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## More Than Meets the Eye: Proximity to Crises through Presidential Photographs

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Vision gives us proximity at a distance. We see things when light interacts with surfaces of objects and sends electromagnetic energy (photons) to receptors in our eyes. This data shows us a great deal about those objects – color, texture, size, orientation – that enables interaction with our world. The same photo data can be sensed by cameras and stored on analog film or digital sensors. When we see the world around us, we generally do so across time – glancing at the thermometer, looking for the car keys, focusing on entering the road, shifting our gaze about the environment. Each scene is set within a larger context. Churchland refers to this as seeing “spatiotemporal particulars [within a] landscape or configuration of the abstract universals, the temporal invariants, and the enduring symmetries that structure the objective universe of [the brain’s] experience” (Churchland, 2012). Any individual photograph presents an exquisite data set of “spatiotemporal particulars,” but is, in and of itself largely bereft of universal particulars of either the maker or the seeker or the viewer.

We look at three photographs, each made at a time of profound crisis, in order to tease out notions of proximity. Each image was made by a highly skilled photographer, but each presents the photon data from only a fraction of a second. How is a viewer to insert the spatiotemporal particulars of that fraction of a second into their own abstract universals? Can words and other images from the photographers enhance the viewer’s proximity to the original? Can we make use of the photographers’ accounts of their proximities for enhancing the understanding of individual viewers?



In 1963, light generated photon data from a group of people in a small space. We can see some of that photon data today in the above photograph. It was made in the midst of an extraordinary crisis in the United States. The photo was made not only for news value and history but also to resolve one aspect of the crisis – continuity of government leadership. Yet, it shows essentially nothing of the actual crises. Photon data brings a viewer into a form of close proximity with a portion of the original data of the scene. However, without metadata and without anecdotes (contextual information not ordinarily collected), the functionality of that proximity may be severely limited, obstructing access, use, and understanding. The photograph, in and of itself does not tell us what crisis is documented; nor does it tell us just whom we are seeing or what is happening. This becomes increasingly problematic as spatial and temporal distance from the event increases; thus means for facilitating proximity become more significant for understanding.

Metadata, such as captions, can add functionality and enhance the likelihood of understanding. A caption presents words that give some context: “Cecil Stoughton’s photograph of Lyndon Johnson being sworn in as President of the United States aboard Air Force One immediately after the assassination of President Kennedy.” Some metadata may be less than functional in terms of the relationship of such a photograph to the crisis from which it emerged. The Library of Congress (LOC) Subject Headings applied by the Prints and Photographs division give no hint of the assassination of Kennedy being the primary circumstance of Johnson’s inauguration:

- Johnson, Lyndon B. – (Lyndon Baines), – 1908-1973 – Inaugurations
- Onassis, Jacqueline Kennedy, – 1929-1994 – Public appearances
- Presidential inaugurations – Texas – Dallas – 1960-1970
- Oaths – Texas – Dallas – 1960-1970

The folder holding this photograph in the John F. Kennedy Library is titled in an almost bizarrely comical way: Trip to Texas: Swearing-in ceremony aboard Air Force One, Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) as President.

The obituary for the very first official White House photographer Cecil Stoughton in the *New York Times* enhances proximity to the image and its impact. Within a recounting of Stoughton’s life, with considerable attention to his role as the first official White House photographer, two sentences tell the reader just why the picture was so important:

Mr. Stoughton’s picture is the only photographic record of the Johnson administration’s abrupt, official beginning. At a precarious moment in the country’s history, it gave the public at least a semblance of continuity: one president sworn in as the widow of another looked numbly on. (Fox, 2008)

What we do not see in captions or in the Library of Congress Subject Headings (among others) or even in the *New York Times* obituary, are: the efforts of the photographer to be on the scene; the necessity to reassure the American

public; why the image is black and white; the purpose behind the composition. Not knowing such contextual information decreases the likelihood of finding and understanding a photograph, even one so intimately connected to a horrific and consequential crisis. We look to the backstory on the production of the image to glean anecdotal – the not so easily known or immediately available clues to understanding. These illuminate the proximity of the photographer to the subject/event, thus contextualizing the visual proximity the photograph presents. Anecdotal may not be useful to all potential users, but they may well be crucial to some viewer's understanding.

