Appendix B

Photographs and the Study of the Past

*It is impossible that the immense worth and use of systematic and comprehensive photographic records of our country and our time can much longer fail to be recognized.*—George Francis, “Photography as an Aid to Local History” (1888).

Documentary photography has vast and as yet unrealized potentialities for recording as well as for presenting data that should be of vital interest to social scientists and historians. . . . Documentary photography is a new means with which the historian can capture important but fugitive items in the social scene.—Roy Stryker and Paul Johnstone, “Documentary Photographs” (1940)

The use of photographs and film has begun to play a more important part in social science research and analysis. Ethnographers utilize film analysis in order to understand the behavior and culture of “primitive” peoples, while psychologists and psychiatrists employ microanalysis to such sources to determine personal and group behavior of members of more “advanced” societies. Furthermore, anthropologists have expressed an interest in preserving and researching visual sources made by earlier scholars and filmmakers. As two scholars have pointed out:

Investigators in many disciplines, faced with the fact of non-recurrence, or their inability to recreate phenomena in which

they are interested, are confronted with the problem of recording, preserving, and retrieving data on non-reproducible events for future study. The astronomer studying unique celestial events... and the biologist happening on anomalous or passing speciation are no less concerned with the data of such events than... the anthropologist investigating disappearing cultures, and the historian trying to reconstruct the past.  

While this basic concern can be addressed by the use of visual records, a brief review of the ways in which historians have used photographic sources, and the methods developed for such study, reveals the need to turn to other disciplines. Following this historiography, a case study of alley life utilizing social science techniques of photo-interpretation is presented to demonstrate the value of this approach for historical study, as well as to show which methods are the most effective for this kind of analysis.

It is important to define what is meant here by using photographs as a "primary source." Such use involves the study of the content and meaning of a visual image to locate information on a particular subject. One must "read" and analyze the photograph much as one reads a manuscript or document: with a concern for authenticity and accuracy. A given photograph contains information that can be cited or "quoted," either through a written paraphrase or through reproduction. However, since photographs, unlike quotes, carry myriad other information, they can present unique problems.

Documentary photographers were the first to see the value of their work for historians. The work of Roger Fenton on the Crimean War, or that of Mathew Brady and Alexander Gardner on the American Civil War, reflected not only a concern for financial gain, but also an interest in preserving "non-recurring" events. As Gardner noted in the preface to his book of Civil War photographs, "Very..."


3. The reading process begins by developing a general sense of what is going on in a given photograph—what the elements are and how they are related, as well as the mood and tenor of the image. More precise determinations of data and evidence on such things as material culture and behavior are made later. For an excellent description of this process, see Howard Becker, "Photography and Sociology," *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, 1 (Fall, 1974): 6.

4. This approach contrasts sharply with most of the historical studies considered here. Many studies merely use photographs as illustration, while others are organized around the photographs, attempting to explain each image individually, rather than to use visual data as evidence for other factors or events.


7. Ibid., p. 276.


dication for the movement toward use of visual records that was to come to fruition in the 1930s and 1940s.\textsuperscript{10}

The Depression brought with it a renewed interest in the use of photographs, reflecting changes in the history profession as historians turned to new subjects (the “common man”) and new approaches (the result of Robinson and other New Historians urging their colleagues to view the social sciences as allies). The result of this ferment can be seen in the 1939 American Historical Association convention, which was devoted to the “Cultural Approach to History.” Besides hearing papers on demography, folklore, folk music, and linguistics, historians were presented with a clear statement of the possible value of photographs for historical study. Roy Stryker (then director of the Historical Division of the Farm Security Administration) and Paul Johnstone argued that “photography can easily reach the vast number of human beings whose lives ordinarily are unrecorded either in literary sources or in formal graphic sources.”\textsuperscript{11} It offered, they contended, “a new means with which the historian can capture important but fugitive items in the social scene.” They went beyond the Camera as Historian by suggesting the areas in which photographs can be utilized in historical research; these ranged from the most obvious—recording physical details of material culture—to “clues to social organization and institutional relationships,” and interpretation of the “human, and particularly the inarticulate elements.” Stryker and Johnstone contrasted a “Michigan Iron Miner’s Home” with that of a black “Sharecropper Family” in Louisiana to suggest social organization and institutional relationships, while a photograph of an “Italian Immigrant Mother and Child at Ellis Island” in 1903 “reflected the order, the security, the sense of status, and the personal relation which characterized the peasant culture from which this immigrant had come.”\textsuperscript{11}

While Stryker and Johnstone offered insights into the possible uses of photographs as primary documents for historical research, they did not elucidate methods for analyzing a large body of photographs, or suggest how such information could be readily incorporated into a study. Like Francis and a number of later scholars, they left historians to work out their own forms and methods. This may help to explain why historians have remained reluctant to use photographs as primary sources.

Of course, historians have used photographs, or drawings made from them, for illustrations. Moreover, in recent years certain subfields have employed photographs as research documents. Most commonly they are used for discovering remains of earlier societies, as in the case of the Smithsonian Institution’s study and projected restoration of Maryland’s first capital, St. Mary’s City.\textsuperscript{12} Historical archaeologists also use photographs to record artifacts recovered from excavation sites. Less common is the analytical use suggested by David Miller, involving “the reconstruction of a landscape as it existed or developed at some time in the past.” Photographs here provide the relationships of one part of the landscape to another, thus indicating possible forms of social organization and control.\textsuperscript{13} Nevertheless, the photographs used in these studies are taken or generated by the particular study; such research does not involve analysis of historical photographs.

A number of recent studies have sought to use photographs as primary documents directly in their analysis. In their 1969 study of Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis, Harold Mayer and Richard Wade claimed that they were breaking historical ground by using “photography as evidence instead of as mere illustration.” Although they do include a brief essay on their sources, including a discussion of the limitations and biases, they never apply nor develop methods for photoanalysis. Their study does, however, provide extensive visual sources that could be subjected to such an analysis.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{11} David Miller, review of Norman and St. Joseph’s Early Development in, Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 4 (Fall, 1973): 592–95.

\textsuperscript{12} Harold Mayer and Richard Wade, Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis (Chicago, 1969), p. 1. Many studies, both scholarly and popular, try in varying degrees to use “the photograph as historical technique and source” (Robert F. Harney and Harold Troper, Immigrants: A Portrait of the Urban Experience 1860–1970 [Toronto, 1973], p. 9). For a more popular account, see John Bejermann, Victorian and Edwardian London from Old Photographs (New York, 1969). While these studies are valuable and interesting in their own right, and often apply strict rules of historical evidence to the photographs to insure validity and accuracy, they are designed to re-create the past by explaining visual images of it, rather than interpreting or analyzing that past.
Pete Daniel's study of the 1927 Mississippi River flood also uses photographs extensively, although they are used largely as illustrations and are not subjected to analysis. Moreover, there is no discussion of the methods used. Daniel does, however, use a valuable technique developed by anthropologists and others to sharpen and deepen responses in interviewing. This technique of interviewing with photographs elicits much more complete and precise information from respondents.

