purpose, according to cultural scholar David Clarke, a scholar of culture, cultural diplomacy recycles the products of a country's cultural life toward foreign policy goals. "Stated simply," Clarke writes, "cultural diplomacy is the deployment of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy."¹¹

The United States' reputation as a global superpower, once expressed mostly via the country's "hard power" or the ability to get people *to do what it wants*, was slowly getting enriched by the nation's "soft power," or its ability to get people *to want what it does*.¹² Even before its founding, and ever since, the United States has drawn on all its assets—its geography, natural resources, and population, along with its economic, political, military, psychological, and informational advantages and muscle to sway other countries and peoples to support its objectives.¹³ The press and news photo agencies like Bain News Service helped facilitate, even if not entirely consciously, American persuasion during the early twentieth century.

Political scientist Joseph S. Nye, Jr. observed that international power is not limited by the exercise of military force and territorial conquest. He coined the term *co-optive* power to describe the indirect way countries "encourage" others to want what they have. "Co-optive power can rest on the attraction of one's ideas or on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences that others express," Nye wrote. "The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions."¹⁴ The spread of news photography beyond the United States' national borders via the news photo agency in the early twentieth century is a prime example of the informational, or co-optive, element of national power. The modern and post-modern nation-state can influence the preferences and goals of other nations via photography. The "evidence" provided in pictures can help countries affirm and even (re)create realities that were once merely imagined.

News photographs are tools for strategic narratives and as such, cultural diplomacy appropriates them as it engineers exchanges of ideas, information, art, and culture. Cultural diplomacy is "an important component of the broader endeavor of public diplomacy, which

basically comprises all that a nation does to explain itself to the world,” wrote diplomacy scholar Cynthia P. Schneider.¹⁵

Similarly, former journalist and photography sociologist Mary Angela Bock has noted that politics has always relied on visual messaging by building monuments, minting coins, or even by giving speeches in front of historic backdrops. Leaders have long used visuals to their benefit. Yet visual propaganda poses problems for journalists, which digitization has intensified, as politicians are able to flood communication channels— now including social media—with partisan imagery themselves. “Visual journalists are routinely roped into political stagecraft, as the routines of coverage become ever more tightly controlled by those in office. They have very little freedom when covering a President,” Bock wrote. “Their access to events is limited, and once credentialed for these events, their literal movement—one of the most important dimensions of the choices they have in making an image—is tightly controlled.”¹⁶

A study of Bain, his competitors, and those who followed him in the twentieth century helps explain how news photography grew domestically and internationally and contributed to and/or challenged the representation and discourses of power. The establishment of the news photo agency as an institution brings valuable discussion points when connected to the power of visual representations, the changing news values within the field of journalism, and ultimately, the legitimization of national images on a global scale. Art historian John Tagg argued that 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 representation and regulation were central to the restructuring of local and national states in industrialized societies.¹⁷

As Tagg furthermore suggested, the late twentieth-century development of distinct photographic practices is enveloped by the historical development of distinct economic and institutional structures of which the Bain News Service is exemplary.¹⁸ Historians can see Bain News Service as a journalistic institution central to the exercise of soft power. George Bain's entrepreneurial skill set, combined with his keen journalistic eye, led to an even greater commodification of news photographs as in the century past (e.g. as Mathew Brady's Civil War images were deployed). Bain's news photo agency became a visual mass communication force.

Following WWI, the standardization of news photographic practices by international news services such as the Associated Press, Reuters, United Press International, among others, served as a turning point for news photo agencies. As Jürgen Habermas has noted, the reaction of the state to a "power-penetrated public" sphere was expressed in the formation of these agencies.¹⁹ "Editorial opinions recede[d] behind information from press agencies and reports from correspondents; critical debate disappear[ed] behind the veil of internal decisions concerning the selection and presentation of the material," Habermas wrote.²⁰

Large-scale international news services came to dominate visual information and communication channels around the world facilitating the spread of national agendas across international borders. According to a UNESCO 1953 report, "in principle, none of these agencies was subject to political influence. They were independent of governments, but governments and agencies rendered each other certain services by publishing communiques and news items issued by Ministries."²¹ These agencies, just like the early news photo services, became the new gatekeeping hubs for the flow of images in the global public sphere.

As the global "imagined community" (Anderson) was growing with the help of the mass media and the centralized news (photo) agencies, so were the material and intellectual production

and exchange. Globalization processes forced the intellectual creations of individual nations to become common property, and as Karl Marx had predicted a century earlier, the national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness started to become more and more impossible.²² To add to the challenges, with the help of twentieth-century's unidirectional mass media, the public sphere became dramatically widened and later, with the popularization of the twenty-first-century's multidirectional Internet, the public sphere grew even more complex. Diversity of interests, world-views and cultural life forms, along with an inflated volume of messages, ideas and images in circulation, all suggest that the contemporary politics of representation is becoming ever more deeply entangled in the processes of mass communication and information technology networks (Castells).²³

7.3. Citizen Witnessing and the “Decentralized Aesthetic of Every Day”

Since Bain's time, advancements in photographic equipment, techniques, and business practices have expanded the production of visuals in various formats and with a wider distribution. In the twenty-first century, digitalization and convergence have fueled the speed of image dissemination and fostered the opportunity for mass self-publishing. Modern technologies have also opened avenues for image alterations and the strong faith in the authenticity of the news photo has been losing its momentum under the pressures of the Internet and citizen journalism.