We ask: What are the things that are knowable about a photograph beyond title/caption/photographer and metadata such as time, place, camera? How can we understand photographer decisions, mechanical constraints, cultural constraints? What can be gained by some form of proximity to the photographer's initial making of an image and by some form of proximity to the circumstances of the image being published? While these may seem primarily of interest to photographers, they may well clarify matters for some viewers. Why do we not see the face of the federal judge administering the oath – the first female judge to do so? Because there was no angle in the small room from which to make an image of Johnson and Kennedy and also include the judge's face. Knowing that time was of the essence and it was only possible to make 21 pictures, might explain to a historian why certain people are in the picture but not well lit. Knowing that there was no professional audio recorder available but somebody remembered there was a dictating machine in the Air Force One office explains the little square item held in front of the judge. A fashion historian might find the clothing of political figures of 1963 of interest, and perhaps especially Jackie Kennedy's jacket. Stoughton's image of the jacket is both a comment on his skill at choreographing the subjects and a cautionary tale about accepting a single photograph as the record of the moment. This photograph had to reassure the nation, so Stoughton had her stand with her left shoulder to the camera – the side farthest from the president when he was shot, the side with the least amount of bloodstain. Lady Bird Johnson's diary entry for that day notes the reality of the other side of the jacket and the skirt:

Her hair [was] falling in her face but [she was] very composed ... I looked at her. Mrs. Kennedy's dress was stained with blood. One leg was almost entirely covered with it and her right glove was caked, it was caked with blood – her husband's blood. Somehow that was one of the most poignant sights – that immaculate woman, exquisitely dressed, and caked in blood. (Johnson, as quoted in *Lady Bird*)

Since the dress is held by the National Archives – uncleaned – and, by the wishes of family, secured from public view at least until 2103, photographs are the primary source of study of the outfit for any purpose.

We propose mechanisms of proximity, constraints on proximity, and levels of proximity in the making of the photographs as a substructure for connecting a viewer’s abstract universals with those of the photographer. We assert that the functional strength of the thread of proximity depends on the partners at both ends of the thread – the coding practices and the decoding abilities.

We should note that every president since Kennedy has had an official White House photographer. Before Kennedy, White House photographs were made by members of the Army Signal Corp essentially as photographic records of events such as hosting dignitaries, signing legislation, and the like. Since Stoughton’s time the official photographer has had onsite office and facilities, but each president has used the photographer’s talents differently. There is not a statement purpose of the photographer’s position or, indeed, of responsibilities that can be assumed to hold across all the presidential photographers. Some have had close relations with the president and photographed casual and intimate moments, where others have essentially been record makers. The photographs made by the White House photographer are publicly available with certain constraints on classified materials, but how many photographs are made of what sorts of topics and under what constraints vary with the president. The photographers are proximity pieces / agents between the president and the public, but without knowing the nature of the photographer’s link to the president, we cannot know the nature of a viewer’s proximal link to presidential events.



### **Mechanisms of Proximity: Representation**

We propose that photographs and perhaps documents in general are mechanisms that resolve the past, in the sense of (re)presenting its constituent parts. We can ask about any document: what sort of resolving power does it afford one in determining a past state? A photographic document recovers a vector state of the past that enables a close mapping of surface qualities. There exists the possibility of recovering from the initial files, the temporal, spatial, and spectral component(s) of some State 1 from the State 2 represented in the photograph.

Cecil Stoughton was witness to a crisis and provided some degree of eyewitness presence for future viewers. The precipitating event for the crisis was the assassination of President Kennedy – Stoughton’s photographs show us nothing

of that event. The crisis at hand was assurance of continuity of government – Stoughton’s photographs record the swearing in of the new president.

### **Photographic Processes at the Time of the Crisis**

In a time when nearly everybody has a camera in their cell phone that is capable of making color photographs and videos, it may be difficult for today’s viewers to comprehend that in 1963 there was only one camera aboard Air Force One. Cecil Stoughton – the official White House photographer – was photographing with a Hasselblad 500C camera, that weighed almost four pounds and could make only about 20 images on one roll of film.