Without a doubt, the most impressive and provocative uses of photographs by a recent historian are in Michael Lesy's *Wisconsin Death Trip* and *Real Life: Louisville in the Twenties*. In his efforts to recall the psychological climate of the place and time of these subjects, Lesy has subjected his visual sources to analysis and has organized and arranged them to tell a larger story. While his methods are not without problems, Lesy's approach to photoanalysis stands out as a model for future studies.

While historians have continued to use photographs as illustrations, they have not often used them as sources in any systematic and comprehensive way. This condition exists despite numerous encouragements over the years by scholars to use photographs as primary sources. We must instead turn to the social sciences for possible models and methods applicable to historical records, although that applicability will, of course, be restricted because of the different nature of the sources.

Fortunately, social scientists have not been as timid as historians in developing and explicating their techniques for photo interpretation. This may be because they can make their own visual surveys, and thus can control factors that the historian cannot. Yet, as Sorenson and Gajdusek have pointed out,

Film, [and photographs] more easily than most other types of records, can become the source of information and observation unforeseen by the filmmaker. The camera, even when aimed at specifically chosen material, invariably picks up, unapprehended and unanticipated, incidental surrounding information which we may neither understand nor recognize at the time. Review of such data can be the basis for uncategories, intuitive impressions supplying the clues to fruitful avenues of inquiry.

Perhaps the most useful approach to the analysis of historical photographic records has been developed by a number of anthropologists, although some work by sociologists and psychologists also provides important techniques and insights. The methods employed in photoanalysis are largely the result of trial and error, drawing from a variety of techniques and approaches. Regardless of which approach is taken, all students of photoanalysis stress that certain key steps must be taken before the actual analysis of photographs may be made. These steps include determining where photographs can be located, collection techniques, sample size and randomness of the collection, and information on the context of the photographs. Such steps are critical for determining the accuracy, bias, and validity of the visual sources, and are not unlike other “tests” of historical sources.  

17. Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (New York, 1973), *Lesy, Real Life: Louisville in the Twenties* (New York, 1976). It is unfortunate that Lesy fails to provide more discussion of his methods and technique. A number of other studies, such as those by art historians, are not considered here because they are largely concerned with different sets of questions: e.g., William Scale, *The Tuskegee Intervie: American Intervie through the Camera's Eye*, 1896-1917 (New York, 1973).
Relevant photographs can be found almost anywhere. For this study, the most important ones were in archival collections. Unfortunately, few photographic archives are organized to facilitate searches by subject; most are arranged by the photographer's or collector's name, making it necessary for the researcher to examine a variety of collections that appear to be tenuously connected with the topic. (One of the very few exceptional cases is the Farm Security Administration Collection in the Library of Congress.) For this analysis of alley life, pertinent photographs were located in the Lewis Wickes Hine Collection, George Eastman House; the John Inder Collection, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library; the National Child Labor Committee Collection, the Farm Security Administration Collection, and the Washington, D.C., Street Survey Collection, Library of Congress; the photographic collection of the Washingtoniana Room of the Martin Luther King Library in Washington, D.C.; and the photographic collection of the Columbia Historical Society.

Other important sources included the photo files of newspapers. The Washington Daily News files are available at the Washingtoniana Room of the King Library; I was also able to gain access to the Washington Star photo files. Magazines, newspapers, books, and pamphlets also provided important photographs, including some for which original prints or negatives may no longer be available. Well's two publications on alley life were also useful, since most of their original photographs were no longer available. Government agencies—in this case, the Alley Dwelling Authority (or rather its successor, the C.H.A.)—had quite extensive and valuable photographic collections. Finally, personal collections are often very rich.

Possible collection techniques range from taking notes on the content and background information for each photograph in an archive, to ordering some or all of the prints in archival sources for subsequent analysis. The first method was rather quickly ruled out for this study because of the large number of photographs and the nature of the subject; only when the complete visual record was assembled would I be able to begin to abstract and analyze these materials. The second approach was ruled out for financial reasons. Because obtaining a large number of photographs from archival


21. I had hoped that many of Well's original photographs, as well as those taken by other photographers for his two studies, would be available in his papers. Unfortunately, as indicated earlier, repeated efforts to gain information on these were never answered.

22. Sources can represent considerable investment. I copied these photographs with my own camera. Fortunately, most archives will permit a researcher to make copies with a hand-held camera. (Occasionally they will even permit use of a copy stand, although lights are seldom, if ever, permitted.) Almost any 35 mm single lens reflex camera with a built-in light meter, using fast film (Tri-X, for example), will suffice in archival conditions without unduly burdening the researcher. Copies lack the clarity and contrast of the original, but this can become a serious problem only when the original is very poor, or when precise behavioral analysis is to be made. The major drawbacks that result from using a hand-held camera in light-available situations are occasional blurred negatives, unintentionally cropped photographs, or light spots from reflections on glossy pictures. When prints are to be made later (especially at a considerable distance from an archive), this can present a very real problem. However, since absolute clarity may not be required for study and analysis, this problem may not be so great. Occasionally a negative is so blurred that one must obtain a positive copy from the archive, but the costs and numbers are minimal, when compared to those that would be involved in so ordering every photograph. For publication and illustration purposes it is better to obtain prints directly from archives, although some copy prints may even be sufficient for this purpose.

When copying the prints, one must note as much information as possible about each photograph, including archive number, complete caption, photographer, date, location, and, if at all possible, full information about how the photograph came to be taken. Often such data are partly or completely lacking, but any available information can be of crucial importance.

The size of the sample will depend on the subject, the needs of the researcher, and the number of extant photographs. Under certain conditions only a few photographs might be necessary to facilitate analysis. On the other hand, the approach I have taken, which

23. A camera that will focus down to 15 inches or less is most practical, although the researcher will have to use extension rings for smaller photographs in any case. Another advantage of this kind of camera and the use of extension rings is that one can obtain a close-up of a specific part of a photograph, or enlarge close-up views to "recover data" otherwise too small. (The cropped photograph should be accompanied by the complete photograph during analysis, in order to provide as full a context as possible; cropping, of course, is methodologically dangerous unless handled in this way.) With the development of high-quality photocopy machines, one can even use this process to make copies, although this reduces the information content of some photographs.

