
Visual Textbook Stereotypes as Sources of Social Inequality

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Introduction

Often specific visual scenarios come to be expected in social interaction (Corr, et al., 2020). This repetitive nature of visual behaviour tends to create role stereotypes (Hall, 2010) and is more powerful than most realize. Image repetition thus promotes meaningful agency for perceptual society. This paper suggests graphic representation is an underlying force maintaining inequalities in the American social scenario particularly given strong impetus through the process of schoolroom textbooks. Historically the study will start circa 1880 with textbook pictures and end with contemporary suggestions based in the 21st Century. The source of pictures will come from the University of Miami (Ohio) Havighurst old textbooks and the University of Pittsburgh Nietz collections.

Problem History

The industrial revolution began circa 1880 changing this nation from agrarian to an industrial orientation or from farms to factories (Burner et al 1985). Education also changed from the one-room schoolhouse to the “factory system” or the multi-storied building with categories of students called “grades” (Reed & Bergeman, 1995). What did not change was the fact that what a person learns young they learn well (Hall et al., 2010)!

Technology produced complicated textbooks filled with a plethora of pictures that had not been seen. Students were pictorially taken to lands they had only dreamed of, and graphic textbook pictures enhanced these dreams. Students gazed at the images and experienced a visual sociology that would influence their social perception on through the mid-20th Century.

Textbooks of the late 19th and early 20th Century were packed with wonderful illustrations of the emerging technical/ industrial society. Especially noted were geography texts lending their pages (often the whole page) to pictorial representations. These pictures gave the young student a chance to see beyond the smoke-filled skies of cities like Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Not only were far-away places illustrated, but local and national scenes as well as society in general were shown. This was more than what is seen in texts today. The development of significant role stereotypes in these texts illustrated society as it was and what culture thought it should be. The following graphic examples were not exceptions to the rule, but common repeated portrayals the student saw and subtly creating social expectations of behaviour (Hall et al., 2010). Pictures, however, do not give clear indications concerning what is thought in the subject's mind (Berger and Mohr 1995). This is of no consequence because students would not know, nor would they care. The fact is a student would silently sit staring at pictures and forming impressions they would accept as the reality of knowledge (Berger and Mohr 1995) without the notion it may possibly be a fabrication of social or political caprice.

The Problem

Cornell (1982) has stated that "The business of the school is not propaganda." Well – not exactly! Teachers often slant their classroom presentations and authors do hedge in their texts. These attitudes may institute a hidden curriculum (Van Ausdale & Feagan, 2010) forming unstated norms, values and beliefs transmitted to students in creating underlying rules and ideas about their school and social life (Giroux, 1983). How textbook pictures fabricate a hidden curriculum, and lasting social perception is investigated by examining graphics in late nineteenth and early 20th Century randomly chosen elementary/high school texts.

The Data

In 1880 America was moving from an agrarian to an industrialized country. Textbooks capitalized on this idea as in Figure 1 (Hall 1870). The man moves from a farmer sowing seed to a miner in the pit which was the social and occupational direction of American culture. The student overtly learns the new economy is powered by industry but notice the title of the picture – “The Occupations of Men”. Nothing is said of women changing roles (if changing at all), in addition the figures are all white. Emphasis on these themes will become common. In fact, emphasis on the white male is prominent in most pictures.