The centralized news photo agency of the twentieth century has now been replaced by digital, decentralized global (stock) photo agencies. While these agencies have adopted some of the practices of the first news photo agencies such as Bain's, they offer a much wider variety of

news items beyond photographs. As a result, the distinction between creative, advertising, news, and editorial content being produced by professionals and amateurs alike has been diminishing over the past century. The line between public and private has also grown blurry making the authority of news photographs highly questionable. The news photo agency, as a centralized media institution, has disintegrated and with it, the authenticity of images has all but disappeared as well.

With the widespread adoption of the Internet at the beginning of the new millennium, business and commerce took on a different approach. The United States entered the twenty-first century as a leading developer and proponent of Internet and satellite technologies, which led to new windows of opportunity to spread American culture across the globe. The development of Web 2.0 with its user-generated content, the growth of social networking sites, the massive accumulation of personal, corporate, and historical bodies of photographs in online databases and archives, and the invention of the camera-phone, have all changed the ways in which photographs are produced and consumed. VII successfully adapted to these changes evident in the agency's use of mobile photography, digital archiving, and swift global image distribution between its worldwide branches and clientele.

In the twenty-first century, according to media and culture historian Martin Lister, new forms of photojournalism have emerged and the practices of snapshot and personal photography have shifted. "In the same time frame, the distinction between the still and the moving image has become hard to secure, the chemical photograph has become an historical artefact and its traditional means of production have become all but unavailable," Lister noted.²⁴

VII's approach to long-form photo reportage of global social and political issues and the agency's up-close-and-personal visual storytelling supports this shift. In addition, VII has had to

adapt to the growth of audience-produced media, or citizen journalism. According to media scholar Stuart Allan, citizen journalism is seen in

First-person eyewitness accounts, audio recordings, video footage, mobile or cell phone and digital camera photographs, and the like, typically shared online via email or through bulletin-boards, blogs, wikis, personal webpages and social networking sites. Described variously as ‘user-generated content’ as well as ‘grassroots journalism,’ open source journalism, ‘distributed journalism’ or networked journalism,’ amongst further alternatives, there is little doubt that it is realigning traditional news reporting’s communicative priorities and protocols, sometimes in profound ways.²⁵

This has created what Allan calls “witnessing,” which characterizes ordinary citizens as eyewitnesses, observers, spectators, and grants these citizens “the capacity to participate in news-making by sharing what they have seen felt, or heard at the scene.”²⁶

A prime example of witnessing is the social media photography website Flickr. Created in 2004, Flickr is an image and video hosting service and a virtual photo community. Flickr’s users can upload images and create albums of photographs with searchable keywords, categories, and/or tags. Users are allowed to write notes, comment on photos, and participate in contact lists and groups. As a freely accessible and searchable online database, Flickr also allows news media to access a large catalog of photographs that are mostly free for publication in the press. In this sense, the emergence of Flickr, and similar photo-hosting and photo-sharing websites, have complicated twenty-first-century visual representations and the business of news photo agencies at large.

According to media scholar Susan Murray, Flickr serves as a “shared display of memory, taste, history, daily life, and judgments through which amateur and professional photographers collectively articulate a novel, digitized (and decentralized) aesthetic of the everyday.” In Murray’s view, such collaborative channels help photography becomes more alive and

immediate and the digital camera more of an essential tool in the navigation and documentation of daily life. “This is a definitive shift in our temporal relationship with the everyday image and has altered the way that we construct narratives about ourselves and the world around us,” Murray wrote.”²⁷ But it is not just the temporal relationship with everyday images that has changed. Historical accounts that help build and sustain the nation’s collective memory are also being altered. A prime example of these developments, and one worthy of future investigation, is the Bain Collection Flickr account curated by the Library of Congress.²⁸ The account features a portion of Bain’s photographs where Flickr community members can add comments, notes, and tags, with the potential of altering facts and history and ascribing meanings out of context—or perhaps doing the opposite, in giving voice to those people and/or events mis- or underrepresented in the images and their captions.

7.4. “Branding” of the United States in the New Millennium

While at the turn of the twentieth century, the news photo services were centralized institutions with authority over communication channels, the postmodern, twenty-first-century visual landscape is largely defined by digital networks of communication and citizen-produced visual media that further complicate the global public sphere. As the Internet revolutionized communication channels, it offered a decentralized and democratized public sphere, all while altering national images and the global political climate at large.

In an article titled *Perceptions of US Public Diplomacy*, Lionel Beehner, staff writer for the Council on Foreign Relations, sided with the former director of the International Broadcasting Bureau, Geoffrey Cowan. Beehner asserted, “nations are affected by the images that others hold of them in their minds. If people see America as being arrogant, greedy, or

ruthless, they're less likely to want to be partners with us at the highest level of government, or buy our products."²⁹ News images are key in international relations, especially at times when diplomatic efforts, as established by governments, are scarce. When diplomatic efforts are limited or absent, as was often the case in the pre-and post WWI era, it is arguable that the early news photographic services played a key role as informal public diplomacy agents. Bain News Service painted a mostly idyllic look of an exceptional United States. The VII agency, a hundred years later, pictured the frayed edges of the United States.