To provide proximal links for current viewers of this photograph, we turn to Stoughton’s words on the making of the photograph under emotional stress, engines on Air Force One already revving, and having someone on a phone in Washington, DC, dictate the words of the oath of office.

I took the color film out of my Hasselblad and reloaded it with black and white, [since it took] two hours to process color film in those days, they don’t transmit color on the wire photos, and black and white’s the only way to go.

And now I’m in the cabin where the oath’s going to be taken, and the president says, “Cecil, where do you want us?” you know. Because I had to arrange to make sure that I’d get the necessary picture: him holding his hand up and his other hand on the Bible, and anybody that would be surrounding him would be important, like Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Kennedy.

The judge read the oath, and the president repeated it. I was clicking pictures left and right, standing in my little leather seat and spraying around the cabin while they were doing the talking. Got the picture that was required: Hand up, hand on the Bible, eyes open. And Jackie and Mrs. Johnson on the other side. And then the president said, “Let’s get this plane back to Washington.”

Well, I couldn’t go back to Washington with it, because I had to take the film off and get the film processed and put it on the wires for the wire services, because the world was waiting to see what was going on ... So it was important that the film get processed and released as quickly as possible.

... Went to the AP photo lab downtown in the Dallas Morning Herald’s photo lab, I think it was. We processed the film, and made the prints, and put it on their wire service, wire photo drums. I repeat this drums thing, and a lot of times it’s not knowledgeable to people who weren’t aware

of what the drums were. But it's a telephonic device for transmitting pictures through the telephone wire.

So the picture was developed and processed, printed and transmitted, and reprinted in Washington. By the time Johnson was getting off the plane at Andrews Field two hours later, the picture was on his TV screen in the cabin of the plane, and he was watching himself being sworn in before he got off. (Stoughton, 2002)

## **Being There: Proximity to the Kennedy Family**

### **Preparation**

Captain Cecil Stoughton was trained as a US Army photographer and filmmaker under some of the luminaries of the day, such as Alfred Eisenstadt, Margaret Bourke White, and Ronald Reagan. He had seen combat action, including photographing events at Guadalcanal. He had considerable technical expertise and the ability to work under pressure. Assigned to photograph the inauguration of John F. Kennedy, he produced images that caught the eyes of the new President and First Lady. Kennedy arranged for him to be assigned as the first official White House photographer, with an office in the White House and a dedicated telephone in his home.

In his time as White House photographer, Stoughton “sat poised each day for the sound of a buzzer, which meant President John F. Kennedy was ready for his services. Over 35 months, Mr. Stoughton shot state dinners, receiving lines and visitors of all kinds, from foreign leaders to ‘50 singing Nuns’ ... But when the visitors left, Mr. Stoughton had the chance to capture the First Family in far more personal settings – in their White House quarters, at their vacation homes and on their many travels” (Fox, 2008).



Photographer Cecil Stoughton and Faith Hambrook Stoughton, Military Reception at the White House

### **On the Day of the Assassination**

Stoughton was with the press corps in the presidential motorcade and once the sound of a rifle shot was heard, he made use of several proximities to arrive at Air Force One as the only photographer. Stoughton's words on making his way:

The driver of our car was a local police officer. ... He recognized somebody on the sidewalk there; he said, "What happened?" And he said it sounded like – looked like somebody got shot in the president's car, and they must have gone to Parkland [Hospital].

I told the guy, well, "Let's go. We need to get there, too." So we took off real quickly... ended up at this Parkland Hospital. Jumped out of the car and started making pictures... The president's car was in a little emergency ambulance drive-in. I went on inside the hospital – being part of the staff, I was not precluded from going in ...

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Johnson, Vice President Johnson, and Lady Bird and Rufus Youngblood, his Secret Service guy, walking rather rapidly towards the door that I had come in just a few minutes before. And this chief warrant officer that was handing me this phone, I said, "Where's he going?" And I nodded my head like that. He said, "The president's going to Washington."

