Note: text excerpted from *A World History of Photography* by Naomi Rosenblum,
found online at: http://all-art.org/history658_photography8.html

DOCUMENTATION:

THE SOCIAL SCENE

to 1946

The true use for the imaginative faculty of modern times is to give ultimate vivification to facts, to science and to common lives.
Walt Whitman, 1860

Documentary: That's a sophisticated and misleading word. And not really clear. . . . The term should be documentary style. . . . You see, a document has use, whereas art is really useless.
Walker Evans, 1971

AS AN INEXPENSIVE AND REPLICATIBLE MEANS of presenting (supposedly) truthful verifications of visual fact, camera images were bound to become important adjuncts of the campaigns waged by reformers in industrialized nations during the 19th century to improve inequitable social conditions. Nevertheless, while photography's potential for this purpose was recognized soon after the medium's inception, a characteristic form for social documentation did not emerge until the end of the century. Then, shaped by both the emergence of organized social reform movements and the invention of an inexpensive means of mechanically reproducing the photograph's halftones, social photography began to flower in the aspect that we know today.

A tandem phrase, social documentary, is sometimes used to describe works in which social themes and social goals are paramount, because the word documentary could refer to any photograph whose primary purpose is the truthful depiction of reality. Indeed before 1880, nearly all un posed and unmanipulated images were considered documentation; since then, millions of such records of people, places, and events have been made. The word social also presents problems when used to describe the intent of a photograph because many camera images have as their subject some aspect of social behavior. For instance,

commercial *cartes* (pl. no. 409), snapshots, postcards, artistic and photojournalistic images often depict social situations; that is, they deal with people, their relationships to one another and the way they live and work even though the motives of their makers have nothing to do with social commitment or programs. This said, however, it also must be emphasized that one cannot be too categorical about such distinctions, since all photographs defy attempts to define their essential nature too narrowly, and in the case of works that have social change as their prime goal the passage of time has been especially effectual in altering purpose, meaning, and resonance.

Documentary, as Evans observed, refers also to a particular style or approach. Although it began to emerge in the late 19th century, the documentary mode was not clearly defined as such until the 1930s, when American photography historian Beaumont Newhall noted that while the social documentary photographer is neither a mere recorder nor an "artist for arts sake, his reports are often brilliant technically and highly artistic"—that is, documentary images involve imagination and art in that they imbue fact with feeling. With their focus mainly on people and social conditions, images in the documentary style combine lucid pictorial organization with an often passionate commitment to humanistic values—to ideals of dignity, the right to decent conditions of living and work, to truthfulness. Lewis Hine, one of the early partisans of social documentation (see Profile), explained its goals when he declared that light was required to illuminate the dark areas of social existence, but where to shine the light and how to frame the subject in the camera are the creative decisions that have become the measure of the effectiveness of this style to both inform and move the viewer.

A crucial aspect of social documentation involves the context in which the work is seen. Almost from the start, photographs meant as part of campaigns to improve social conditions were presented as groups of images rather than individually. Although they were included at times in displays at international expositions held in Europe and the United States in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, such works were not ordinarily shown in the salons and exhibitions devoted either to artistic images or snapshots. They were not sold individually in the manner of genre, landscape, and architectural scenes. Instead, socially purposive images reached viewers as lantern slides or as illustrations in pamphlets and periodicals, usually accompanied by explanatory lectures and texts. Indeed, the development of social documentary photography is so closely tied to advances in printing technology and the growth of the popular press that the flowering of the movement would be unthinkable without the capability of the halftone process printing plate to transmute silver image into inked print (see *A Short Technical History, Part II*). In this regard, social documentation has much in common with photo-reportage or

photojournalism, but while this kind of camera documentation often involved social themes, the images usually were not aimed at social change.

409. CRUCES ND CO. Fruit Vendors, 1870s.
Albumen print. Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Early Social Documentation

Few images of a socially provocative nature were made in the period directly following the 1839 announcements of the twin births of photography. The small size, reflective surfaces, and uniqueness of the daguerreotype did not suit it for this role despite attempts by some to document such events as the workers' rallies sponsored by the Chartist Movement in England in 1848 (pl. no. 331). The slow exposure time and broad definition of the calotype also made it an inefficient tool for social documentation.

Of greater importance, however, is the fact that the need for accurate visual documentation in support of programs for social change was a matter of ideology rather than just technology; it was not until reformers grasped the connections between poverty, living conditions, and the social behavior of the work force (and its economic consequences) that the photograph was called upon to act as a "witness" and sway public opinion.

Nevertheless, although social betterment was not initially involved, images of working people were made soon after portraiture became possible. Usually commissioned by the sitters themselves, some images straddle the line between individual portrait and genre scene, as in a daguerreotype by an unknown American depicting blacksmiths at work (pl. no. 330). Its particularity of detail—it includes surroundings, tools, work garments, and individual facial characteristics—coupled with the revelation of a sense of the upright dignity of the two men pictured, reflects attitudes toward rural and artisan labor similar to those embodied in the work of the American genre painters such as William Sidney Mount.

Calotypists who favored the picturesque genre tradition generally regarded working people as types rather than individuals, and portrayed them in tableauxlike scenes such as one of hunters by the French photographer Louis Adolphe Humbert de Molard (pl. no. 257). Others found more natural poses and more evocative lighting in order to place greater emphasis on individual expression and stance rather than on tools and emblems of a particular occupation or station in life. This approach, visible in images of farm laborers made by William Henry Fox Talbot on his estate at Lacock and of fisherfolk in Newhaven by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, may be seen as indications of the growing interest among artists and intellectuals not only in the theme of work but in working people as individuals.

A consciously conceived effort involving the depiction of working people was undertaken in 1845 by Hill and Adamson. Probably the first photographic project to embrace a socially beneficial purpose, it apparently was suggested that calotypes might serve as a means of raising funds to provide properly decked boats and better fishing tackle that would improve the safety of the fishermen of the village of Newhaven, Scotland. Intending to present their subject in as favorable light as possible for cosmopolitan viewers. Hill and Adamson made beautifully composed and lighted calotypcs of individuals (pl. no. 51) and groups that may be seen as especially picturesque forerunners of the documentary style.

After the invention of the collodion negative, which made possible the inexpensive Ambrotype, and the still cheaper and easily replicated albumen print on

paper, working people began to be photographed more frequently, appearing on *cartes-de-visite* and other formats. With the subjects posed in studios in front of plain backdrops, often with the tools of their trade, these works, meant either as mementos for the sitter or souvenir images for travelers, ordinarily pay little attention to actual conditions of work or to the expressive use of light and form to reveal character. The incongruity between studio decor and occupation, for example, is obvious in an 1867 English carte of a female mine worker (pl. no. 410) who, appropriately clothed for work in clogs, trousers, and headscarf, stands squarely before a classy paneled wall with a studio prop of a shovel by her side. One exception to the generally undistinguished character of such *cartes* is the work of Danish photographer Heinrich Tonnies, who maintained a studio in the provincial town of Aalborg between 1856 and 1903. In common with many such portraitists, Tonnies photographed all classes of people—carpenters, housemaids, chimney sweeps, waiters—as well as the town's more prosperous folk, but despite the anomaly of the decorated studio carpet and occasional painted backdrop, his images reveal a feeling for character that endows these working-class sitters with unusual individual presence.