In the twenty-first century, the changing discourse of diplomacy, together with the more general exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples, has grown vastly complicated. According to Nye, the decline in the attractiveness of the United States since 9/11 comes from explicit and implicit views of how it exercises and abuses power. "Messages and images are conveyed partly by government policies at home and abroad, and partly by popular and higher culture," Nye reminded.³⁰ Nye noted that the role of the United States as a dominant force in the world has created an increasingly difficult terrain to persuasively exercise soft power. "The problem of the United States will be less the rising challenge of another major power than a general diffusion of power," he wrote.³¹

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, notably since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, DC, diplomacy has become a more fluid exercise that in part reflects emerging trends in international relations. Diplomacy is no longer state-centric, Beehner agreed with Nye, but composed of multiple actors and networks, including mainstream and social media, operating in an ever-changing global environment. "Public diplomacy entails the efforts—international publications, broadcasts, cultural, and educational exchanges—to shape public perceptions of the United States abroad."³²

The news photo agencies of the past and present—along with freelance photographers and ordinary citizens—belong to the group of “actors” that affect America’s image at home and abroad. The depictions of the US and the world found in VII’s archives reflect the twenty-first century’s political, cultural, and visual climates. The images produced by a closely networked team of international photographers and differ dramatically from those found in Bain’s catalog. While Bain News Service focused on domestic affairs and promoted the image of a prosperous nation in the first two decades of the twentieth century, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century VII focused on exposing the inequalities in the United States and the global challenges posed by climate change, poverty, war, and violence.

News photography was a near-invisible diplomatic tool during the era of traditional media. The photographs lived in a public sphere—a mostly one-way communication bubble, where the elite minority with a political and economic agenda spoke to the majority of communicationally disempowered citizens. Then came the World Wide Web, the smart phone, and social media and cancelling the unidirectional traffic between speakers and listeners in the public sphere. The public became narrators, reporters, editors and broadcasters. In so doing, everyone became a diplomatic messenger. Yet, the messages are not just continuous, they are cacophonous, out of synch, and divisive, surely sending conflicted messages to Americans and the world.³³

It is a truism now to say, as sociologist Manuel Castells noted, that the global public sphere revolves around global communication networks that rely on “mass self-communication,” or citizen-produced content circulating on social media channels. As a result, Castells noted, “public diplomacy, as the diplomacy of the public, not of the government, intervenes in this

global public sphere, laying the ground for traditional forms of diplomacy to act beyond the strict negotiation of power relationships by building on shared cultural meaning.”³⁴

The critical issues conditioning everyday life for people and their governments in every country are largely produced and shaped by globally interdependent processes that move beyond the realm of ostensibly sovereign state territories ... [Furthermore], the structure of opportunities for political action is no longer defined by the national/international dualism but is now located in the “global” arena. Global politics have turned into global domestic politics, which rob national politics of their boundaries and foundations.³⁵

The new public sphere, according to Castells, has decreased the power of national institutions (including the media), to act as authoritative mechanisms. As a result, as in the example of VII, nongovernmental actors become the advocates of the needs, interests, and values of people at large, while undermining the role of governments in response to challenges posed by globalization and structural transformation.³⁶

In a sense, the new public sphere offers multiple, decentralized channels for the branding of a nation. As noted by Danish business historian Mads Mordhorst, a brand is defined by a collection of symbols, experiences, and associations, which help position and differentiate goods or services from the “competition.”

The nation-state is in its core content a brand, which has been built up around a constructed identity, both internally and externally; they have been shaped by images that distinguish nations from each other. What has changed in the last decades is the degree of integration of business, economy, culture, and politics, and the efforts to use these images and identities in a broad strategic manner.³⁷

Mordhorst has found that nation branding has facilitated the globalization of nationalism. This is evident in:

1. the shifting focus of national identity from a set of internal concerns to a more external orientation in which national branding is used by the state in promotion of its interests; and,
2. the way nation branding is moving nationalism out of its traditional political, cultural, and ideological field and into the marketplace and domain of global competition for prosperity.³⁸

Daniel Tisch, a Canadian communication advisor, noted three factors that drive branding and national reputations: 1) perceptions of its environment (e.g. welcoming people, beauty, lifestyle); 2) exercise of governance (e.g. public safety, ethics, international responsibility, social and economic policies); and 3) the state of the economy (e.g. educated and reliable workforce, contributions to global culture, high-quality products and services). Strong reputations create economic opportunities. Ultimately, the successful “branding” of a nation, according to Tisch, is “based on emotion and reason, the product of our impressions of a nation’s actions and its communications, as well as our deep-seated perceptions, stereotypes, influences, and direct experiences. In an age of empowered, networked publics, the value of a country’s reputation is rising—as is the importance of managing it as one of its greatest assets.”³⁹

As this dissertation has already suggested, media and news photographs are key in the creation of perceptions, stereotypes, influences, and representations. The millennial shift in photographic practices facilitated by the ease of digital distribution and globalization, however,

have challenged national branding efforts. This is evident in the fact that twentieth-century Bain News Service focused on the national/local, while VII focused on the international/global. Bain's photographs presented mostly groups/the nation and their shared story, VII featured individuals and their personal tales, all while giving voice to the voiceless. Bain's images portray the American nation's unity, exceptionalism, and power, VII's America appears in its images to be divided and decaying.