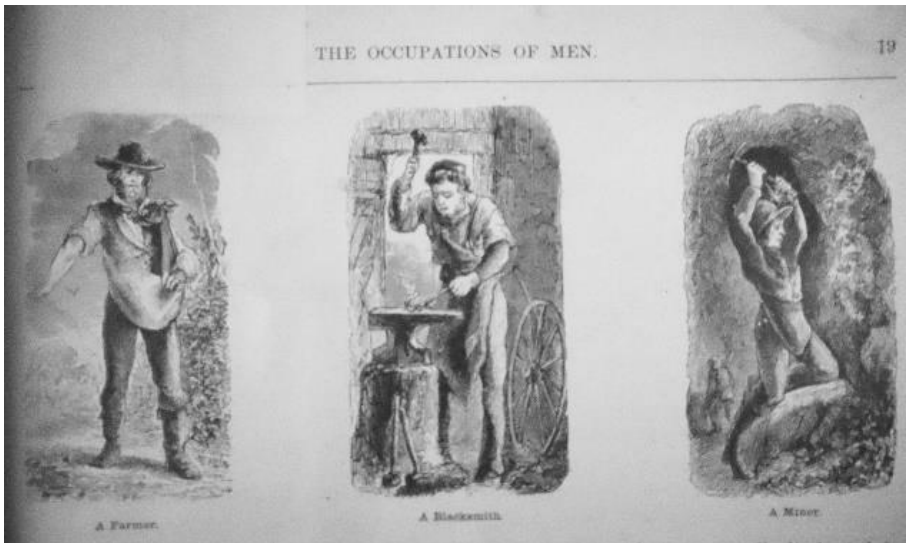


Fig. 1. (Hall 1870) Occupations of Men

In this era Caucasians and males are the dominant personification as in Figure 2 (Guyot, 1885). Here the white male is centered in a position of dominance staring at the reader while the surrounding figures (identified by race/country) are looking away. The two top heads are supposedly “ideal.”



Fig. 2. Guyot 1885

It is no accident that the central white, male figure appears to be Greek while above him are his ancient theoretical perfections. Each generation has an idealized form of the human body. Greek statues of ancient millennia have some lure if not a persistent idea of what should be emphasized in the physical/visual scenario (Bourdieu, 1965). Icons inadvertently will influence other vistas of society as fashion, conversation or power struggles based on

maintaining that fabrication (Friere, 2000). Generic social attitudes are hard to quell and usually create a social milieu involving other behaviours to maintain veracity and longevity. In Figure 3 (Mitchell, 1890) one sees that same theme with other hierarchical factors introduced.

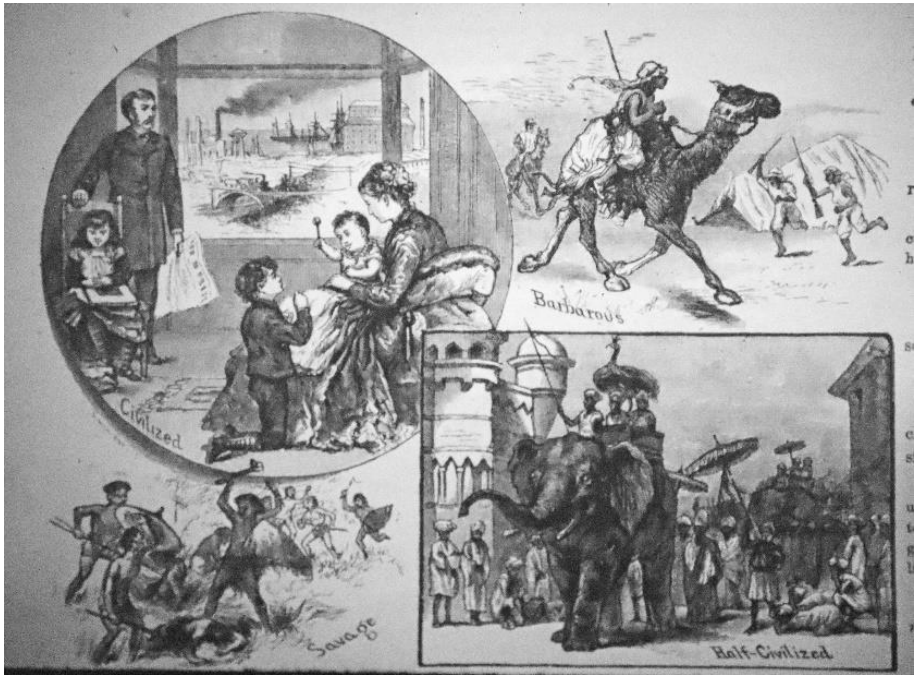


Fig. 3. (Mitchell 1890) “Civilized”

The foundation of a functioning culture is the family (White & Klein, 2002). It is a group that harbors what was and the promise of what would be in terms of social goals and status along with the essence of the culture itself. Perhaps Figure 3 (Mitchell, 1890) is the most illustrative of all textbook themes in this industrial scenario. Not only will one see the defining nature of the American family, but one will also see its comparison with other groups along with social judgements. These comparisons could also be observed from a highly contentious contemporary point of view. Consider that these relationships between individuals will generalize throughout all pictures in that era. Also, of importance, is the included hierarchical nature of the four groups – civilized, half-civilized, barbarous, and savage. The titles themselves indicate a continuum of judgements from pre-defined “good” to “bad” associated with what is shown in the panels.