410. T. G. DUGDALE. Pit Brow Girl, Shevington, 1867.
Albumen carte-de-visite. A. J. Munby Collection, Trinity College Library, Cambridge, England.

Similar images of working people in cultures outside of western Europe and the United States served mainly as souvenirs. To cite but two examples, William Carrick, a Scottish photographer who opened a studio in St. Peters-burg, Russia, in 1859, and Eugenio Maunoury, a French national working in Peru at about the same time, each produced *cartes* of peddlers, street traders, and peasants. The distinctive quality of Carrick's Russian Types (pl. nos. 411 and 412), a series of over 40 images made in Simbirsk that fall partway between portraiture and picturesque genre, probably is owed to the photographer's expressed sympathy for humble clients to whom he devoted special attention.6 Maunoury, said to have been associated with Nadar's studio in Paris before appearing in Lima in 1861, may have been the first to introduce the genre carte to this part of South America, but his static studio scenes depict working-class types as glum and inert (pl. no. 413).

Commercial photographers working in the Near and Far East in the latter part of the 19th century produced larger-format views in which working people, social life, native customs, and seemingly exotic dress were featured. Felix Bonfils, whose scenic views of the Near East were mentioned earlier, was a prolific producer of such socially informative views, many of which show the women of the Ottoman Empire in characteristic dress and activity but with uncharacteristic ease of pose and expression (pl. no. 414). This naturalness, and the fact that in a number of instances native women posed without veils, is attributable to the pictures being taken not by Bonfils himself but by his wife, Marie Lydie Cabannis Bonfils, who worked in the family studios in Beirut, Baalbeck, and Jerusalem between 1867 and 1916. In South America, a similar engagement with the life of the lower classes can be seen in the images of field peasants by Argentinean photographer Benito Panunzi (pl. no. 415).

Unquestionably, the most graceful studio portrayals of artisans, laborers, and geisha are the large-format albumen prints turned out in the Japanese commercial establishments of Felice Beato, Reteniz von Stillfried, and Kusakabe Kimbei. The subtle handling of light and the artful arrangements of props and figures create a rare tension between information—what work is done, what garments are worn—and idealization. Enhanced further at times by delicate hand-coloring or by vignetting, these highly decorative images may be seen as camera equivalents of the *Ukiyo-e* woodblock prints that also often featured depictions of working people.

411. WILLIAM CARRICK. Russian Types (Milkgirl), c. 1859.
Albumen *carte-de-visite*.

412. WILLIAMCARRICK. Russian Types (Balalaika Player), c. 1859.
Albumen *carte-de-visite*.

413. EUGENIOMAUNOURY. Three Portraits, c. 1863.
Albumen cartes-e-visite. Collection H. L. Hoffenberg, New York.

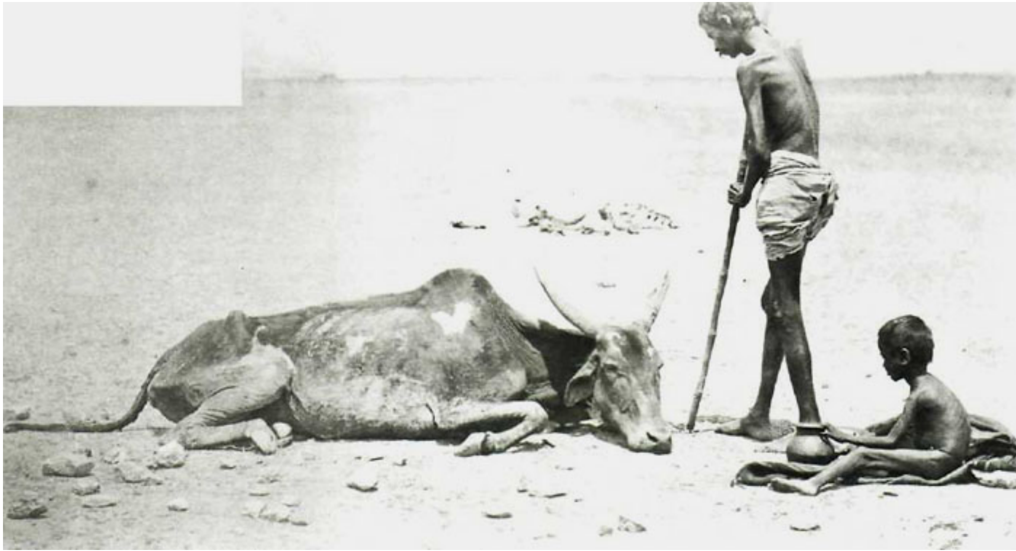
414. MARIE LDIE CABANNIS BONFILS. Group of Syrian Bedouin Women, c. 1870.
Albumen print. Semitic Museum, Harvard University. Cambridge, Mass.

415. BENITO PANUNZI. Settlers in the Countryside, c. 1905.
Albumen print. Collection H. L. Hoftenberg, New York.

Social life and ways of work engrossed amateur as well as commercial photographers working or traveling in these parts of the world. During 1857, compositions by British amateur William Johnson appeared each month in the periodical *Indian Amateurs Photographic Album* under the title "Costumes and Characters of Western India". Photographs of lower-caste Hindus taken by British Army Captain Willoughby Wallace Hooper arc further indications of the growing interest among Westerners in the social problems of the lower classes around the world (pl. no. 416). Perhaps the most completely realized result of a kind of curiosity about the way people live is a four-volume work entitled *Illustrations of China and Its People*, published by photographer John Thomson in England in 1873/74. With a lively text and 200 photographs taken during the photographer's four-year stay in China, the work attempted to make an arcane and exotic way of life understandable and acceptable to the British public by showing industrious and well-disposed natives interspersed with unusual architectural and natural monuments. In so doing, Thomson helped create a style and format for documentation that carried over to projects concerned with social inequities.

A somewhat different view of the non-Westerner emerged in the photographs of Native American tribesmen by cameramen attached to the geographical and geological surveys of the American West. Early images by the Canadian Humphrey Lloyd Hime, and later works by the Americans Jack Hiliers, William Henry Jackson, and Timothy O'Sullivan, for example, depict "native races" with a sober directness unleavened by the

least sense of the picturesque. Hillers's views of the Southern Paiute and Ute tribes, made on the Powell Expedition of 1872, were especially influential in establishing a style of ethnic and social documentation that had as its goal the presentation of information in a clear fashion without either idealization or undue artistry. This approach was taken over by the Bureau of American Ethnology after 1879, and it became a cornerstone of the social documentary style that began to emerge in the late 19th century. This style also informed such sociologically oriented documents as *Report on the Men of Marwar State*, mentioned in Chapter 2 (pl. no. 417).