Between 1900 and 1920, Bain News Service, as a centralized news photo producer and distributor, helped construct an image of America's exceptionalism that was congruent with the nation's leaders and elites. Bain's photographs of social, political, technological, and cultural progress introduced, at least visually, the power of the American nation to both its own people and those living abroad. With these representations, as sold to national and international publishers, Bain News Service further promoted a deep sense of nationalism on domestic grounds, while creating awareness of America's exceptionalism on a global scale.

In the twenty-first century, the global infrastructure for strategic narratives that serve to build a nation's brand and enhance its reputation has been significantly disrupted by the ability of the public to act as producers of media content and distributors of ideological messages. Visual representations moved from traditional media (television, print, radio, and film) to online social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. The "new 'wild zone of representation' has become a key battlefield of contemporary political struggles, allowing for previously disenfranchised forces to take on an important role in the production and contestation of geopolitical power," media scholar Kari Anden-Papadopoulos argued.⁴⁰

The twenty-first century's visual landscape has involved private individuals' accessing and sharing visual images through various media channels causing complications in the global

visual dialogue between individuals and nations alike. “Reputation is both internal and external—and big gaps mean big blind spots. The US has the second-largest gap—its internal reputation is 78, which is 23.4 points above its external reputation,” Tisch wrote in 2017. “Since a strong country brand comes from countless actors—including institutions, businesses, and ordinary citizens—the inability to be self-critical is a major risk.”⁴¹

As part of its “brand,” the United States has in the past, at least, been described as an “empire of liberty,” a “shining city on a hill,” the “last best hope of Earth,” the “leader of the free world,” and the “indispensable nation.” Foreign policy and international affairs scholar Stephen M. Walt noted that “such statements of ‘American exceptionalism’ presume that America’s values, political system, and history are unique and worthy of universal admiration. They also imply that the United States is both destined and entitled to play a distinct and positive role on the world stage.” This kind representation of America’s unique role in the world, however, is mostly a myth. “By focusing on their supposedly exceptional qualities, Americans blind themselves to the ways that they are a lot like everyone else.”⁴²

To assess the United States’ standing on the global stage, the Pew Research Center has been tracking international opinion of the country over several years. Their *Pew Global Attitudes Project* began as a multinational survey focusing on worldwide issues in June 2001. Its original intent to survey globalization and democratization, however, shifted quickly following September 11, 2001. According to the Pew website, much of the focus turned to how America was perceived abroad. Between June 2002 and June 2006, the researchers interviewed roughly 110,000 people in 50 countries, revealing that international opinion of the US, including views of its policies, values, and people was declining. Pew found a rise in anti-Americanism. The project documented not only that the US as a nation was perceived negatively, but increasingly the

American people were viewed negatively as well. The researchers found that many across the world had grown resentful and even suspicious of American power, even before the war in Iraq caused global attitudes toward the United States to plummet further. The polling also indicated that much of the world rejected “Americanization”—the world was pushing back against the wide diffusion of American ideas and customs fueled by globalization.⁴³

Multiple forces, including globalization and the rise of modern communication technologies that have made citizen witnessing possible, have disrupted the American image-building efforts. The new visual economy does not support, but challenges authorities and the status quo. While the news photo agencies of the early twentieth century presented the American nation and the world with images of America’s exceptional character and unified national identity, today, globalization and decentralization of the image economy have given others the authority to define what Americanness means. Throughout the twentieth century, centralized news photographic institutions such as Bain News Service, served more directly in harmony with the state and its cultural diplomacy efforts; in the globalized and decentralized Internet era, the decentralized image economy swamps those efforts.

While the processes for the exchange of ideologies, ideas, information, and aspects of culture are now even more easily enabled by twenty-first century technologies and globalization, these exchanges have grown more complex. News images featured in the press no longer hold the power to solely represent a nation’s ideals and aid its institutions to build broad support for its economic and political goals. These representations no longer serve to reveal connections between media and cultural policy in a universal language disseminated across political, social, and cultural divides. The news photo agencies are no longer Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) in the sense Althusser once proposed and the photographic frame is no longer

disciplinary, as Tagg had suggested. The twenty-first century has fostered a “new” meaning of exceptionalism, nationalism, and the American Dream, which the upcoming conclusion examines in detail.

Endnotes

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Chapter 8: Conclusion: Is the Dream Still American?

Bain News Service, the first news photo agency established in the United States, had a revolutionary approach to doing business with the press, providing publishers with a substantial volume of photographs that could be inserted in both breaking news and feature stories. It was the right time and place for George Grantham Bain to visualize the world, as in the span of twenty years at the turn of the twentieth century, cars displaced horses and carriages, airplanes took to the air, magazines and newspapers began to run photo features using the improved halftone process on a regular basis. Those years saw the launch of the United States as an imperialist power with new territories in the Pacific and the Caribbean following the Spanish-American War. By the end of World War I, the country had emerged as a major world power. From Theodore Roosevelt to Woodrow Wilson, the presidential administrations were pro-all things American. Cases in point, they looked to control the immigrants entering the country and to use cultural diplomacy to export American values abroad.¹ It was a favorable time for news photo agencies, as centralized journalistic institutions, to establish and expand their authority.