“Civilized” (Fig. 3.) infers a rightness to the organization involving dad, who is physically higher than the others (a repeated theme) and symbolic of power. Mom is a caretaker with the children and lower in stature to dad. The little boy looks up to mom and the girl is in waiting to dad. “Civilized” also implies industrialization as seen out the window. One could say the heart of the “civilized” world was a white, nuclear family arrangement immersed in the “factory culture” which school systems will mimic.

Half-civilized or “not all that bad” are the people from India. Curiously all people from India are historically portrayed in these early books as closely akin to the “civilized” group. Generally, they are respected members of the world community from American textbook perspectives. This is not so with the middle eastern “barbarians” as shown nor the African “savages”. Africans or black people are always at the nadir of any old textbook social hierarchy and frequently associated with some violence. Not only that, but the denigration of Blacks continues throughout all texts as seen in Figure 4 (Tarr & McMurry, 1901). Here the Blacks are in Africa and again referred to as “savages” and half naked as accepted attire. The caption is a subtlety that most school children (or others) would not be acquainted with or understand. In Africa,



Fig. 4. (Tarr and McMurry 1901) "Kaffirs."

"kaffirs" is a more vicious ethnic slur than any x-word proffered in the American culture. This denigration continues verbally in Figure 5 (Hall 1880). The upper left-hand corner shows the wheel of ethnics with a white person centered yet is presented with a nuance – a white woman is in the center. There were women textbook authors during these times and the woman is Mary Hall author of the text (Hall 1880). (Looks like she is getting back for being defined as subaltern.) The comment below her states, "The white race is superior to all others in intelligence and civilization."

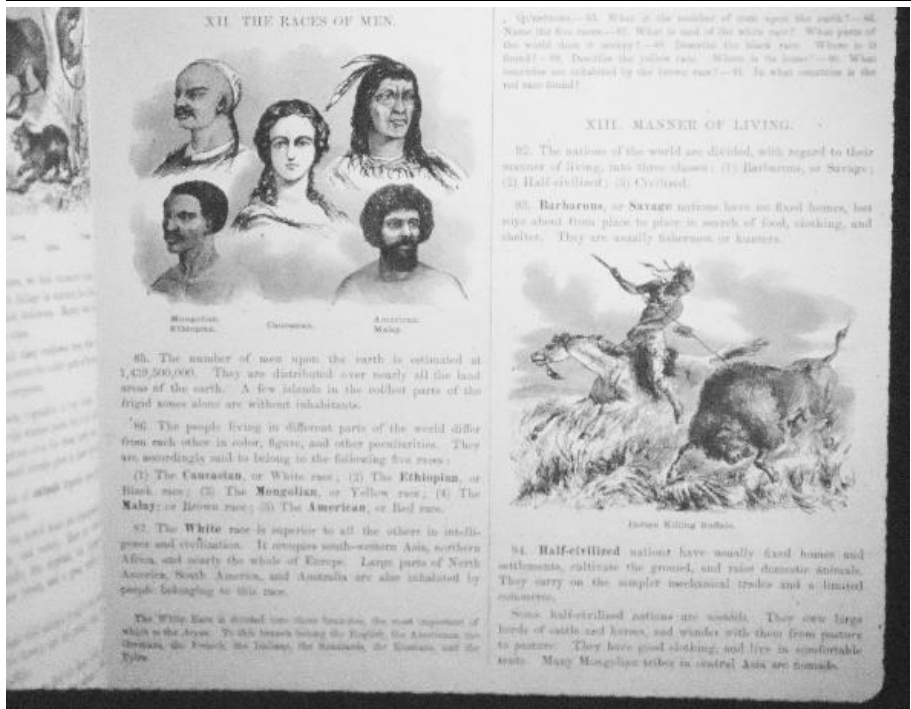


Fig. 5. (Hall 1880) Mary Hall

“Intelligence” being stated first is interesting. Does the sequence assume that intelligence is equated with characteristics of “civilized” status? In fact, one could glean from history that there have been highly advanced cultures guided by rather stupid people and the opposite is true. There is no doubt, however, old textbooks assume Blacks are not intelligent and there is a direct connection with negative culture status. If you are Black, you are not intelligent, your culture is savage, socially submissive and that is that! This relationship is seen continuously in all old textbook pictures and will pervade, but diminish, through mid-twentieth Century.