24. Some archives do provide small study prints for minimal cost.
is an adaptation of Sorensen's "research film," requires as complete a collection as possible. Because the historian has neither the advantage of selecting his initial sample nor the opportunity to direct his own filming (unlike the anthropologist or other social scientist) he or she must compile as large a collection as possible to help circumvent the obvious limitations. Careful research into other documents may strengthen the claim that the "visual sample" is representative.

In the present study, approximately 700 copy prints and 40 archival prints were collected and processed for analysis. While this collection probably does not include every extant alley photograph, it certainly represents the greater part of them, and provides sufficient basis for analysis. There are some biases in this collection, however. Although the visual sample tends to have better coverage of the smaller alleys than do the participant-observer studies, it still tends to concentrate on larger alleys. Moreover, shadows and other indicators suggest that most of the photographs were taken during normal working hours, and probably on weekdays. The randomness of the sample is also strongly affected by the roles, interest, attitudes, and values of the photographers. As Sorensen has pointed out, "Although film emulsions record objective visual data, the use of cameras is, nevertheless, dependent on human direction. Thus, whatever is photographed in any field situation depends on the objectives, desires, and personality of the filmer. This intrudes a necessary and important subjective element into the collection of the research filmed data." It is crucial to know as much as possible about the photographer's background, motivation, values, and employer, as well as to understand the general context in which the "recording" took place and to possess a general knowledge of photographic technology and history. Finally, it is very useful to know the relationship between the photographer and the subject.

Unfortunately, the frequent lack of such information means that historical analysis must be very tentative and suggestive. For example, a recent study of historical photographs of North American Indians revealed that nineteenth-century photographers "posed the Indians" in costumes not their own, and then retouched the negatives. In spite of this fact, however, the researcher was able to determine "visual errors," as well as to elicit important information from the photographs by comparing them with other sources.

Alley photographers, about whom an entire book could be written, generally fall into three groups. One is made up of amateur photographers who were professional housing reformers. Their work illustrated their own numerous books, articles, and unpublished studies. Moreover, like the students of alley life discussed in Appendix A (of whom a number are also considered here), these photographers sought to capture both the unsanitary and the "evil" social conditions. While the quality of their work varies considerably, they tended to stress the worst conditions, further emphasizing their commitment to the reform mentality in the moral tone of their captions. But the photographs often either conflict with the captions, or enable one to develop a number of alternative explanations. Some photographs were clearly posed, and only a few are at all convincing in terms of their captions.

The second group of photographers is more difficult to characterize or critique, although they were all professionals, and many were among the best documentary photographers in the country. Lewis W. Hine, Carl Mydans, Gordon Parks, Ed Rosskam, Marion Post Wolcott, and Arthur Rothstein visually reported the disorder in the alleys, but their pictures often managed to present a positive view of their human subjects. Not unlike Selwyn's written description of Aunt Jane, the photographs by Hine and Parks, in particular, demonstrate considerable strength and order.

28. E.g., in Weller's Neglected Neighbors: "Midday Group of Merry Idlers in Hughes Alley"; "Rushing the Kettle for Beer in Phillips Alley"; "Two Untamed Nurses of a Servant Girl's Baby"; "Receptive Children whose Future Citizenship is Molded by the Evil Sights and Sounds of Average Alley"; "Stunted and Missed by Diahond by Alley Life"; "Cigarette Friends and a Shack in Church Alley"; "A Typical Alley Loafer: a Problem"; or "The Efficient Life, Looing, Drunk, at Midday." Similar captions can be found in Swinney's study of Fenston Place and Snow's Court—"Hidden Eyesores"; "A Blind Pocket" (Photograph 24)—or from the Washington Housing Association's 1952 study of Temperance Court—"Handy a Children's Paradise," or "This is where our children play, no swing, no slide, no grass."
with an equally anonymous group of professional photographers who worked for the A.D.A. and N.C.H.A., provided a substantial number of photographs. Like the housing reformers, they tended to dramatize the poor housing conditions, albeit while displaying a slightly better visual sense.

It is very difficult to gain accurate information on photographic techniques, and even harder to discern the relationship between photographer and subject. Some of the alley family portraits are rigid and formal, while others clearly reflect a fairly good rapport between photographer and subject. If subjects' postures and expressions are valid criteria on which to judge, many alley photos appear not to have disturbed the residents. Occasionally there are obvious reactions to the photographer, as in Carl Mydans's photograph of three startled boys (003–004), or an obvious face-covering (028–008). Nevertheless, since much of this information remains beyond the realm of the historian, one must be very careful about drawing inferences from a research collection.

Photoanalysis

Before reporting the results of the photographic analysis, I must first state the broad objectives of my study, as well as the categories that I will consider. The examination was intended to determine the extent to which photographic analysis was a useful and valid technique for historical research. As a sample study dealing with a group of people at the bottom of society, it can only be suggestive for studies which might deal with more affluent groups, for whom other sources and many more photographs (often taken by the subjects themselves) are available. Moreover, my study is largely a macro analysis seeking broad validity, rather than an analysis of specific behavior of individual persons or various residents of a given alley. I organized the study around certain pertinent questions, some drawn from the concerns of historians, and others reflecting the interests of social scientists. In either case, the questions focus directly on alley life and culture.

My general concerns include: (1) the extent to which historical photographs are useful in establishing context, setting, and information on material culture; (2) the value of photographs for determining the "behavioral landscape" of a place; (3) the extent to which photos reveal information on child-rearing practices; (4) their usefulness in revealing information on social life and culture in general; and (5) the extent to which visual records provide insights and suggest hypotheses that may be tested by further research.

Context, Setting, and Material Culture

Aerial Views (Folder A). One of the best sources for context and setting, for either a rural or an urban landscape, is the aerial photograph. While fire insurance maps can provide much more precise information on building size and land use, they leave out much of importance for the historian. The aerial (027–019) and oblique (027–018) views of Southwest Washington, an area of high alley concentration, demonstrate the extensive building on both streets and alleys. While the streets are lined with trees, the alleys stand out stark and clear. The alley forms vary from the more common Form A, to Form B in 027–019, or the less common Form C of King's Court (020–017, 020–018).

Yet all of these views show the inward orientation of the alley houses, and their physical isolation by the larger and taller wall of street houses that surrounds each block, broken only occasionally by a vacant lot or by the narrow entrance alley that cuts through the block. This apparent physical isolation is further confirmed by the photographs of alley entrances taken from the street (Folder B). The oblique view of Southwest (025–012) shows in more detail the inward-oriented, isolated nature of Dixon's Court, as well as the treeless alley landscape. Two aerial views (018–000, 021–017) and the raised view of Logan Court (Photograph 1; 003–001) more clearly demonstrate this finding, and suggest that alley dwellings were further isolated from street houses by the continuous rows of sheds that lined the backs of street properties and alley houses. Because the alley-house backyards were small and street dwellings were not
particularly tall, even the alley backyards were largely out of view of the street dwellers.