The end of WWI to the start of the twenty-first century, saw a revolution in technology, including in how the world could be captured visually. The emergence of the modern pictorial tabloid newspaper, roll film, color film, smaller cameras, faster lenses, the creation and expansion of the wire services, the ways that media owners, publishers, producers redesigned their media outlets— all of these and more transformed photojournalism and the public's access to images. Taken together, audiences saw the world and their place in it in ways dramatically different.

By the end of the twentieth century, film, chemicals, and darkrooms were on their way out. The changeover to digital that began in the 1990s accelerated in the new century, as

smartphones, interactive websites, and social media explosively altered how the world received information. Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, WhatsApp, and other platforms, fundamentally transformed media, multiplying and diversifying the actors, voices and images that participate in, and influence, global politics.²

The new century witnessed a massive cultural shift due to the span of global communications because of the unprecedented technological boom, expansion of the Internet, the Web, convergence, and digitalization. Just as the press has been digitalized and decentralized, the photo-specific agencies changed their business models or were consolidated into large media organizations or stock image factories. The economic transformations manifested as changes in photographic representations, which in turn shifted the roles photography could publicly play in cultural productions; the projection of identity, belonging, and community; and the dissemination of both partisan and national ideologies.

Despite—or in some cases because of—these changes, news photographs retained a power to 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,” as American Studies scholar Lisa Lowe noted.³ Hall’s idea of the *politics of representation*, helped establish the way news photography has represented and communicated American identity over time.⁴ Hall’s politics of representation clarifies the mechanisms of “myth-making” and “myth-breaking,” and the role of news photography in creating and sustaining certain views and visions of the American nation.

By examining the ways in which the American character, American exceptionalism, nationalism, and the American Dream, have been and are represented by news photo agencies operating in the early twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this dissertation has suggested

that the perception that American ideals—the American Dream—are shared, has given way to a highly subjective, partisan, reactionary-and-activist technology-driven notion that the Dream is dead, or near-enough so. VII has been in the vanguard of the globally influenced social justice school of journalism, using photography as a means to light the darkness. News photography can be a potent way to direct attention to where positive change is needed.

Through the examination of photographic representations of nationalism, exceptionalism, and the American Dream, this dissertation has illuminated the relationships between news photography/the news photo agency and their defacto use as soft power tools for legitimizing the authority of the United States on the global playing field. In reviewing Bain News Services, as a centralized, national Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser) in the context of modernity, and VII Photo, as a decentralized, global, independent body in the context of postmodernity and globalization, this dissertation has shed light on the increasingly complicated visual ecosystem of the millennial public.

In the case of Bain News Service, news photographs and the news photo agencies of the early twentieth century helped preserve and promote an American discourse grounded in the myths and realities of progress, upward mobility, material success, freedom, and endless opportunities, i.e. the American Dream. As noted by Daniel T. Rodgers, American exceptionalism has largely been accepted not as a deficit but as a gift. It also has been a rhetorical way to signal the absences, the ills, and the defects of the “external” world. “Still, having posited its identity in difference, and its difference in exemption from the rule, the American myth lies, in its own way, ‘elsewhere,’” Rodgers wrote.⁵

Come the twenty-first-century, VII, alongside stock photo agencies and citizen photographers, signaled a transformation in the nation’s representation discourse. This

transformation has subsequently challenged the ideas of American exceptionalism, nationalism, and the American Dream. This breeds its own ironies, since, as Rodgers recognized “A nation which conceives itself in exceptionalist terms is fated to spend at least much of its popular historical energy imagining everyone else’s history as in writing its own. That is one of the unrecognized ironies of America’s history.”⁶

8.1. The Dream in the “American Century”

In 1941, Henry Luce, editor, publisher, and creator of *Time* and *Life* magazines, proclaimed to the readers of *Life* that the twentieth century was to be “The American Century”—America was on the cusp of becoming “the” dominant power in the world.

As America enters dynamically upon the world scene, we need most of all to seek and to bring forth a vision of America as a world power which is authentically American and which can inspire us to live and work and fight with vigor and enthusiasm. And as we come now to the great test, it may yet turn out that in all our trials and tribulations of spirit during the first part of this century we as a people have been painfully apprehending the meaning of our time and now in this moment of testing there may come clear at last the vision which will guide us to the authentic creation of the 20th Century—our Century.⁷

Luce’s essay became “a summons, an aspiration, a claim, a calling, and ultimately the shorthand identifier attached to an entire era,” claimed Andrew J. Bacevich, international relations historian.⁸ By the time World War II ended in 1945, the United States had ascended, as Luce had forecast, to a position of global dominance and the trajectory of the “American Century” pushed well into the new millennium. As former president George W. Bush proclaimed in his inaugural

address in 2001, “through much of the last century, America’s faith in freedom and democracy was a rock in a raging sea. Now it is a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations.”⁹

The American Century, that grew up in the same years as Bain News Service, was the era that gave rise to American imperialism, nationalism, and exceptionalism, and further perpetuated the myth of the American Dream. The Dream, as a long-defining feature of the American character, had served to represent that the American national experience was both distinctive and could be shared. As noted by political philosopher and editor of *The New Republic* Herbert David Croly in his 1909 volume *The Promise of American Life*—a volume that inspired Theodore Roosevelt’s “New Nationalism” in the first decade of the twentieth century, America’s character is defined by the common goal for all individuals to be one and to succeed as one, under one nation:

The only fruitful promise of which the life of any individual or any nation can be possessed, is a promise determined by an ideal. Such a promise is to be fulfilled, not by sanguine anticipations, not by a conservative imitation of past achievements, but by laborious, single-minded, clear-sighted, and fearless work. If the promising career of any individual is not determined by a specific and worthy purpose, it rapidly drifts into a mere pursuit of success; and even if such a pursuit is successful, whatever promise it may have had, is buried in the grave of its triumph. So, it is with a nation. If its promise is anything more than a vision of power and success, that addition must derive its value from a purpose; because in the moral world the future exists only as a workshop in which a purpose is to be realized.¹⁰

The American Dream—historically associated with Americanness and the American character and lifestyle—has been a symbol, a myth, and an ideal of a nation in power. During the twentieth century, the Dream was a powerful cultural export and an inspiration for millions of people around the world. As Chapter 7 already pointed out, the language and the vision of the Dream have been employed by multiple institutions during the past century. “Well aware of the Dream’s

power, the government has employed it as a tool of propaganda, that is, a powerful ideological weapon of persuasion both here and abroad. The American Dream is, after all, the perfect brand, explaining in large part why the United States has retained such a popular image despite there being many flaws in the product itself,” cultural scholar Lawrence R. Samuel wrote.¹¹

The American Dream has long been the elites’ synecdoche for the American nation and the purported opportunities available to all. With the help of news photo agencies as the main distributors of photographic representations during the first half of the twentieth century, the Dream was “sold” to future and present immigrants via the news media and touted in presidential rhetoric at least since the days of Theodore Roosevelt. Bain’s news photographs from the first two decades of the 1900s are a prime example of visual ideological messaging across borders and seas as these photographs “told” the world about America’s prosperity, modernization, and exceptionalism. The American Dream and its representations have beckoned to generations of immigrants to come to the United States in search of opportunities.

The American Dream and its representation in news photographs have been burdened by events and powerful individuals whose actions undercut the original, narrow Biblically-inspired vision that America would uniquely be that special “city on a Hill.” In the early 1900s, the United States experienced its second industrial revolution, having just begun to acquire an overseas empire and international influence. America’s economy following the two world wars roared, the nation’s consumer-driven white middle class enjoyed some of the highest standards of living in the world, and American popular culture inserted itself into cultures everywhere.¹²

Over time, the American Dream grew to be closely associated with individualism, entrepreneurial spirit, the sacredness of the home, the seductiveness of wealth, the pressure to succeed, to persistently “hope,” and to believe that “anything is possible.”¹³ Sociologist Sandra L.

Hanson and political science scholar John Kenneth White noted in their 2011 volume *The American Dream in the 21st Century*, that the American Dream is “at its core ... a state of mind.” It is “an enduring optimism given to people who might be tempted to succumb to the travails of adversity, but who, instead, repeatedly rise from the ashes to continue to build a great nation.”¹⁴

8.2. The Dream in the Global Century

As the first few years of the twenty-first century opened with a strong worldwide sense of anti-Americanism, the US government efforts on the cultural diplomacy front to counter these notions were minimal.¹⁵ International history scholar David Ellwood argued that anti-Americanism has been grounded in: 1) representations, images and stereotypes (from the birth of the Republic onwards); 2) the challenge of economic power and the American model of modernization (principally from the 1910s and ‘20s on); and 3) the organized projection of US political, strategic and ideological power (from World War II on).¹⁶

While the foreign nations’ outpouring of support in the aftermath of 9/11 broke a trend in the anti-Americanism that had begun the years before, the goodwill wave dissipated quickly with George W. Bush’s incursion in Iraq in 2003.⁵ In addition, the wide diffusion of American ideas and culture fueled by globalization were adding to the negative perception. Despite global admiration for US science and technology and an eager consumption of American popular culture, views of America and its values and policies diminished at the same time the international community developed increasing grievances about American policies abroad.¹⁷

⁵ The Pew Research Center report on global attitudes between 2000 and 2007, “America’s Image in the World: Findings from the Pew Global Attitudes Project,” suggested that among the key culprits for the negative views of the American nation were the nation’s Middle East policies and the war in Iraq. The researchers had also noted the existence of an overall resentment and suspicion towards U.S. power.

Ultimately, the story of the 2000s is that the Dream may very well be dying—or was always dead—for LGBTQIA+, for women, for Blacks, Asians, Latinos, and other minorities. The meaning—and any value—of the American Dream and American identity at large, has shifted in the twenty-first century, and photographic representations of America reflect this shift. As noted by Hanson and Kenneth, the Dream’s deeply rooted optimism now comes not from ideas about material success and economic mobility, but from a more spiritual place that is grounded in equity, equality, and community.¹⁸ The calls for national unity that are coming to characterize a new progressive communitarian ideal of the American Dream are reflective of the current sentiments of uneasiness and uncertainty of Americans about their place in the country and the world.