There are other subtleties involved with these texts which border on subliminal psychology. In Figure 6 (Redway, 1901), one sees a Black adult, who looks suspiciously like W. E. B. Dubois, and a small boy.

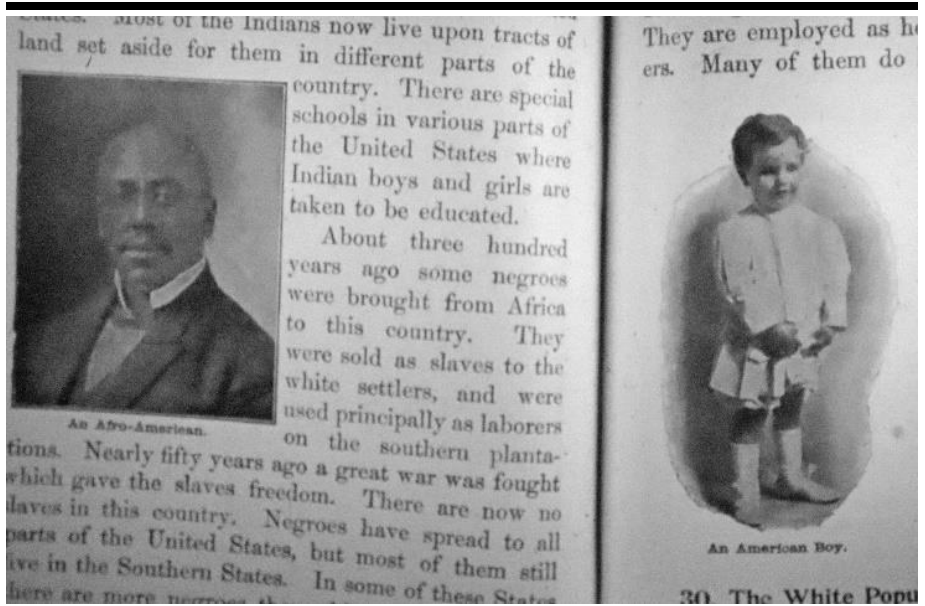


Fig. 6. (Redway 1901) "American Boy"

In that time, little boys were often dressed as a girl lookalike so as not to be kidnapped for work on sailing vessels. The picture titles tend to be misleading, i.e., "An Afro-American" and "An American Boy." There is no constructed inequality even though the boy is younger yet there is a distinction in labels. By the titles, is that what an American looks like as opposed to a specific race? Why is not the Black identified as just an "American?"

In Figure 7 (Redway & Hinmann, 1898) is a picture of a candle (representing the sun) shining on an apple (representing the earth) to demonstrate the seasons and night and day. A good illustration for a science class of young people who may have trouble visualizing the concepts. One would have extreme difficulty labeling this as a model of visual inequality