416. WILLOUGHBY WALLACE HOOPER. The Last of the Herd, Madras Famine, 1876-78.
Albumen print. Royal Geographic Society, London.

417. UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. I of 1565 Aabirs;
He Sells Cow Dung (from Report on the Men of Marwar State, c. 1891.
Albumen print. American Institute of Indian Studies, Chicago.

Although the works discussed so far were sometimes published in books and albums, or were sold commercially, their impact on Western viewers is difficult to gauge. On the other hand, there is no question about the impact of the hundreds of thousands of stereograph views of similar social material published by commercial stereograph firms. From i860 on, as capitalist nations opened up large areas of Africa, Asia, and South America for trade, exploitation, and colonization, companies such as Negretti and Zambra, the London Stereoscopic Company, and Under-wood and Underwood sent photographers—some known, some still anonymous-—to record people at work and their housing, dress, and social customs. These three-dimensional views, accepted by the public as truth that "cannot deceive or extenuate," were in fact taken from the point of view of die industrialized Westerner; but while the scenes frequently were chosen to emphasize the cultural gap between the civilized European or American and the backward non-white, it is possible that glimpses of social life, such as two stereographic views of conditions in Cuba at the turn of the century (pl. nos. 418 and 419), inadvertently awakened viewers to inequities in colonized areas.

Toward the close of the 19th century, interest in social customs led some photographers to capture on glass plate and film indigenous peoples and folk customs

that were in danger of extinction. In Europe, this role was assumed in the 1880s by Sir Benjamin Stone, a comfortably situated English manufacturer who hoped that a "record of ancient customs, which still linger in remote villages," would provide future generations with an understanding of British cultural and social history. Somewhat later, Jose Ortiz Echagiie, a well-to-do Spanish industrialist, and Charles L'Hermitte, the son of a renowned French Salon painter, undertook similar projects, seeking out customs, costumes, and folkways in provincial byways that they believed would soon vanish with the spread of urbanization. Exemplified by L'Hermitte's photograph of lace-makers in Brittany made in 1912 (pl. no. 420), such images tend toward nostalgia in that they romanticize handwork and folk mannerisms while seldom suggesting the difficulties and boredom of provincial life.

418. UNDERWOOD and UNDERWOOD (Publishers). Wretched Poverty of a Cuban Peasant Home,
Province of Santiago, 1899.
One-half of an albumen stereograph. Keystone-Mast Collection,
California Museum of Photography, University of California. Riverside.

419. UNDERWOOD and UNDERWOOD (Publishers). The Courtyard of a Typical Cuban Home, Remedios, 1899.
One-half of an albumen stereograph. Keystone-Mast Collection,
California Museum of Photography, University of California. Riverside.

Similar attempts to use the camera both to arrest time and to make a comparative statement about past and present can also be seen in the work of several photographers in the United States who turned their attention to native tribal life just before the turn of the century. In contrast to the earlier unnuanced records by Hillers and others of Indian dress and living arrangements, these projects— undertaken between 1895 and about 1910 by Edward S. Curtis, Karl E. Moon, Robert and Frances Flaherty, and Adam Clark Vroman—were designed to play up the pos-itive aspects of tribal life, in particular the sense of community and the oneness of the individual Native American with nature. This attitude is especially visible in the 20-volume survey published by Curtis, which owing to its strongly Pictorialist interpretation was discussed in Chapter 7.

The handsome portraits and artfully arranged group scenes made by Moon in the Southwest, and the close-ups of cheerful and determined Inuit tribespeople of the far north photographed by Robert Flaherty, embody a similar desire to make their subjects palatable to white Americans with strong ethnocentric biases. As pioneers in documentary film in the United States in thee early 1920s, the Flahertys became known

for their ability to give dramatic form to mundane events, and among the 1,500 or so still photographs that Robert made of the Inuit are works that seem arranged and posed to accord with a concept of these subjects as heroic and energetic.

A project of more limited proportions than the one envisioned by Curtis occupied Adam Clark Vroman, a successful California book merchant who also saw in photography a means to emphasize the virtues of American tribal life. His images, of which Hopi Maiden is an example, were carefully framed to suggest the grace, dignity, and industriousness of the natives of the American Southwest, but Vroman did not entirely romanticize his theme or obscure the hardships shaping Indian society in his time. In true documentary fashion, he used the photographs in slide lectures and publications in order to awaken white Americans to the plight of the Native American.
The interest in making images of a social nature relates to the collections of photographs of people at work, at home, and at play that were initiated toward the end of the century by individuals who believed such reservoirs of images would facilitate the study of history. Benjamin Stone, for example, not only photographed vanishdanger of extinction. In Europe, this role was assumed in the 1880s by Sir Benjamin Stone, a comfortably situated English manufacturer who hoped that a "record of ancient customs, which still linger in remote villages,'" would provide future generations with an understanding of British cultural and social history. Somewhat later, Jose Ortiz Echague, a well-to-do Spanish industrialist, and Charles L'Hermitte, the son of a renowned French Salon painter, undertook similar projects, seeking out customs, costumes, and folkways in provincial byways that they believed would soon vanish with the spread of urbanization. Exemplified by L'Hermitte's photograph of lace-makers in Brittany made in 1912 (pl. no. 420), such images tend toward nostalgia in that they romanticize handwork and folk mannerisms while seldom suggesting the difficulties and boredom of provincial life.

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handsome portraits and artfully arranged group scenes made by Moon in the Southwest, and the close-ups of cheerful and determined Inuit tribespeople of the far north (pl. no. 197) photographed by Robert Flaherty, embody a similar desire to make their subjects palatable to white Americans with strong ethnocentric biases. As pioneers in documentary film in die United States in the early 1920s, die Flahertys became known for their ability to give dramatic form to mundane events, and among the 1,500 or so still photographs that Robert made of the limit are works chat seem arranged and posed to accord with a concept of these subjects as heroic and energetic.

A project of more limited proportions than the one envisioned by Curtis occupied Adam Clark Vroman, a successful California book merchant who also saw in photography a means to emphasize the virtues of American tribal life. His images, of wluch *Hopi Maiden* is an example (pl. no. 195), were carefully framed to suggest the grace, dignity, and industriousness of the natives of the American Southwest, but Vroman did not entirely romanticize his theme or obscure the hardships shaping Indian society in his time. In true documentary fashion, he used the photographs in slide lectures and publications in order to awaken white Americans to the plight of the Native American.