As the photographic analysis of VII’s archive suggested, the “War on Terror” that resulted from the events of September 11, 2001 challenged perceptions of the American way of life and the nation’s identity as a superpower. The war in Iraq, the economic downturn, the charges of political corruption in the electoral process of the United States during the first decades of the twenty-first century, have all contributed to anxieties about the breakdown of the nation’s government and way of life. In addition, increasingly acute divides among race, class, and gender serve as near-daily reminders that the Dream does not apply to all. The growing rift in the nation was recognized in Obama’s 2008 presidential nomination speech:

Four years ago, I stood before you and told you my story—of the brief union between a young man from Kenya and a young woman from Kansas who weren’t well-off or well-known, but shared a belief that in America, their son could achieve whatever he put his mind to. It is that promise that has always set this country apart—that through hard work and sacrifice, each of us can pursue our individual dreams but still come together as one American family, to ensure that the next generation can pursue their dreams as well. That’s why I stand here tonight. Because for 232 years, at each moment when that promise was in jeopardy,

ordinary men and women—students and soldiers, farmers and teachers, nurses and janitors—found the courage to keep it alive. We meet at one of those defining moments—a moment when our nation is at war, our economy is in turmoil, and the American promise has been threatened once more.¹⁹

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the dominant current of American exceptionalism in the rhetoric of US presidents has been grounded in the idea that the United States has the responsibility to redeem the world by extending freedom and democracy to all nations and peoples. During the second decade of the twenty-first century, President Donald Trump shifted the rhetoric undergirding American exceptionalism. “For Trump, America’s uniqueness lies in its origins—not in a spread-eagled mission to save humanity,” argued Curran. “He sees the revolution as the fount of American patriotism—an event not signifying the country’s destiny to preach democracy to others but providing a shining example of the “people [taking] ownership of the future.”²⁰

Nationalism—originally grounded in the idea of belonging to one nation with common goals and common culture—has become a contested term in recent years too. According to a 2022 article from *Statista*, twenty-first-century nationalism should be separated from patriotism, because nationalism is often driven more by racial and ethnic superiority than a love of country. “While patriotism can be seen in 69 percent of Americans reporting being either extremely or very proud to be an American, it should also be noted that 55 percent of people felt that white nationalism posed a very or somewhat serious threat to the country,” the article noted.²¹

The United States has often been and is again vocally and violently divided and conflicted, and visual accounts that circulate on social media demonstrate that for the whole world to see. “If the national state is challenged from above by larger political groups and associations, its sense of national identity or inner bond of political solidarity is threatened from

below by the claims of smaller cultural groups,” wrote nationalism scholar Anthony D. Smith. “In this ‘multicultural nation’, each ‘self’ is defined in relationship to ‘the other’ and, in Homi Bhabha’s view, the official texts give way to everyday, ‘performative’ narratives of the people in which perceptions of history and identity become split and doubled, the nation is fragmented into its constituent cultural parts and national identity becomes ‘hybridized.’”²²

In the new millennium, such “performative narratives” can be seen in everyday photographic representations produced by ordinary citizens, as well as in journalistic accounts. The so-called “democratization” of the photographic medium via new technologies and digitalization, has given visibility and voice to individuals more so than to the news photo agencies. The rapidly evolving economic and technological environment has not only contributed to the diminishing authority of the news photographic agency as an institution, but it has also weakened the value of news photography as an essential voice in promoting and sustaining national identity and a nation’s reputation. As a result, “this new mediated publicness has altered the power relations in a way in which not only the many are visible to the few but the few can also now see the many,” sociologist John B. Thompson claimed.²³

To demonstrate these developments, Emily Anne Epstein, senior editor at *The Atlantic* created composites of photographs she received from hundreds of citizens trying to capture their personal American Dream. In “Photographing the American Dreamers” for the September 5, 2015 issue of the magazine, some contributors reflected the pessimism that has set roots within the American nation since the turn of the twenty-first century. Contributor Nili R. Blanck, for example, sees the American Dream as elusive, non-existent, and an outdated myth (see Image 89).

As the United States looks onto a fork in the road that reads ‘apocalypse’ to the left or ‘evolution’ to the right, I think it is crucial for us to reconsider the institutions that determine for whom the American Dream is something as unimaginable and distant as walking on the moon. I believe it is equally important to interrogate the standards of ‘success’ we admire as a society.

For another contributor, Patrick Lorenz, the American Dream of having a big house with two cars in the garage, white picket fence surrounding a large yard, and career opportunities allowing for one’s own pursuit of happiness, is nearly unachievable. His photograph “represents the unremarkable, everyday experiences that inform and shape each of us while we achieve or maintain our own version of that dream” (see image 90).²⁴

8.3. Did the National Resist the Global?

In the past few decades, the digitalized and post-modern world has witnessed a growing global culture war all while multilateral organizations and global corporations have been eclipsing nation-states. In the view of *The New York Times* opinion columnist David Brooks, many people who have a strong loyalty to their place and to their nation have felt left behind and that their national honor has been threatened. “People are driven by moral longings—by their attachment to their own cultural values, by their desire to fiercely defend their values when they seem to be under assault. For the past few decades, globalization has seemed to many people to be exactly this kind of assault,” Brooks noted. Furthermore, he argued, “people are powerfully driven by a desire for order. Nothing is worse than chaos and anarchy. These cultural changes, and the often-simultaneous breakdown of effective governance, can feel like social chaos, like anarchy, leading people to seek order at all costs.”²⁵

In their desire to have social order and to belong, individuals are now continuously forming diasporas and groups based on race, class, and gender—highly fluid and contested terms in the twenty-first century landscape. Although the present study did not examine or compare representations of race, class, and gender in news photographs, more research should examine how the wire services depicted race, class, and gender in their news photographs—which are published far and wide. Further, other scholars would do well to take a comparative look at two nations and the way they are represented in news photographs; doing so could help further define how nationalism and exceptionalism are represented.