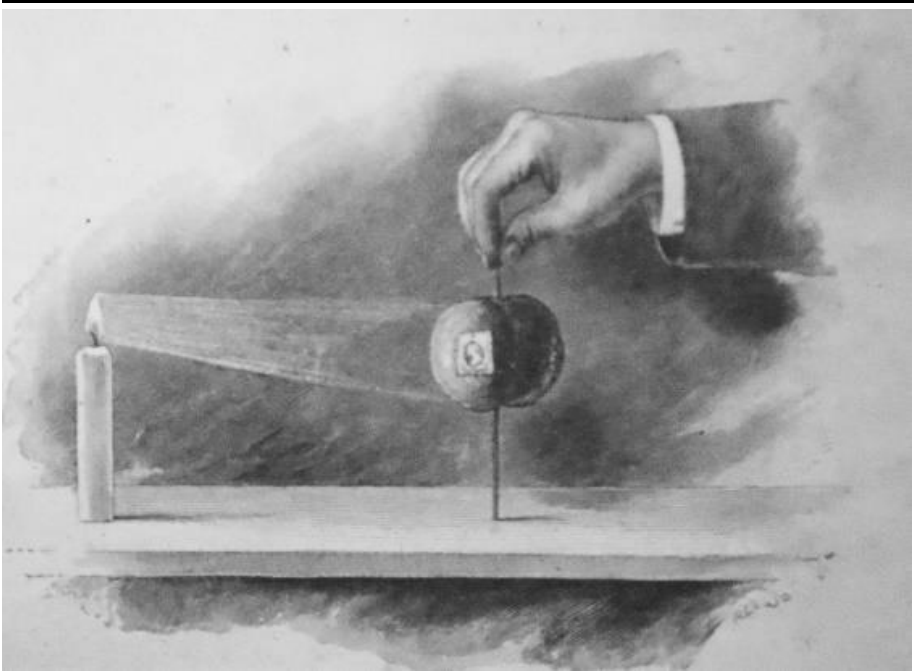


Fig. 7. (Redway and Hinman 1898) The Candle

until it is learned that EVERY science picture in texts with just a hand – is a white hand! One begins to wonder where the Black family fits or is there any viable visualization in these representations. There is, but it is not the “savage” illustration one would conger. It would be hard for textbooks to portray mom, dad and the kids fighting themselves and any others that came along nor are they semi-naked all the time because it is generally not true. The usual representation of a Black family was one of subaltern status lacking a strong authority figure. Figure 8 (Maury, 1900) is iconic as a portrait of the Black family. Here no one is over or below others in stature, they are all doing the same task and the adults are virtually even in height.



Fig. 8.(Maury 1900) A Black Family

Conjectural is the smile on their faces as they toil for the white landowner for pittance. Also of note, this same picture can be found in SEVERAL texts (Copyright laws were different from today). The assumption is the picture portrayed Blacks exactly the way the social order defined them so why not show it in a variety of different textbooks.

A Caveat

The previous suggests that what is repetitively seen comes to be expected and, after a certain amount of time, is institutionalized as a role stereotype. There is a contention here worth discussing. In Figure 9 (Houston, 1879) a couple is on a ridge looking out and over a mountain scene. Typically, the man is gesticulating and pointing out what the woman



Fig. 9. (Houston 1879) Pointing

should concentrate on as white males are universal power figures. The woman is subaltern, sitting and listening, as in all pictures of this era. Their positions are the data of this study – what people are physically doing – not thinking. In Figure 9 (Houston, 1879) all the previous stereotypical characteristics are illustrated yet, the girl may be wondering, “What am I doing here with this dumb person?” The last may be the case, but one has difficulty extrapolating thoughts from pictures.