And my realizing immediately that Kennedy wasn't the president anymore and that Johnson was, nominally, and knowing that there was a need for a ceremony of some kind, either impromptu or official, it behooved me to be with him. So, when he said the president's going to Washington, I said, "So am I."

I didn't ride out in Johnson's car, but there was another car, police car, there, staff car, so to speak. Got into this car with a driver and followed the Johnson party out to what turned out to be Air Force One. Kilduff, Malcolm Kilduff, came running up the aisle and said, to the effect, "Thank God you're here, Cecil. The president's going to take his Oath of Office on the plane. You're going to have to make the pictures and release it to the press because (a) there's no room and (b) they're not here anyway." (Stoughton, 2002)

Physical proximity became an issue after the prints had been sent over the wire because of the blood on Jacqueline Kennedy's outfit. Kenny O'Donnell at the White House had evidently seen other images showing the blood-stained clothes; so, he sent a plane to get Stoughton back to Washington, DC, where Stoughton went to his darkroom and made prints of the images that had been released – showing that there was no blood because he had posed her and framed the image to avoid the blood. In 1963, printing required considerable time and required the negative, the piece of film that had come from the camera. To show the



Wearing the bloodstained pink suit that has become one of the artifacts of Nov. 22, 1963, Mrs. Kennedy arrived at Andrews Air Force Base and was escorted by her brother-in-law Robert F.



White House staff that his negatives showed no discernible blood, Stoughton had to be in Washington, DC.



In the case of Stoughton's photograph of Lyndon Johnson taking the oath of office, there are several other photographs to expand the spatiotemporal particulars, to expand a viewer's proximity to the event. Several of the other images on Stoughton's roll of 21 pictures are publicly available through the National Archives and Records Administration (on line from both the Kennedy and Johnson presidential libraries.).

Putting Stoughton's published image (upper left) into proximity with one made seconds before (upper right) gives a sense of his observation acumen at the time of making the image and in preparing it for publication. All the people in the two photographs are in almost exactly the same positions, as is the camera. In the image on the left, Lady Bird Johnson's face is tilted just a little more to the left, revealing her entire mouth; she is thus seen as part of a trio rather than someone in the background. The bottom of the picture on the left has been cropped slightly,

minimizing the amount of the frame occupied by the judge in the lower left and bringing the primary subjects closer to the viewer. The other two photographs give a sense of just how crowded and chaotic the situation was. In his comments, Stoughton mentions “spraying around the cabin,” by which he means be sure to photograph everyone that was on the scene; we actually see some different people in the different images.

Having these is not likely to make the most prominent image more readily accessible in a search; however, they do present the crowded confusion during the few minutes surrounding the oath taking photograph, perhaps increasing the utility of the prominent image. It might be said that the primary image could be an accidental, inadvertent link to the behind-the-scenes images and to just who was in the space.

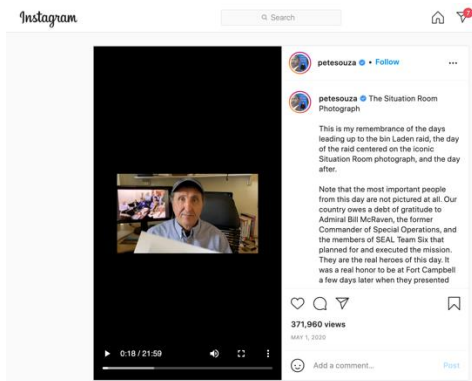


In 2011, Obama’s White House photographer Pete Souza – who had also been White House photographer for President Reagan, gathered the photon data of several people standing and staring in a small room. Souza was using a digital single lens reflex camera with a wide-angle lens – a Canon 5E Mark II – that weighed about the same as Stoughton’s Hasselblad, yet capable of making hundreds of high-resolution full color images on a single storage card. Souza had been a newspaper photographer in Chicago and had covered Obama’s career there; he had also photographed events in Afghanistan immediately after the events of September 11, 2001.