From aerial photographs one can estimate the numbers of residences in alleys, although varieties of house forms and the transformation of some houses into garages and warehouses make this figure approximate. Here the variations in alley size become immediately apparent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALLEY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF HOUSES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logan's Court</td>
<td>63+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dixon's Court</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schott's Alley</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King's Court</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonder Court</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Court</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(It might also be noted that social science techniques permit analysis of aerial photographs to determine the approximate number of residents and the extent of crowding.32) The number of houses in an alley certainly must have affected the types of social organization and control that existed. Similarly, alley locations must have had an effect on the types of residents attracted, and their places of work. Locations near the hotel district and other parts of the central business district might be more inclined to have such illegal activities as gambling, prostitution, and bootlegging, while those in Southeast and Southwest, near the Navy Yard and waterfronts, were probably linked through employment with these centers and were perhaps less inclined toward organized crime. Again, female alley dwellers near the central business and government districts were probably employed as washerwomen and charwomen for such facilities, while alley dwellers located in strictly residential areas probably served as domestics and washerwomen for middle-class residents on the neighboring streets.

Street Views (Folder B). Like the alley layouts, the alley entrances varied greatly, from a two-foot-wide entrance to Logan Court (AAA), to a walkway to O'Brien's Court (022-017), to the wider alleys of Green's Court (018-016), Bell's Court (A-5), Willow Tree Alley (Photograph 16; both entrances 007-009, 007-010), K Street Alley (020-008), Snow's Court (025-004, 025-003, 025-002), Blund's Court (026-018, 026-017), Temple Court (003-031), and King's Court (021-002, 020-015). Some alley houses in O'Brien's Court, Green's Court, Willow Tree Alley, K Street Alley, Snow's Court, Blund's Court, Temple Court, and King's Court are visible from the street, but the vast majority are hidden from view. While these access alleys generally cut straight through the block, they were seldom used except by alley residents, for both social and logistical reasons. Most alleys were between six and twelve feet wide and were not readily noticeable from the street; these factors could only have furthered the isolation of alley residents.

The Alley (Folder C). Unlike the aerial views, photographs taken within the alley are somewhat disorienting. It is extremely difficult to know where one is in the alley, let alone in the city. The sensation is like that of being in a maze, further enclosed by the three-story brick street buildings. In contrast to the visual experience of the "canyon" streets in American cities, where, despite the height of buildings, one can see several miles in four directions, alley views are severely restricted and disorienting.33 All visual contact with the rest of the city is lost, while the two-story alley houses create a sense of great concentration. The two long rows of nearly identical houses are only thirty feet apart on the main interior alley and are enclosed at both ends by similar rows of houses. Moreover, no trees or other physical barriers obstruct the open alley, creating a most unusual landscape. (Photographs 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25.)

These alley "vistas" offer very little from an aesthetic standpoint. The monotony of brick row houses is broken only by an occasional frame dwelling, garage, warehouse, or vacant lot. And while the alleys themselves were generally clean, corners of clutter were scattered throughout (A-7, 026-001, 025-009, 016-012, 002-006; Photograph 22). Shutters and window boxes occasionally offer the eye a brief respite, but the overall visual impression is one of monotony, man-made maze devoid of Nature and beauty. It might be noted, however, that these features, enclosure and monotony, have also been incorporated into some of the most recent urban designs. And, as will be suggested later, the close proximity of residents may not necessarily be a disadvantage.

A problem of definition must be raised here. It has already been
noted that there were various alley forms; to housing reformers and police census-takers, an alley often appears to have been defined by social considerations as much as by physical form. Thus minor streets like Golden Street (018–011, Folder F) and Seaton Place (024–001) were occasionally included in alley surveys and photographs. Although these streets lacked the totally enclosed nature of the alleys, they do provide something of that experience, and as a result represent a sort of "middle ground" between street and alley.  

The Alley House (Folders D–H). Like the alleys themselves, alley houses came in various sizes and shapes. These buildings fall into four general categories, each reflecting a stage in the development of alley housing: (1) shanties and sheds, (2) tin row houses, (3) brick row houses, and (4) multi-purpose buildings or buildings converted to serve several functions. While forms and types overlap considerably, these four represent a generally chronological order that can be reconstructed.

Shanties and sheds were common in the earliest years of alley dwelling (1850–1900), but most were removed by the District Health Officer and Condemnation Board. Only a few pictures exist to document these structures. The construction of shanties and shacks (indicated in photographs 000–A and 028–002, Folder D) were poor. These buildings, very likely put up by residents who sought to squat on alley land, offered only the barest protection from the elements and certainly provided little room in which to maneuver. The barrels and buckets evident in both pictures suggest that water for drinking, cooking, and washing was collected in this manner. The other shanties and shacks (000–B, 000–D, 012–000, 026–004), while certainly not sturdy, represent a transition from the initial "squatter's huts" to the more substantial frame and brick structures. These were probably constructed by property owners who sought to take advantage of the freedmen who flocked to the city following the Civil War. Migrants, faced with a severe housing shortage exacerbated by economic and residential restrictions, found housing in the alleys. These dwellings did offer more protection from the elements, as well as considerably more room. All appear to have had fireplaces and chimneys to facilitate both heating and cooking indoors. Water was still available only through the rain barrel (000–D) in some instances, although an outdoor water hydrant is visible in a 1935 photograph (026–004).

34 See Ch. 1 for a more complete analysis.

The sheds represent another response to the housing shortage for working-class migrants in the postbellum years. Sheds originally constructed for other purposes, such as fuel storage (000–F), were rented out as dwellings. While built better than the first shacks, they provided little more than basic shelter (000–C, 000–F, 000–E, 026–014). The rain barrel is again visible (000–C), indicating that these sheds lacked water, sanitary facilities, and electricity (in later years). While some were of considerable size (000–C), others (000–F, 000–E, 026–014) provided scarcely enough room to sleep in.