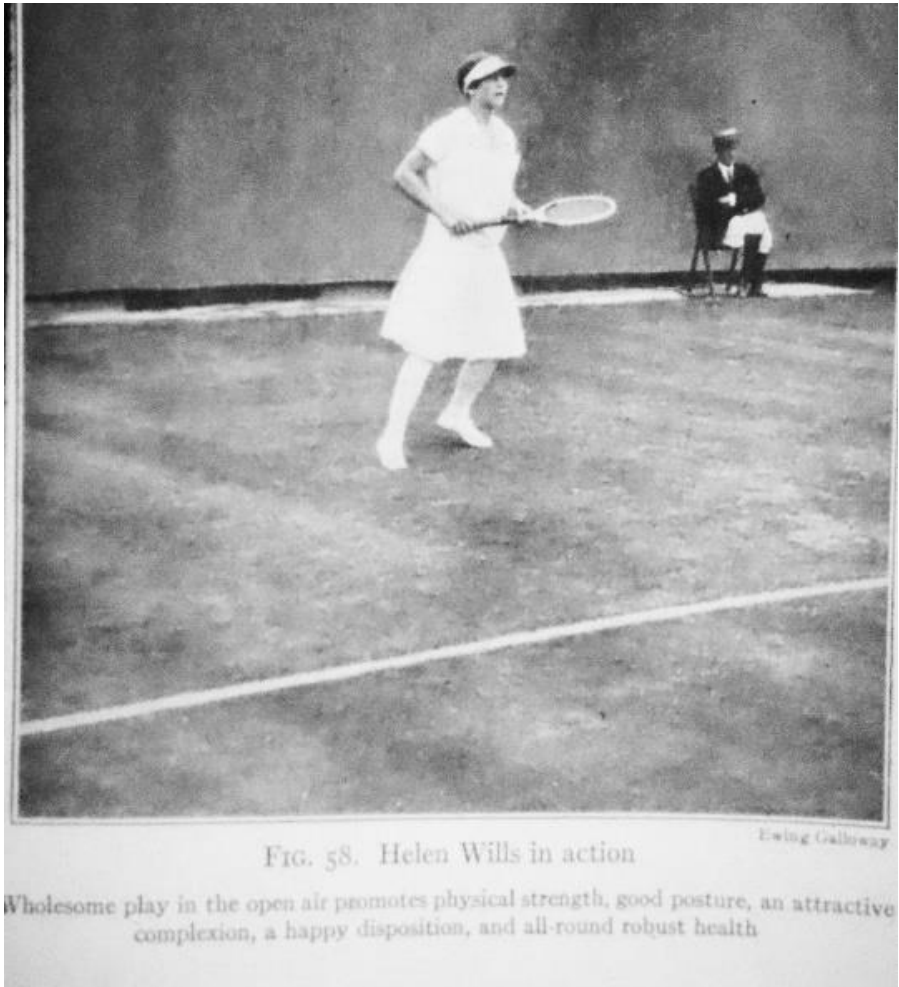


Fig. 10. (Andress and Evans 1928) Helen Wills

Physically interpreting social images from pictures is a problem but these images do mask actual thoughts. In this study's context, what is thought is existentially irrelevant.

The stereotypes continue into the 20th Century with a slight difference. By this time images were firmly embedded in the culture's popular social preferences. Textbooks were laden with projecting inequalities and definitions with bolder attitudes on these concepts. Many "types" were no longer just visual and often negatively stated in the texts

below the pictures. Helen Wills Figure 10 (Andress, 1928) was a champion athlete of her day, and many believe she was better than the more prominent contemporary women tennis players. Her picture, however, has no mention of athleticism nor her winning record. In fact, it is more an ad for health and social presentation. The adjectives used to describe the picture were "...attractive complexion, good posture, happy disposition and robust health." Put all together it is a statement on female desirability. In other words, athletics will make women healthy and desirable; female tennis icons are beside the point! When analyzing graphic representations, it is always beneficial to ask who is the ideal viewer? It is suggested the universal ideal viewer in these times is undoubtedly a white male.

Finally, some comments are beyond nice for it certainly was not an era of "don't offend anyone" commonly seen in the 21st Century. "The Circus is in Town" Figure 11 (Andress, 1928) presents two performers of a circus. One very tall and the other very small. Not a particularly unexpected nor unusual duo for a circus. The sub-text refers to both as "freaks."

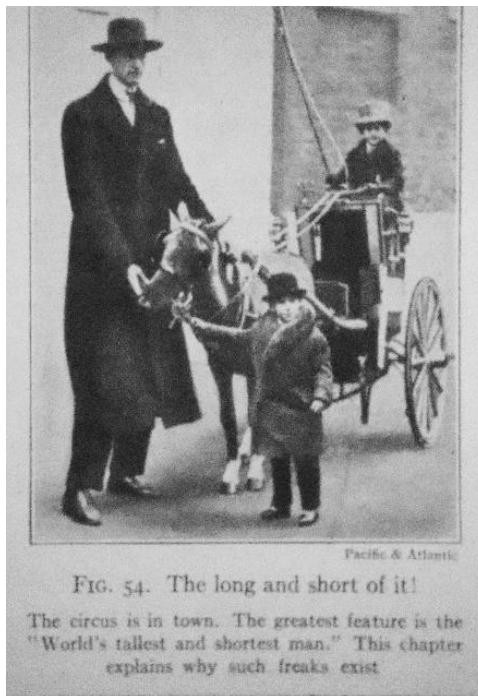


Fig. 11. (Andress and Evans 1928) "Freaks."