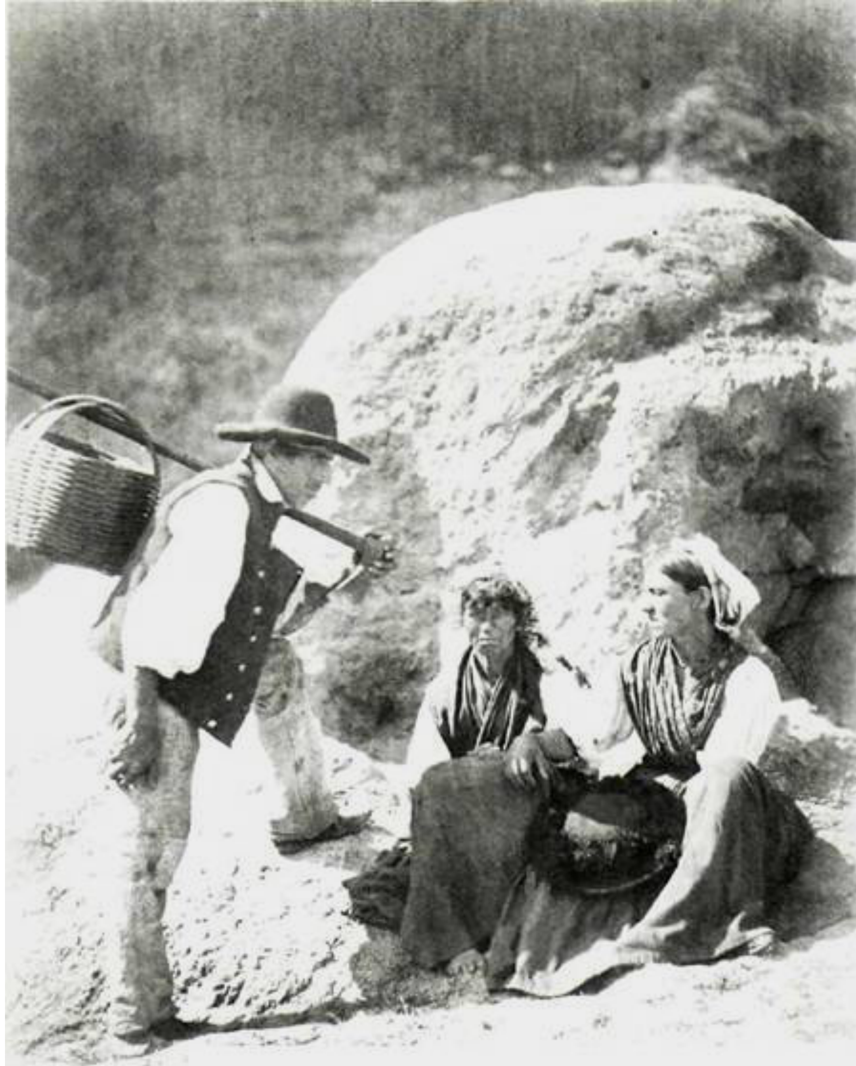
420. CHARLES L'HERMITTE. On the Coast of Plomarc'h, Douarnenez, 1912.
Gelatin silver print. Explorer, Paris.

421. UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. Blind Russian Beggars, 1870.
Albumen print Stone Collection, Birmingham Central Library. Birmingham, England.

The interest in making images of a social nature relates to the collections of photographs of people at work, at home, and at play that were initiated toward the end of the century by individuals who believed such reservoirs of images would facilitate the study of history. Benjamin Stone, for example, not only photographed vanishing customs but, an inveterate traveler, he collected camera images of social experiences around the world, typified by a photograph of blind beggars in St. Petersburg by an unknown photographer (pl. no. 421). He advocated the establishment of photographic surveys to be housed in local museums and libraries throughout Britain, a concept that actually was realized around the turn of the century with the establishment by Francis Greenwood Peabody, professor of social ethics at Harvard University, of a "Social Museum" that eventually comprised over ten-thousand documents, including photographs, of social experience around the world.

It should be emphasized again that it is difficult to categorize many images that at first glance seem concerned with social themes such as work and living conditions, in that the goals of the makers were varied and complex. For example, should one regard views of workers on Talbot's estate at Lacock or of peasants in Portuguese vineyards owned by the family of photographer James Joseph Forrester (pl. no. 422) as more than a new type of picturesque genre imagery because they show us tools, dress, and

relationships? *Children on a Fish Weir* (pl. no. 274) by the Venetian photographer-publisher Carlo Naya transforms the reality of working youngsters into an idyllic episode; should such commercial views be considered social documentation also? Can one really decide whether Curtis's views of tribal life in the United States are authentic documents or Pictorialist fictions?



422. JAMES JOSEPH FORRESTER. Peasants of the Alto Doura, 1856.
From The Photographic Album, 1857. Albumen print.
Gernsheim Collection, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin.

Perhaps all of these images, no matter what their purpose, might be seen as aspects of the growing interest in problems of work and social existence on the part of

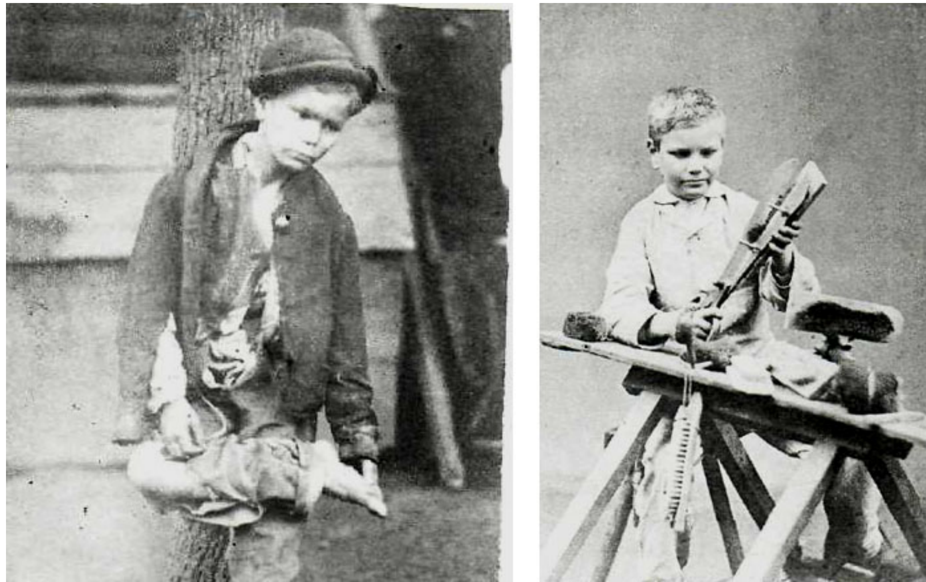
Western artists and intellectuals. From the 1850s on, alongside the serious but idealized treatment of the European peasantry by Barbizon painters, realistic portrayals of less bucolic kinds of work associated with advancing industrialization had begun to appear in graphic art and literature. Exemplified by The Stonebveakers (pl. no. 423) of 1851/52 by French realist Gustave Courbet and by Work (pl. no. 424), a grandiose composition begun in 1852 by the English Pre-Raphaelite Ford Maddox Brown, such themes signaled the mounting concern among elements of thie middle class for the social and ethical consequences of rampant industrialization—a concern that helped prepare for the role of the documentary photograph in campaigns for social change. Obviously, the complexity of ideas explored in the painting Work, which deals with the roles and kinds of labor necessary to the functioning of industrialized society, is difficult if not impossible to encompass in photography. Nevertheless, an effort was made by Oscar Gustav Rejlander. His composite picture Two Ways of Life (pl. no. 253— discussed in Chapter 5) can be seen as an attempt to deal with the moral and ethical implications of labor in a society in which the working class faces a choice between virtuous hard work or sinful ease. While Rejlander's image is derivative in style and moralistic in concept, other of his photographs embody less complex social themes and are more successful. For instance, the anxiety of unemployment is imaginatively handled in the composite image Hard Times (pl. no. 266) while portraits of chimney sweeps reveal an individualized grace that docs not depend on social class.