Frame row houses represent the first substantial type of dwelling construction in the alleys (Folder E). One of the first such buildings was constructed in Snow's Court before the Civil War, but most went up in the 1870s and 1880s. This was the entrepreneurs' first response to the housing shortage, and they realized significant profits from renting dwellings to members of the working class. While built on the ground, like the shanties and sheds, these frame row houses were substantial dwellings. Most common were the two story, two- to four-room row houses (026–010, 026–013, 023–006, 000–G); variations included one-story row houses (026–006) and a two-story, four-apartment arrangement (A–3), among others. These dwellings contained fireplaces and/or stoves for heating, had gutters, and occasionally were decorated with shutters. The facades were simple (023–011, 023–012), but in some cases the roof line was accentuated with decorative features (026–010). While they were built directly on the alley, most row houses had small steps and occasionally a tiny porch or curb that could accommodate a chair or bench above the alley's drainage line (023–006). They also contained numerous windows, permitting both light and ventilation. Although it is difficult to judge the dimensions of these houses from photographs, it is safe to say that they were tiny, no wider than the length of a 1920s automobile (026–010). (Generally alley houses were about 12 feet wide and 30 feet deep, with a small backyard 10 to 15 feet long.)

Brick two-story row house construction came to predominate during the 1880s and early 1890s. (A prohibition on alley house construction in 1892 virtually terminated dwelling construction.) Brick houses have continued to exist long into the twentieth century, as the collection of photographs indicates. These houses must have been constructed by relatively large contractors, given the extent of building and the continuity of design in some alleys. (Photograph 003–001 in Folder A gives an excellent portrayal of one such continuous row of houses.)

The brick row houses (Folder F) came in various numbers, from
the sets of eight or more in Logan Court (003–001 in Folder A), Naylor's Court (013–009), and Golden Street (018–011), to five units in London Court (019–014), four in Valley Street (018–016), three in Bell's Court (A–13), and two each in Oddfellows Court (023–002) and Naylor's Court (022–008). These relatively well-built structures were usually set on the ground or slightly raised, as with other alley houses, although a few did have basements. Like the frame row houses, the brick units were small, with two to four rooms (approximately 12 by 30 feet) and with three windows in front and four in the rear.

Unlike the frame houses, however, the brick facades were considerably more decorative, if somewhat repetitious. While the bricks were laid in common bond, decorative features highlighted the doors, windows, and cornices, and often compared favorably with brick row houses on the street. (See 022–017, 022–015, 018–016, A–9, 007–009, 020–011, in Folder B.)

Although the vast majority of alley houses surviving in the twentieth century fit the two-story brick row house pattern just discussed, there were some variations. One-story brick row houses (007–015) and detached brick block houses (probably occupied by more than one family; 015–009, 004–017, A–2), multi-story alley tenements (000–H, 000–J), tight knit U-shaped courts (Photograph 24; 023–013), and three-story 'minor' street houses with English basements (027–015) represent possible variations, although they constitute a small minority of the total.

Virtually any building in an alley could become a dwelling; sometimes stables were even converted into houses. In earlier years some housing was located over stables or warehouses (003–014, 017–008), while in later years the ground floor was converted into garages, with the second floor utilized for dwelling (015–003, 014–016, 018–007, 022–002, 025–010 in Folder G).

Photographs not only provide information on the facades of houses no longer part of the urban landscape, but they also give information on types of construction, interior arrangement of rooms, and room size. Many of these photographs were taken at the time of demolition, either shortly after 1900 or in the 1930s and 40s.

The frame houses appear to have been constructed on low brick basements, with the first floor about a foot above the ground (008–005 in Folder H) or with two perpendicular rows of beams laid on the ground (026–011, 026–012). The side was attached to upright beams at the standard interval, with the interior covered by lath and plaster (011–016). No insulation appears to have been used, and units were separated by only plaster, lath, and beams; however, this construction provided sound, well-built structures and sufficient protection from the elements, with at least a partial sound barrier between units. These units contained two rooms per floor, a central chimney, and flue and draft holes for heating and cooking stoves. The houses in Bland's Court appear to have had draft and flue holes for each of the four rooms, although only one side is visible in the photograph (026–012), while in Navy Place the two front rooms had fireplaces as well as flue holes for stoves, and the back room also had such flue holes (007–014). Whether such heating units were actually provided in every room is unknown. The relative size of the people visible in the pictures (026–011, 026–012, 007–005) suggests just how small these houses were.

More complete information is again available on the brick houses. As the trenches on the ground of what once was O'Brien's Court suggest, those houses were built on a brick base laid below the freezing line to provide structural stability (023–001). For the first floor wood beams were laid about a foot above the ground (008–009). In some Navy Place houses, basements were dug out and bricked in (017–015). In either case, the units were separated by plaster-covered brick which provided considerable privacy from neighbors and protection from the elements. Stairways were constructed against one of the side walls, starting at either the back of the house (008–002, 015–013), or the front (024–010). Almost every unit was broken into two rooms per floor, with what appears to be a small closet on the second floor. As with the frame houses, flue and draft holes for heating and/or cooking stoves appear to have been a feature of every room (007–029, 018–020).

Unlike many of the frame houses, the brick dwellings had flat tin roofs with either a single chimney per unit or (as in the case of Rupert's Court) a double set of chimneys, one running across the front, and another for heating stoves set between units in the rear (024–00A). Again, workmen present in the photos suggest both the size of the rooms and the effect of a person in one of them (007–020).

Despite the claims of many reformers, these houses were well-built—a fact attested to by the persistence of some dwellings today. The before and after pictures of Snow's Court (000–N, 000–M, 010–016) and the restored Terrace Court (000–0) indicate that these Victorian structures were (and are) sound. However, photographs of alley houses suggest considerable variation in the quality of construction; and even among similar houses there were variations in maintenance. The better alley houses probably attracted
people different from those who lived in some of the shabbier structures. At an aggregate level like this, such an observation can only be suggestive; but future study might test individual variations between alleys, based on quality of physical structure, alley form, and socioeconomic status. There was considerable variation in lifestyles among alley dwellers, and through an analysis of such materials a typology might be developed (perhaps along the lines suggested by Ulf Hannerz in *Subside*).

*Yards, Interiors, and Material Culture* (Folder 1). Photographs also provide information on the household arrangement, facilities, decoration, material culture, and patterns of domestic life. While alley plans are available from fire insurance maps and exterior construction can be deduced partly from existing structures, the interiors and backyards of alley dwellings fall almost entirely into the realm of "non-recurring" events.

One of the nearly universal phenomena of alley dwellings was the outdoor water hydrant. Of two basic types of hydrants, the first, which was probably the oldest and most common, was a large cylinder with a lever at the top which was depressed to release the water (Folder 1: 000-BB, 000-AA, A-8, 006-018, 005-002, 005-005, etc.; also Photograph 29). More recent was the thin pipe extended out of the ground with a turn valve at the top (027-013, 028-014, 027-010, 010-013). In later years drains were installed in conjunction with the hydrants, but, in many alleys which had no such conveniences, excess water merely spilled onto the ground in the yard where the hydrant was located. Some alleys had only one or two hydrants for the entire population (027-013), thus adding to the problems of draining water.