Discussion

The methodology of this study was to randomly choose old textbooks from the Havighurst Collection, University of Miami Ohio and Nietz Collection, University of Pittsburgh (112 texts), catalog physical recurrancies and discuss graphic relationships. Samples from textbooks were looked at as to differences of people from others, considering male/female, black/white etc. The following is a partial synopsis of findings:

1. Of all standing alone, 78% white males
2. Of all standing alone, 86% white and black males
3. Of all white and black males standing alone, 91% white
4. Of all in hard labor, 82% white males
5. Of all in manufacturing, 76% white males
6. men tend to lead; women tend to follow
7. White males socially dominant
8. All females are socially secondary
9. Children are socially tertiary
10. Children tend to mirror adult counterparts
11. 100% white adult females isolated from all blacks

In addition, emerging from the specifics was a social hierarchy placing “civilized” as the highest in status as opposed to “savage” as the lowest with white Europeans in the apex and Black Africans at the bottom. One could suggest this defined and strengthened Eurocentricity.

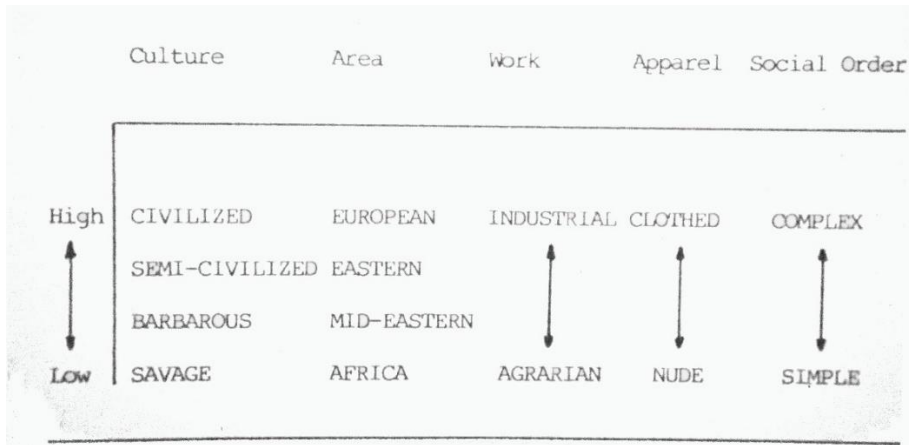


Illustration 1. Eurocentricity

There exists no doubt that racism is present along with sexist policies and an elitist tinge to the interaction seen in the pictures. Of importance is that these pictures were in elementary schoolbooks and viewed by impressionable minds. Indeed, a child going through the school system got a thorough training in inequality no matter what their ethnicity. Not only is it a training ground, but also an ongoing continuance of graphic inequality. Consider a child goes through this system, grows to an adult, becomes a teacher and perceives the textbook images as quite expected and normal from their school days! The prejudicial ideas are perpetuated, and generations continue the process and ideas. Teachers teaching children, children becoming teachers and teaching children as its hidden curriculum moves through the 20th century. In this study, from 1880 to 1910, the American culture changes significantly, but the stereotypes do not. Consider the sociology of knowledge injected with this invasion of stereotypical images then entering the television era up until today. In this study, if a Black person was to harbor thoughts of social change, the viable images were of white, male power. This lessened Blacks chances for social equality because the hidden agenda of social status had not changed (Hinton, 2000).

In the social upheaval of the 1960's American culture at least acknowledged and began to think in different terms concerning racism and sexist policies. This does not mean to imply whatever was defined as graphically negative would be totally resolved. In fact, it is suggested that textbooks did change and had a more cultural equity look to them, yet the

computer and television screen began to supersede textbook pictures. One sees contemporary electronic graphics in television advertising saturated with ethnic images and virtually no Latino representation. Undoubtedly gone forever, as in the title picture of this paper, is the dominant white male icon lording over the world globe. Stereotypes are still here, but emphasis has changed, and hidden curriculums abound begging additional questions and study. To that end, neutral education processes in any media or publishing do not exist. Graphic representations either function as an instrument facilitating the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Shaull, 1993). The nature of this transformation remains to be in what we shall see.



Morton 1891

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