423. GUSTAVE COURBET. The Stonebreakers, 1852

424. FORD MADDOX BROWN. Work, 1852.

The Social Uses of Photographic Documentation

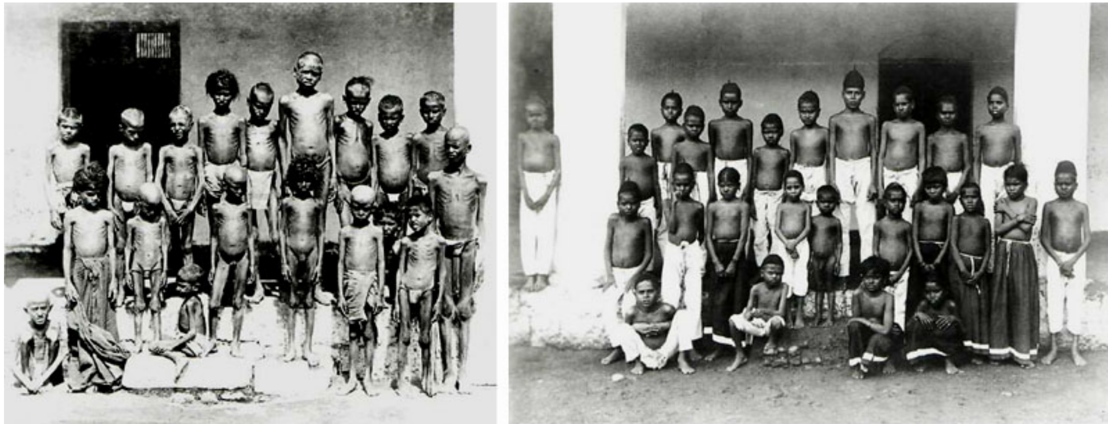
The concept of using camera documentation to improve social conditions could not evolve so long as poverty was regarded as a punishment for sinful behavior. Nevertheless, even before such Calvinistic attitudes were replaced by an understanding that improved housing and working conditions might produce better behavior and a more efficient labor force, the photograph began to find a place in campaigns for social betterment. *Carte* portraits were turned into a quasi-sociological tool by Dr. Thomas John Barnardo, a self-appointed evangelical missionary who opened his first home for destitute boys in London in 1871 and went on to organize a network of so-called charitable institutions. To illustrate the effectiveness of his programs, Barnardo installed a photographic department to document the "before" and "after" transformations of street waifs into obedient slaveys (pl. nos. 425 and 426); the prints were kept as records and sold to raise funds.



425-26. UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. Before and After Photographs of a Young Boy, c. 1875. Albumen prints. Barnardo Photographic Archive, Ilford, England.

Such works have little value as expression, but they raised issues that have continued to be perceived as significant problems in social documentation. Because the transformations seen in the photographs were at best little more than cosmetic, the result of a wash and a new ward-robe, and at worst entirely fictitious, Barnardo was accused of falsifying truth for the camera; he responded that he was seeking generic rather than individual truths about poverty. This attitude was considered flawed by subsequent social documentary photographers, who endeavored to make absolutely authentic

records while also expressing what they saw as the larger truth of a situation. Nevertheless, the "before" and "after" image became a staple of social documentation, appearing in American tracts of the 1890s and on the other side of the world in the photographs made by the firm of Raja Lala Deen Dayal, for the nizam of Hyderabad to show the efficacy of relief programs for die starving (pl. nos. 427 and 428).



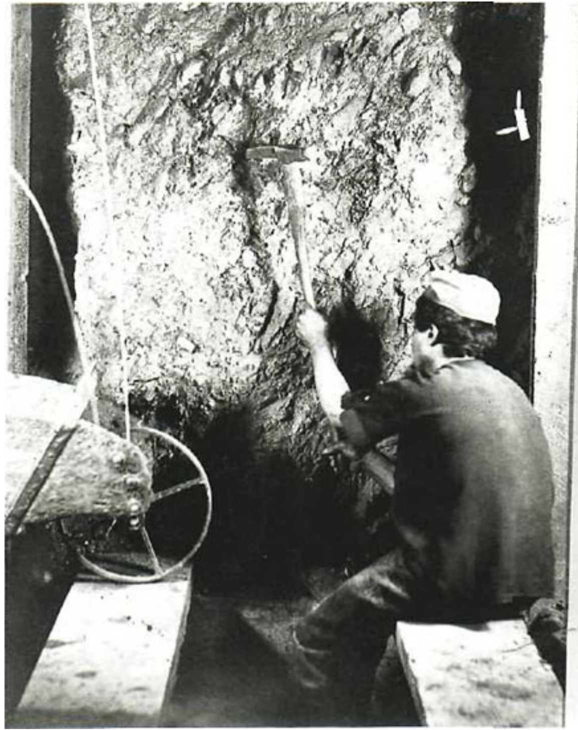
427-28. AJA LALA DEEN DAYAL.
Before and After (from Types of Emaciation
Aurangabad), 1899-1900.
Gelatin silver prints. Private collection.

As photographs came to be accepted as evidence in campaigns to improve social conditions, it became apparent that in themselves images could not necessarily be counted on to convey specific meanings—that how they were perceived often depended on the outlook and social bias of the viewer. The *carte* images of women mineworkers mentioned earlier are a case in point; introduced before a British industrial commission, as evidence that women were deprived of their feminine charms because mine work forced them to wear trousers, the same images suggested to others that hard work induced independence and good health in women. Naturally, not all photographic images can be as broadly construed as these bland *cartes* obviously were, but one of the basic tenets of the developing documentary style was that images should not only provide visual facts, they should be as unambiguous as possible in tone.

For instance, in an interesting contrast to the *cartes* under discussion, an image of a young woman delivering coal (pl. no. 429), taken some 50 years later by Horace Nicholls as part of a project to investigate the role of women doing "men's work" during World War I, leaves little question as to the subject's feelings.