The outhouse was even more of an alley institution than the water hydrant, and was usually found near the hydrant. Outhouses ranged from relatively modern facilities, with water flush mechanisms and china bowls, to the less pretentious board seats with mechanical controls for opening and closing. Similarly, exterior structures varied from poorly constructed doorless houses to more substantial forms. Photo captions indicate that a number of these outhouses leaked into the backyards, presenting serious health hazards.

The backyard in which the hydrant and outhouse were usually located varied considerably in size, sometimes even within a single alley. The tiny yards of Douglas Court (017-012), St. Mary's Court (025-014), and Navy Place (016-007) contrast sharply with the more spacious ones in Navy Place (016-015) and Brown's Court (015-017). Generally these yards are quite cluttered; it is difficult to determine when this is organized clutter resulting from the lack of storage space in the tiny houses, and when it is the result of disorganization. Several features do stand out, however. Most notable are the large washtubs and washboards, utilized not only for the family laundry but for washing the clothes of others as well. The wheelbarrows which appear in several pictures were probably used for transporting coal or wood for the stoves, as well as for various day labor jobs.

Interiors of alley houses also contained some of the simple but decorative features that adorned the exteriors. Woodwork, both plain and fancy, lined the windows, doors, floors, and ceilings (023-008, 018-008, 019-019). Coal or wood stoves were used to heat living rooms (005-013, 028-012, 000-FFF), but almost all rooms were illuminated with oil lamps. Interior decoration ranged from wallpaper (005-013), to plaster in varying conditions of repair (028-012, 016-010, 001-031). Furnishings appear to be few and well used, with chairs covered with slipcovers (016-019, 028-012) and beds and straight chairs serving as combination living room/bedroom/kitchen furniture (021-016, 021-014, 016-016). Nevertheless, most of the living room interiors appear clean and functional.

Kitchens could be located at either the front or the rear; in cases where there was only one downstairs room, the kitchen took up a large part of it. In any case, the kitchen appears to have been the center of activity within the household, for a number of reasons. As the tiny houses did not permit the specialization of room functions common in middle-class houses today, the kitchen was not only the place for meal preparation, but often the place where food was consumed as well. A wood-burning stove, oil lamps, a small table, and an icebox were common kitchen furnishings. Occasionally there was a cold water tap (020-000B, 019-009, 024-000B, 022-019). The kitchen was also important because it was where all washing took place. Many kitchens gave evidence of this activity by the preponderance of washtubs, large washtubs on or near the stove, and numerous irons that required heating on the stove (see especially 010-014, 001-024, 016-018, 001-027, 001-031).

Bedrooms were normally located upstairs, although almost any room could also fulfill this function. The wide variety in furnishings, depending on the tenant and the location, suggests a wide variation in alley dwellers' incomes, values, and aspirations. One house in
O’Brien’s Court had a small bedroom containing an ornately decorated mirrored dresser, chair, table, wallpaper and wall decoration, besides a bed (022–018; Photograph 13), while a more simply furnished bedroom was found in an alley near Union Station (001–016). At the other extreme was an alley “bedroom” discovered by Jacob Riis, where plaster was almost entirely gone from the walls and the inhabitants slept on the floor.

It would be both interesting and rewarding to apply the analysis of household furnishings and placement set up by Jurgen Ruesch and Weldon Kees in their study of Nonverbal Communication. I will not attempt it here on a house-by-house basis because of the limited number of interior photographs, the lack of complete photographic coverage for at least several houses, and the absence of supporting data from other sources. Nevertheless, several general observations can be made about alley house interiors and decoration. Generally they were simply furnished and organized on the basis of function and utility. Some current social scientists, like the housing reformers and social scientists of an earlier era, might look at these alley interiors and see disorganization in the fact that many rooms had mixed uses, with kitchens serving as dining rooms, bedrooms, and living rooms as well as work areas. The reformers and social scientists who were active during the height of alley housing considered these photographs as exemplary not only of slum conditions, but also of the disorganization that resulted from living in the alley. Certainly these conditions differed from middle-class experience; but, given the limited space alley dwellers were permitted to live in, and the high rents, their adaptation appears to have been positive and realistic, rather than disorderly. (See Chapter 3.)

These houses were, in the final analysis, functional and well used, but there is little evidence of the disorganization that reformers and scholars alike sought, except in several extreme cases. Undoubtedly there was considerable variation in interiors, as in exteriors, and houses shared by two families or one family and several boarders would have more multi-use rooms and would show more wear and deterioration. Yet such circumstances were within the cultural experience of most alley residents, who came to Washington from single-room slave quarters or sharecropper cabins.

Behavioral Landscape (Folder 2)

One of this volume’s major issues concerns the extent to which the urban environment adversely affected folk migrants, restricting their ability to maintain order and control. If alley dwellers were able to use and remake their environment to fit their own needs, then clearly there was no such effect, or at least not to the extent predicted by much of the literature. The more the behavioral environment supports a community’s social order and organizations, the greater will be the integration and order within that community.

Photographs represent a nearly unique source for establishing the behavioral landscape. While descriptive accounts can be helpful here, visual evidence is virtually alone in its ability to record unobtrusive information on how people use and adapt their environment to their own needs or fail to do so.

Every chapter in this study has indicated the great need for collective action if alley residents were to survive. Moreover, all forms of social organization (especially extended kinship networks, neighboring, and community) depended on high levels of face-to-face contact. In order to facilitate this contact, alley dwellers literally remade their environment. To begin with, they utilized a number of “natural advantages” offered by the alley landscape. The isolation from street-front neighbors and nonresident traffic aided interaction among residents, as did the single exit alley, the extreme proximity of alley houses and their inward focus. Much that went on, whether in the alley or in alley houses, would be common knowledge unless residents made concerted efforts to maintain their privacy and personal space. Finally, the hot, humid summers of Washington encouraged residents to spend as much time as possible outside their small, crowded homes, while the tiny, cluttered backyards with often malodorous privies discouraged many from moving in that direction.