The diminishing appeal of “nationalism” for many has had a direct effect on the values associated with the American Dream. Despite the depredations of modern technologies and globalization and the uncertainties of national belonging driven by political divisions, individual nostalgia for the Dream seems to persist. As efforts to bring a sense of unity to the American nation continue, the desire for nation-building continues, but in subtler grassroots forms, such as the sharing of photography by individual citizen along with their personal stories and memories. VII’s *Lost Rolls America* project, featured in Chapter 6, for example, encouraged people to explore the meaning and the significance of their private photographs. In so doing, those people were encouraged to reconnect their personal past with the collective experience. *Lost Rolls America* wanted to create a national archive of images that could form a collective memory of a shared past.²⁶ Social media photographic accounts of nationally-experienced celebrations, such as the Fourth of July, along with major sports events that feature the American Flag and the singing of the National Anthem have never ceased to exist.

In *The Atlantic*’s “Photographing the American Dreamers,” Epstein observed that the search for meaning (of the American Dream) in the twenty-first century is a highly subjective,

and even fruitless, pursuit. “Everyone, American or not, has his or her own idea of a life actualized. And every great American photographer, be it Robert Frank, Richard Avedon or Ansel Adams, has photographed a different America,” she wrote. Looking at the dozens of citizen photographs, however, one can see that symbolism featured in early twentieth century news photography still guided Americans’ perceptions of the Dream. “To some readers, the dream is as simple as a flag. To others, it’s a building piercing through clouds. To many, it’s a quiet moment with friends and family,” Epstein noted.²⁷

Contributors to *The Atlantic*’s article variously described the American Dream as a “national goal,” as institutionally-motivated propaganda, and as an economically and/or politically driven “machine.” But most of them at heart found the Dream best reflected in their own personal pursuit for happiness. For *The Atlantic*’s photo contributors David Scotti and Veronica Owen, for example, the Dream was alive and well, reflected in photographs of American symbols of progress and modernization—the high rises and the skyscrapers—that are seen even by those who have never been in the country. “Just like the skyscraper in my photo, the American dream propels people toward the highest point—but it is no longer a clear and safe journey. It is dark, full of contradictions and accidents. We can still get close to the heavens, but at what price?” Scotti asked (see Image 91). For Owen, a child of an immigrant, “the dream is all about reaching higher and striving to achieve what may be unachievable” (see Image 92).²⁸

Another contributor, Calla Kessler, saw the Dream as reflected in the lifestyles of rural American towns. “This dream comes to fruition through a strong sense of community. My photos show holiday celebrations, softball games, and county fairs; these events are staples of American culture” (see Image 93). Contributor Jerry Habraken’s images, on the other hand, represented what he called a “more classic vision of Americana—whether it a classic car or a

cowboy preparing for a rodeo. These moments aren't the big, life-changing events of this country, but just quiet scenes of everyday people living out their American Dream" (see Image 94).²⁹

Despite the global rise of anti-Americanist sentiments and a growing discontent with American politics, the pursuit of happiness and the American Dream still appear to drive foreigners to the "promised land." An example is the ongoing Diversity Immigrant Visa (DIV) program, also known as the green card lottery, established with the 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). DIV is a United States government lottery program that helps foreign nationals legally obtain a United States Permanent Resident Card. The lottery, administered by the Department of State, makes available 50,000 immigrant visas annually with the aim of diversifying the immigrant population in the United States. According to Pew Research, the program is the only one of its kind globally and since 2005, more than 200 million people from countries around the world have applied.³⁰

That is one indication that the United States may continue to be seen by many as a "promised land." The iconic American symbols—the high rises, the bustling streets, the modern men, the industrial nation, the monumental landscapes, the land of liberty, opportunity, and material success—featured in many of Bain's news photographs—apparently continue to work as Barthesian mythological devices, as socially/culturally constructed sign systems that carry powerful ideological meanings. Such representations remain powerful definitions of the American Dream. For centuries, they have remained vital in the nation's and the world's collective understanding of "America;" they are still alive for many today. This in itself points to the fact that news photography, as a source of representation, should be regarded as a fundamental knowledge system that successfully illuminates discourses of power and helps

(re)create national identity. As millennial populations and political leaders shun or outright reject nationalist ideologies, the 21st-century's postmodern global society has also become a post national one.³¹



Image 89: “Photographing the American Dreamers.” Photograph by Ali Kate Cherkis, Nili R. Blanck, EchoSight, *The Atlantic*. Screenshot.



Image 90: “Photographing the American Dreamers.” Photograph by Patrick Lorenz, Veasey Conway, EchoSight, *The Atlantic*. Screenshot.



Image 91: “Photographing the American Dreamers.” Photograph by Patrick Lorenz, David Scotti, EchoSight, *The Atlantic*. Screenshot.



Image 92: “Photographing the American Dreamers.” Photograph by Veronica Owen, John Thomas Collins, EchoSight, *The Atlantic*. Screenshot.



Image 93: “Photographing the American Dreamers.” Photograph by Calla Kessler, Tinatin Japaridze, EchoSight, *The Atlantic*. Screenshot.



Image 94: “Photographing the American Dreamers.” Photograph by Jada Chin, Jerry Habraken, EchoSight, *The Atlantic*. Screenshot.

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