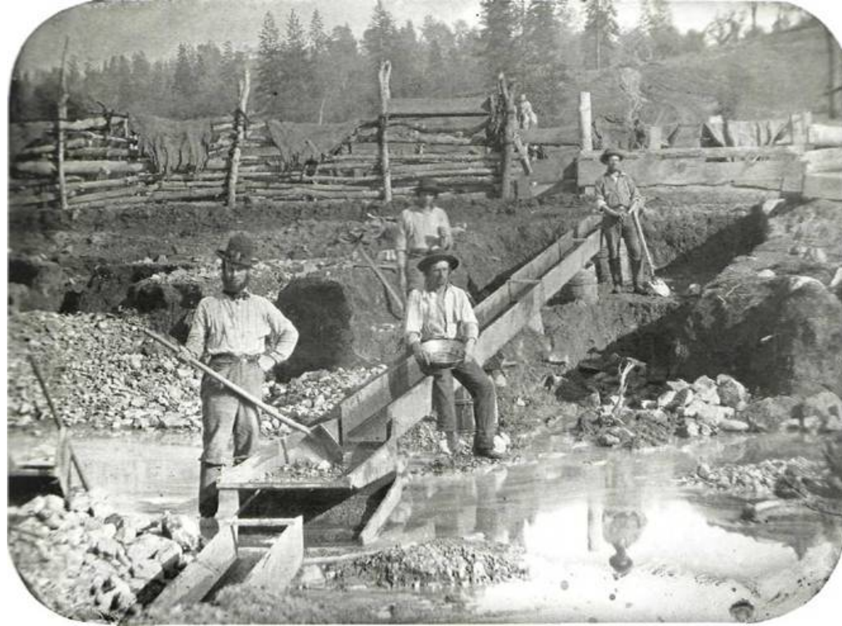
As a social theme, mining became a subject of special appeal to artists, writers, and photographers in the late-19th and early-20th centuries owing to its difficulties and dangers and to the perception of the mineworker as one who mixed individualism and fearlessness. One of the earliest American mine images, an 1850 daguerreotype of California goldminers (pl. no. 431), presents this occupation as an open-air enterprise that seems not to entail hours of back-breaking "panning." The first underground mining pictures were made in England in 1864; some three years later, while on the Clarence King expedition, Timothy O'Sullivan documented silver miners at work in images that suggest the constriction of space and the physical difficulty of the work (pl. no. 430).

429. HORACE W. NICHOLLS. Delivering Coal, c. 1916.
Gelatin silver print. Royal Photographic Society, Bath, England



430. TIMOTHY O'SULLIVAN. Miner at Work, Comstock Lode, 1867.
Albumen print. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

In the final several decades of the 19th century, mining companies themselves commissioned photographs of their operations and often displayed them at international expositions. Between 1884 and 1895, George Bretz, who pioneered subterranean photography with electric light in the United States, focused almost exclusively on mining in Pennsylvania hard-coal collieries. Breaker Boys, Eagle Hill Colliery (pl. no. 432) was one of a number of works acclaimed for unusual subject, technical expertise, and directness of treatment. Not long afterward, Gustav Marrissiaux, a Belgian photographer commissioned by mining interests in Liege, depicted (among other operations) young boys similarly occupied in separating coal from slag (pl. no. 433). Perhaps the most compelling images of this subject are those taken by Lewis Hine around 1910 as part of the campaign against the unconstrained use of children in heavy industry being waged by the National Child Labor Committee.



431. UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. Goldminers, California, 1850.
Daguerreotype. International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.

The directness of style associated with social documentation emerged around 1850, the consequence of expanded camera documentations on paper and glass of historic and modern structures—buildings, railroads, bridges, and, on occasion, social facilities (see Chapter 4). Commissioned mainly by government bodies, railroad lines, and publishers, the photographers involved with this work demonstrated an earnest respect for actuality and an attentive regard for the expressive properties of light. While they did not seek to obscure or mystify their subjects, they realized that the judicious management of light added an aesthetic dimension to the description of objects and events. One such documentation eloquently confirms that while actuality may be depicted without artifice, it can be made suggestive; The Linen Room (pl. no. 436) by Charles Negre avoids the picturesqueness this photographer brought to his images of street types and draws one into the scene by an alternating cadence of dark and light notes that seem to imbue the scene with a mysterious silence. The series of which this is part was commissioned in 1859 by Napoleon III to demonstrate the government's benevolent concern for industrial workers injured on the job.

432. GEORGE BRETZ. Breaker Bays, Eagle Hill Colliery, c. 1884.
Gelatin silver print. Edward L. Baftord Photography Collection, Albin O. Kuhn Library and Gallery, University of Man-land, Baltimore

433. GUSTAV MARRISSIAUX. Breaker Boys, 1904.
Gelatin silver print. Musee de la Vie Wallone, Liege, Belgium.

434. W. ROBERTS. Street-Seller of Birds' Nests, c. 1850.
Wood engraving after a daguerreotype by Richard Beard or assistant;
an illustration from London Labour and London Poor by Henry Mayhew.
New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

Social Photography in Publication

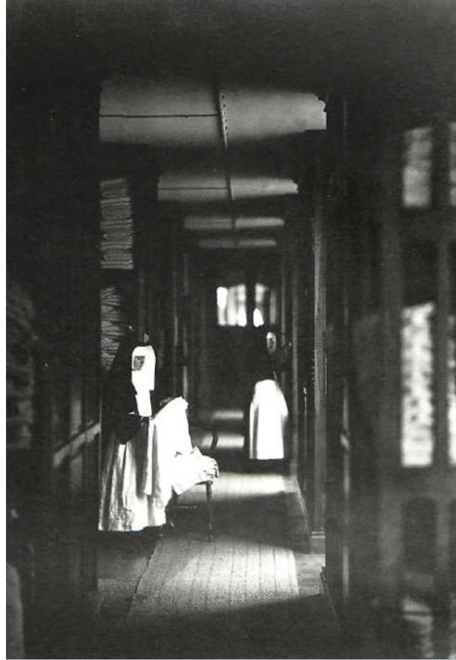
Despite the realization that photographs might be useful in campaigns for social improvement, it took a while for the medium of photography and the message of social activism to be effectively harnessed together. One early sociological venture involving camera images was Henry Mayhew's pioneering work, London Labour and London Poor, which first appeared toward the end of 1850. Combining illustrations based on daguerreotypes taken under the supervision of Richard Beard with "unvarnished" language in the text portions, the author sought to enliven his account of lower-class urban life, but in the translation from camera image to wood engraving the London "poor" became little more than stiffly positioned genre types (pl. no. 434). Furthermore, with the backgrounds only sketchily indicated, the figures of street vendors and workers seem extracted from their environment, a visual anomaly in view of Mayhew's desire to bring the reality of working-class existence home to his readers. Curiously, the same lack of veracity characterizes his later work on English prison conditions even though by this time the engraver had access to albumen prints from collodion negatives supplied by the photographer Herbert Watkins. Even so, the format that was established—authentic language supposedly from firsthand interviews and accurate visual illustration from photographs—became the bedrock of sociological documentation—one that is still used today.