One key aspect of this transformation of the alley landscape had to do with alley dwellers’ use of the alley itself. While builders of
alley dwellings (and later middle-class residents of the alleys) conceived of the alley only as a path to permit movement into and out of the block's interior, residents converted the alley into a multipurpose commons and community center. Alley dwellers then turned their homes inside out by projecting part of the house into the alley and opening the rest to the alley. This often involved moving household furniture into the alley, although virtually anything could be used for sitting or lounging, from chairs and benches to stoves, chairs, and boxes. (See Photographs 4, 5, 6, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 31, and 32 here; also A-4, 004-004, 020-016, 004-010, 018-014, 021-000, 016-008, 003-017, A-5 in Folder 2.) Their use, as well as the general use of the alley for neighboring, was nearly universal among alley dwellers and seemingly continuous throughout the day, except in the worst weather. (See previous photographs and 004-008, 004-006, 007-012, 004-001, 004-002, 017-011, 000-FFF, 003-036, 000-AAA, 000-FFF, 028-006, 028-007, 028-008, 014-013.) Moreover, while builders had installed small doors and windows in the facades, alley dwellers figuratively "knocked out" these "tentative" openings. It was not unusual to find heads sticking out of doors and windows into the alley, or heads pushed into first-story doors and windows from the alley. While there were occasional screens, the overall impression of the alley was one of open doors and windows, with curtains pulled back and shades raised. Neighbors apparently moved back and forth from house to alley to neighbor's house, unimpeded by either physical or social barriers. In addition, the open alley house served as a symbol of the interdependence of the residents, and made visual surveillance, social control, and maintenance of defensible space much easier.

A small number of houses stand in sharp contrast to this finding. These houses have closed doors, drawn shades, or curtains, and occasionally even the shutters are closed. (See especially Photograph 25.) Many of these residents, undoubtedly those who most

37. While it is easy to presume that everyone would utilize these “natural advantages” in the same way, or that the conversion of alley path into commons is a desirable or simple thing, it is simply not the case. Middle-class residents of today’s alleys have turned the alley back into a path, as well as a parking place. In contrast to the earlier practices, these residents are almost never seen. Any interaction between neighbors appears to occur inside the houses, or in backyards. (See Photograph 3.) For a more complete discussion of the different uses made of alley landscapes, see James Borchert, “Alley Landscapes of Washington,” Landscape, 25, no. 3 (1979): 3–10.

38. Ethel Waters described the same practice in Philadelphia alleys. See note 35, ch. 2.

closely approached mainstream values, perhaps sought to set themselves off from their neighbors by avoiding contact. Their imposition of barriers in the facade not only increased their privacy, but also represented a nonverbal message to neighbors about their concerns. 39 Nevertheless, the vast majority of houses reflect the open pattern described earlier. 40

Based on this analysis, it seems reasonable to conclude that alley residents transformed the physical environment into a behavioral landscape that facilitated their social organization and ways of life. 41 The fact that the behavior evident in the photographs is consistent with and supportive of the survival strategies developed by alley residents indicates considerable order and integration in their response to the urban environment.

A note of caution should be added to this assessment. Since the historian analyzing historical photographs cannot test conclusions by interviewing residents or constructing a sociogram of alley interactions, findings on the extent of interaction must be tentative. Other sources can strengthen these conclusions, and (as in this case) visual evidence greatly strengthens the theoretical and observational information from other sources.

**Childhood in the Alley (Folder 3)**

Photographs also provide insight into the child-rearing process and the material culture of alley children, information notably absent from most other sources. “Portraits” suggest the type and quality of clothing, while less formal photographs indicate the nature of informal play, material culture of play, child labor, and family setting.

Alley children appear to have been reasonably well dressed, although not necessarily in fashionable clothes. On apparently warm winter days, boys had jackets and girls sweaters, while heavier coats were worn on colder days (000-AAA, 002-026, 003-032, 006-024, 008-017, 005-016, 005-010, 005-001, 005-000, 026-019). On warmer summer days, clothing was suitably light (010-019).

39. Residents of restored alley houses have developed this nonverbal message to considerable lengths, by installing porches with sharp railings, projecting small yards out into the alley, and using their parked cars as an added buffer, as well as by closing up every opening on the facade. See Photograph 3 and Borchert, “Alley Landscapes.”

40. Sometimes shutters were kept closed to keep out the hot afternoon sun. See Photograph 20.

41. See Chapter 3 for a more complete discussion of these issues.
Five photographs show various numbers of children, ranging from ten (000-GGGG) to five (000-IIIJ), four (011-014), three (012-018), and one (000-KKKK). In two (012-018, 011-014) a child is holding onto a parent or older child. In fact, except for the obviously proud mother with her baby (001-033), older siblings in these and later photographs seem to have had considerably more contact with and responsibility for their younger brothers and sisters (000-GGGG, 000-IIIJ, 001-024, 001-036). Feeding of babies, however, remained the mother’s prerogative, if the sequence of three photographs (006-011, 002-005, 004-009; Photograph 27) is representative. The feeding process was overseen by a grandmother, suggesting that three generations lived under one roof. Complete family scenes are also extremely rare, undoubtedly because of the time of day when most photographers were working. Only 006-009 (Photograph 4) and several earlier photographs include the father, making intrafamily relations extremely difficult to discern. In contrast, alley scenes of children and adults interacting are far more common (000-MMMM, 004-009, and throughout other folders; Photograph 5), suggesting that the alley “community” hypothesis has further validity and import for child-rearing.

Many children may have been watched, cared for, and socialized by their older siblings, rather than by their parents. Reformers often pointed out that younger children were left in the care of older brothers and sisters (012-016, 012-012; Photograph 26) while their parents went to work. Many mothers who worked outside the home used this child care alternative, or left their children under the watchful eye of a neighbor or grandmother (if the latter did not work outside the home). Nevertheless, the number of young children who appear to be playing unattended suggests that peer group socialization must have been important, as were the overriding influences of the “enclosed alley” where friendly neighbors watched out for the children in a confined situation (000-MMMM, 024-009; Photograph 5).

Interestingly, teenagers seldom appear in photographs (000-0000). Most likely the financial needs of the family required that older children be employed. Certainly census data confirm that some were, while some must also have been at school. Black alley children worked as domestics with their mothers or elsewhere, or as laborers, or helped their mothers who did washing at home (016-014, 013-019). Considerably more is known about white alley boys from the visual record. Lewis Hine’s child labor photographs of Washington portray a number of such children, many not yet in

010, 004-005, 003-025, 003-019). While garments did not always fit—a common problem for growing children, whether their clothes are new, secondhand, or “hand-me-downs”—they do appear to be clean and well cared for (013-009).

Unlike their parents, young children appear to have spent some time in the backyard, often playing near trash or other items that were either stored or discarded there (002-026, 020-012, 010-015, 005-026, 003-004, 003-009, 003-005). Much of this play involved digging or playing with dirt or discarded objects. More common was play in the alley itself (020-003, A-12, 000-000, 000-000, 010-004, 003-003, 010-009). In both backyard and alley play, there appears to have been little sex segregation.

Photographs of more formal play are few in number. Nevertheless, a form of baseball (019-010, 019-011, 000-000, 000-000), marbles (004-006, 000-000), and an undetermined game involving the use of a forked stick to draw circles on the ground (028-009, and closeup) suggest that such games did exist, and, in the cases of baseball and the “circle game,” involved a considerable number of children.

Toys and games appear to have been in short supply in the alleys. No children are pictured holding dolls or stuffed animals, nor are the activities of “packaged” games (although these were probably available only in the later years). Pets appear in a number of photographs, but in only three are they in contact with humans (A-30, 000-FFF, 006-011). The baseball players in 019-010 and 019-011 were equipped with a catcher’s glove, bat, and ball, while in 000-000 the “boy gang” Veller discovered had a catcher’s mask (?) and baseball bats, although these might have been used for activities other than baseball, as Veller seems to think. (There is not much other visual evidence of teen or preteen gangs, although this lack does not, of course, rule out their existence.) A homemade cart and a soapbox racer appear in the earlier years (000-FFF, A-14; Photograph 28), while later photographs (018-009, 014-012) indicate that commercially produced toys of this type became more common. Tricycles and bicycles (021-018, 027-020; Photograph 32) are also present in later years, along with equipment for basketball (017-002), archery (027-009), and roller skating (003-034). Small toys are almost nonexistent in the alley photographs; a miniature car (005-025) is the sole example. More common were makeshift toys (024-011, 004-000) or games (015-006, 015-016).

Photographs of family groups suggest family size, ages, sibling relationships, relations with parents, and occasionally eating habits.
their teens and virtually all recent migrants from Italy with their parents. They were employed as newsboys (019–008, 019–006, 019–005, 019–004, 019–003, 019–002, 019–001, 019–000; Photograph 26) and vendors (019–007). Even though much of its proceeds went to support the family, such independent economic activity took children out of the alleys and involved them in peer group relationships for which earlier alley life may have prepared them. They were able to cope in the “street market” without parental guidance; at the same time, they could follow the lead of the older working children, as they had done in the alleys with their older brothers and sisters. Thus the alley could have been a training ground for the “apprenticeship” of child labor, preparing the alley child for survival in a difficult world.

Another hypothesis is that alley housing served families at a particular point in the life cycle, during early parenthood. This is as difficult to demonstrate as the preceding hypothesis, yet it may offer partial explanation for the absence of adolescents from alley photographs.

Other Aspects of Alley Life (Folder 4)

Many aspects of alley life and culture eluded the photographer’s camera, although occasional glimpses suggest some of these. Alley houses shared the alley with other land uses, including stables, blacksmith shops, carpenter shops, and occasional stores. In some cases these businesses were owned and operated by residents who lived above their establishments. The grocery stores in Navy Place (016–013 in Folder 4) and Fenton Place (017–020) are two examples of a rather uncommon alley phenomenon that made shopping, and perhaps credit, somewhat easier. Other marginal enterprises included a fish market (018–002) and fish peddling (028–003).

Because coal for heating and cooking stoves had to be purchased, many alley dwellers instead used pieces of wood left at construction sites, or from crates and boxes. Piles of such materials were often found in alley areas (006–014, 006–013, 002–011, 000–ABB, 016–014).

One of the most important aspects of alley life involved religion. A few printed sources mention religious services in homes, but visual sources are almost entirely lacking. Two different approaches to religion are suggested by the tiny Baptist church (002–022) and the “traveling evangelist” (002–016, 022–008; Photograph 33).

While there are few visual sources for adult employment, a substantial number do exist in home laundries. Chapter 5 considers them in detail. (See Photographs 29–31 here, and 000–ABC, 003–023, 003–024, 012–014, 001–015, 001–018, 027–005, 001–008, 017–004, 001–006, 003–026.)

Hypotheses and Other Notes

Several tentative hypotheses can be advanced in addition to those already suggested in the analysis. The first concerns the physical-spatial dimension of the alley. Given the relatively high densities of many alleys and the proximity of the houses, it would seem that, when social order did break down or when conflict between several families broke out, it could lead to considerable disruption.

On the other hand, other sources contain little evidence to indicate that this kind of breakdown actually took place. Perhaps the social structure was able to control and limit these incidents. If so, it may be partly because of long experience in similar environments. Certainly, on a superficial level, the alley form seems similar to the West African residential landscape, where villages are encircled by timber or brush walls, with houses facing one another across a narrow common area. At least some plantations also had housing that approximated that of the alleys. Many slaves lived in rows of small detached cabins, with the area between cabins serving as a commons. City slaves either lived in dwellings at the back of the master’s lot next to the alley and congregated in the alley, or lived apart from their owners, often in alleys. In fact, the alleys in southern cities were meeting places for slaves and freedmen—which may help account for the rapid decline of urban slavery after 1820.

If we attempt to apply Edward Hall’s “System for the Notation of Proxemic Behavior” to alley dwellers’ interaction, only four of eight categories are ascertainable from photographs. Postural-sex


44 Wade, Slavery in the Cities.
identifiers, sociofugal-sociopetal orientation, kinesthetic factors, and touch code are visible; retinal combinations, thermal code, olfactory code, and voice loudness scale are impossible to discern. This study highlighted the tendency for sex-segregated interactions among adults during working hours. Nevertheless, much necessary information was difficult to determine from photographs, largely because interaction between alley residents was not the alley photographer's primary subject, and as a result it usually occurred far from the camera.

Because so few pictures provide accurate data, a more complete study of these photographs using the first four categories of proxemic behavior notations was not carried out. Such a study should, however, be considered by historians who have numerous photographs that provide clear and precise views of human interaction. A notation system should allow the research to distinguish "in-group" members' interactions with those of another group.

Conclusions

Photographic sources have a great deal to offer the historian, especially the social historian of everyday life and groups at the bottom of complex societies. For developing and providing settings and contexts, photographs are a crucial source. They also represent virtually the only method for determining the material culture and behavior of groups who no longer live in the same circumstances.

Yet historical photographs must be used with great care, taking into account the problems of sample size and photographer bias. The historian cannot rely solely on photographs any more than he can rely solely on printed sources when dealing with subjects for which there are quite limited.

For historical study, the photograph's import is largely suggestive, rather than definitive. Photographic analysis offers a wide range of possible hypotheses and insights; some of these may be tested or confirmed in other sources, while others represent ideas that could not have come from more traditional sources. Despite the level of analysis, photographic sources can stand on equal footing with printed ones.


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