A later work, Street Life in London, a serial that began publication in 1877, repeated this scheme, but instead of line engravings it was illustrated with Woodburytypes made from photographs taken expressly for this project by Thomson, after his return from China. The 36 images that illustrate written vignettes supplied by author Adolphe Smith seemed to accord with the canons of the documentary style even though the text was a mixture of sensationalist reporting and moralistic opinions. The work was not a condemnation of the class system or of poverty' as such, but an attempt to make the middle class more sympathetic to the plight of the poor and thus more eager to ameliorate conditions. In keeping with the tone of the writing, Thomson photographed vendors and other working-class Londoners in an agreeable light, on the whole choosing pleasant-looking individuals and consciously arranging them in tableaux like genre scenes. Nevertheless, at least one image—The Crawlers (pl. no. 435)—must have left readers with a disturbing feeling in that it depicts with considerable force and no self-consciousness an enfeebled woman seated in a scabrous doorway holding an infant. While Street Life may seem ambiguous in terms of purpose, one of its goals that met with eventual success was the building of an embankment to prevent the Thames River from periodically flooding the homes of the London poor. A project that originated in the desire to make a record of slum buildings slated for demolition in central Glasgow also helped establish the documentary style even though its purpose was nostalgic rather than reformist.

435. JOHN THOMSON.
The Crawlers from Street Life in London (an album of 36 original photographs), 1877.
Woodburytype. Museum of Modern Art, New York; gift of Edward Steichen.

In 1868 and again in 1877, during a period of unsettling urban growth, the Glasgow Improvement Trust commissioned Thomas Annan, a Scottish photographer of architecture, portraits, and works of art to "record many old and interesting landmarks." The results, originally printed in albumen in 1868, were reissued with later images added as carbon prints in 1878 and in two editions of gravure prints in 1900 with the title Old Closes and Streets of Glasgow. Because this project was not conceived in a reformist spirit, no statistical information about living conditions or comments by the inhabitants—who appear only incidentally in the images—were included. Nevertheless, Annan's images might be seen as the earliest visual record of what has come to be called the inner city slum—in this case one that excelled in "filth . . . drunkenness . . . evil smell and all that makes city poverty disgusting." The vantage points selected by the photographer and the use of light to reveal the slimy and fetid dampness of the place transform scenes that might have been merely picturesque into a document that suggests the reality of life in such an environment (pl. no. 437).

Whatever the initial purpose of the commission and despite their equivocal status as social documentation, many of Annan's images are surprisingly close in viewpoint to those of Jacob Riis, one of the first in America conceive of camera images as an instrument for social change. Sensitivity to the manner in which light gives form and dimension to inert objects also links Annan's work with that of the French photographers Charles Marville and Eugene Atget and supplies further evidence that the documentary style in itself is not specific to images commissioned for activist programs. This becomes even more apparent in the work of the photographer Waldemar Franz Herman Titzenthaler, one of the first in his native Germany to understand that the dry plate gave the urban photographer unprecedented access to the social scene. Whether documenting urban slums, industrial enterprises, workers (pl. no. 438), army cadets, or street life, Titzenthaler's images all display the same careful attention to pictorial structure and the disposition of light. Indeed, the stylistic similarities between such images and those made to realize specific social goals suggests that in addition to a particular approach on the part of the photographer, social documentation requires text and context to make its message understood.



436. CHARLES NEGRE. Vincennes Imperial Asylum: The Linen Room, 1859.
Albumen print. Collection Andre Jammes, Paris; Courtesy National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

437. THOMAS ANNAN. Close No. 75 High Street from Old
Closes and Streets of Glasgow, 1868.
Albumen print. Edward L. Bafford Photography Collection,
Albin O. Kuhn Library and Gallery,
University of Maryland, Baltimore.

438. WALDEMAR FRANZ HERMAN TITZENTHALER.
Boiler Maker (Types of German Workers), c. 1900.
Gold-toned printing-out paper. Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts.
Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Social Documentation in the United States

Riis was the link in the United States between older Victorian concepts and emerging Reform attitudes toward social problems. His subject was the tenement world— where the poverty-stricken half of New York's population lived. In the late 1880s, on the eve of the Reform era, mil-lions of immigrants from Europe, largely from the eastern and southern sections, were induced by the promise of jobs to come to the United States. Needed as cheap labor for seemingly insatiable industrial appetites, those uprooted workers became the first victims of the economic collapse that lasted from 1882 until 1887 (one of the many in the post-Civil War era). Disgracefully ill-housed in

tenements or actually living in the streets of major American cities, with New York by far the most overcrowded and disease-ridden, impoverished immigrants were thought by most middle-class people to be responsible for their own poverty. Before 1890, the problems of the urban poor were completely ignored by public officials, while private charitable organizations contented themselves with pro-viding soup kitchens and moral uplift.

As a police reporter for the New York Herald, Riis, who was thrust squarely into a densely populated and malignant slum called Mulberry Bend, started to use camera images, taken by himself or under his supervision, to prove the truth of his words and to make the relationship between poverty and social behavior clear to influential people. The photographs were seen as a way to produce incontrovertible evidence of the existence of vagrant children, squalid housing, and the disgraceful lodgings provided by the police for the homeless. As lantern slides for Riis's popular lectures and as illustrations for articles and books, diese pictures were significant elements of the successful campaigns to eliminate the most pestilential shanties in Mulberry Bend and to close down the police lodging houses. The first and most influential publication by Riis, How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York, which appeared in book form in 1890, consisted of reportage based on his personal investigation and was illustrated by 40 plates, 17 of which were direct halftone reproductions of photographs. Despite the poor quality of these early halftones, images such as Five Carts Lodging, Bayard Street (pl. no. 439) clearly are more persuasive as photographs than as line drawings (pl. no. 440).

Neither their social intent nor the fact that Riis thought himself an inept photographer, uninterested in the techniques or aesthetics of printing, should blind one to the discernment with which these images were made. Fully aware of the purpose to be served, the photographer selected appropriate vantage points and ways to frame the subject, at times transcending the limitation implied in the title—that of an outsider looking at slum life from across the deep chasm separating middle- from lower-class life. While he may not have entered very deeply into the space occupied by the "other, his was not a casual view. Com-pare for example, the Jersey Street sheds (pl. no. 441) in which the figures are placed in a rigidly circumscribed patch of sunlight, hemmed in by areas of brick and shadow and so disposed that the eye must focus on them while also taking in the surrounding details, with a contemporaneous image by an unknown photographer of a London slum courtyard pl. no. 442). This scene, with its random arrangement of figures, may actually seem more authentically real to modem viewers than Riis's image, but the slice-of-life naturalism it represents did not interest social

documentarians. Because social images were meant to persuade, photographers felt it necessary to communicate a belief that slum dwellers were capable of human emotions and that they were being kept from fully realizing their human qualities by their surroundings. As a result, photographs used in campaigns for social reform not only provided truthful evidence but embodied a commitment to humanistic ideals. By selecting sympathetic types and contrasting the individual's expression and gesture with the shabbiness of the physical surroundings, the photographer frequently was able to transform a mundane record of what exists into a fervent plea for what might be. This idealism became a basic tenet of the social documentary concept.

Before 1890, tracts on social problems in the United States had been largely religious in nature, stressing "redemption of the erring and sinful." Such works usually were illustrated with engravings that at times acknowledged a photographic source and at others gave the artistic imagination free reign. After the appearance of How The Other Half Lives, however, photographic "evidence" be-came the rule for publications dealing with social problems even though the texts might still consider poverty to be the result of moral inadequacy rather than economic laws. In one example, Darkness and Daylight, an 1897 compendium of interviews, sensationalist reporting, and sermonizing, readers were assured that all the illustrations were "scenes presented to the camera's merciless and unfailing eye," notwithstanding the fact that they actually were engraved by artists using photographs.

As halftone-printing techniques advanced and reformist ideas took the place of religiously motivated charity, social photography became the "embodiment of progressive values," largely through the work of Hine. His career spanned 40 years, during which he enlarged on Riis's objectives and formulated new concepts and techniques. Involvement in The Pittsburgh Survey, a pioneering study of working and living conditions in the nation's foremost industrial city, aided Hine in developing a forceful and distinctive personal style, exemplified by the previously mentioned Breaker Boys (pl. no. 474). This complex organization of informative detail and affecting expression bathed in somber light creates a miniature netherworld of intersecting triangles, a visual counterpart to Hine's characterization of child labor as "deadening in its monotony, exhausting physically, irregular," and of child workers as "condemned."

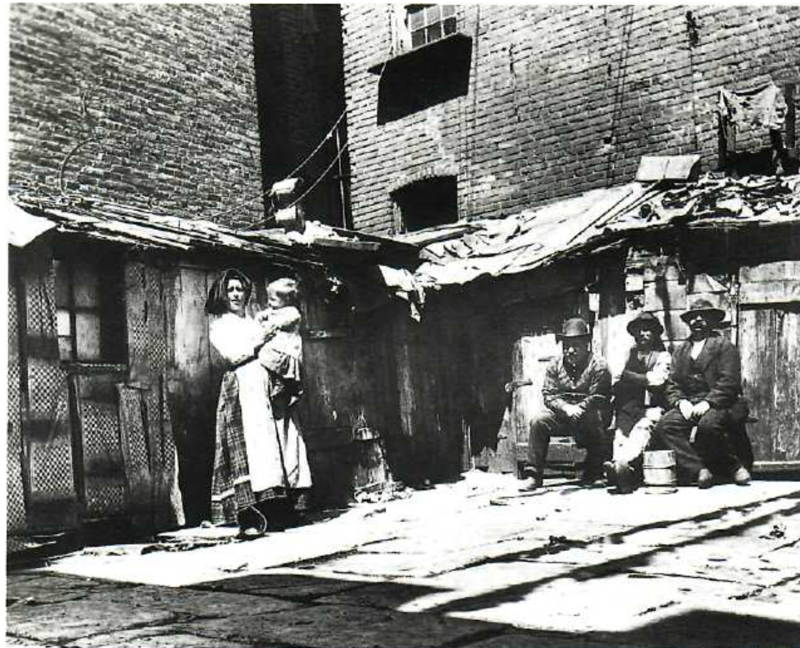
The confident atmosphere engendered by the Progressive Era sustained other projects in which camera images were used to document social conditions, but few photographers were as committed to lobbying for social change as Riis and Hine. Many worked for the expanding periodical press that by 1886 had increased its use of photographs to the point where Frances Benjamin Johnston could describe herself as

"making a business of photographic illustration and the writing of descriptive articles for magazines, illustrated weeklies and newspapers" (at the time an unusual career for women). Her early assignments are indicative of the growing popular interest in work and workers; they include a story on coal mines, a spread on the employees in the United States Mint, one on iron workers on the Mesabi Range and on women in the mills of New England, besides news stories on the illustrious doings of celebrities. Her most fully realized commissioned documentation (as contrasted with her magazine stories) was undertaken in 1899 to publicize the educational program offered by the Hampton Institute—a school in Virginia that incorporated the Reform ideal of industrial training in a program designed to eliminate poverty among rural blacks and Indians. Johnston's highly styled arrangements, classical poses, and overall clarity of illumination—seen in Students at Work on the Stairway (pl. no. 443) and now so unexpected in documentary images-—seem designed to suggest the temperate and disciplined approach that the school emphasized. Others who supplied imagery on social themes to the press were Arthur Hewitt, a member of the Camera Club of New York whose Pictorialist style colored his photographs of bridge-builders and longshoremen for Everybody's Magazine, and Jesse Tarbox Beals, whose prosaic record shots of tenement life were commissioned by the charity organizations that eventually merged into the Community Services Society.

After 1915, Reformist ideals and programs withered as American energies were redirected to the crisis occasioned by the first World War. With social issues receding in importance, there was less demand for photographs that give dimension to these concerns, and at the same time fresh aesthetic winds, generated by the Armory Show of 1913, quickened interest in the European avant-garde movements in the arts. Abstraction, Expressionism, and Dadaism were some of the new styles and concepts that made Realism and the expression of human emotion and sentiment in visual art seem old-fashioned and contributed to a brief eclipse of the social documentary sensibility during the 1920s.

439. JACOB A. Riis. Five Cents Lodging, Bayard Street, c. 1889.
Gelatin silver print. Jacob A. Riis Collection,
Museum of the City of New York.

440. KENYON COX.
Lodgers in a Crowded Bayard Street Tenement, 1890.
Wood engraving from How the Other Half Lives.



441. JACOB RIIS. Yard, Jersey Street Tenement, c. 1888.
Gelatin silver print. Jacob A. Riis Collection, Museum of the City of New York.

442. UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. London Slum, c. 1889.
Gelatin silver print. BBC HuJton Picture Library/Bettman
Archive.

443. FRANCES BENJAMIN JOHNSTON. Hampton Institute:
Students at Work on the Stairway, 1899-1900.
Gelatin silver print. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Jacob Riis

American photographer of Danish birth. The son of a schoolteacher and editor, he was well educated when he came to the USA in 1870. He was a self-taught photographer and worked at a variety of jobs before becoming a journalist, and he understood the power of the written and illustrated word. Riis's work in journalism began in 1873 when he was employed by the New York News Association. By 1874 he was editor and then owner of the *South Brooklyn News*. In 1878 he won a coveted job as a police/reporter at the *Tribune* and found the basis of his life's work in his assigned territory, Mulberry Bend, where the worst slums and tenements were (e.g. *Mulberry Bend as It Was*).