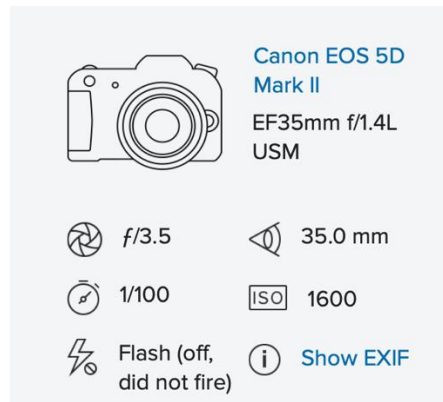


As with the Stoughton photograph, in and of itself, Souza’s image does not tell us what crisis is represented; nor does it tell us just whom we are seeing or what is happening. Souza’s photograph, made nearly 50 years after Stoughton’s photograph of President Johnson, affords rich comparative analysis. In many ways it is almost the same picture. We do not see anything of the crisis involved. The photo was made from the same corner of a small room, with lots of people, the angle of the wall trim in both pix is the same, and Jackie Kennedy and Hillary Clinton occupy both the same space and hold the role of ‘punctum’ – not the primary object but one that gives the emotional punch (Johnson, 2011). Even what is different is similar – the space containing the judge and LBJ is totally empty in the Obama photo, simply inverting the primary subject of LBJ to negative space. Of course, much of this is simply due to the fact that many impromptu presidential events take place in small places and there are often many folks involved. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that Souza’s photograph is in color.

Context provided by anecdotal data shows significant similarities and significant differences in the circumstances of production, in the role of the photographer, and in the initial intention/use of the photograph. There are two primary sources for the anecdotal data – both of them substantially different from Stoughton’s oral history. Souza maintains an Instagram account with more than 2,000,000 followers. On that account he has posted a 22-minute video in which he gives the background of making the “Situation Room” photograph. He also maintains a site on Flickr.com with 6,668 photographs from the Obama White House. Flickr has an EXIF button that enables display of a photograph’s Exchangeable Image File format data. Ordinarily, EXIF data is used to store technical information generated by the camera at the time of exposure, e.g.: time, GPS coordinates, length of exposure, camera model, lens type. EXIF data can also hold notes entered by the photographer.



Pete Souza on his Instagram page



EXIF tab on Pete Souza's Flickr page

Souza's EXIF note is 372 words; many of the words simply tell us who is pictured in the photograph, but there is a good deal of contextual information also:

May 1, 2011: Much has been made of this photograph that shows the President and Vice President and the national security team monitoring in real time the mission against Osama bin Laden. Some more background on the photograph: The White House Situation Room is actually comprised of several different conference rooms. The majority of the time, the President convenes meetings in the large conference room with assigned seats. But to monitor this mission, the group moved into the much smaller conference room. The President chose to sit next to Brigadier General Marshall B. "Brad" Webb, Assistant Commanding General of Joint Special Operations Command, who was point man for the communications taking place. With [sic] so few chairs, others just stood at the back of the room. I was jammed into a corner of the room with no room to move. During the mission itself, I made approximately 100 photographs, almost all from this cramped spot in the corner. There were several other meetings throughout the day, and we've put together a composite of several photographs (see next photo in this set) to give people a better sense of what the day was like. [Names] Note: a classified document seen in front of Sec. Clinton has been obscured.

At the beginning of the note, we are given more situational detail than the Library of Congress Subject Headings provide for the Stoughton photograph of Johnson, together with an acknowledgement of the public reception of the photograph. We learn the White House Situation Room is more than one small space and why the photograph was made there. Unlike Stoughton, who choreographed the Air Force One image, Souza was "jammed into a corner of the

room.” He mentions that he made “approximately 100 photographs” of that particular meeting and made images of other meetings from which he and his staff “put together a composite ...to give people a better sense of what the day was like.”

From the video on Souza’s Instagram account, we learn more details about the circumstances of this particular image. Unlike Stoughton’s situation, Souza had advanced notice that “something historic” would probably be happening “Saturday or Sunday.” He was not told just what it would be, only that he should be available. On the two days before the weekend, Souza accompanied Obama to Tuscaloosa, Alabama to observe severe weather damage, Cape Canaveral for a rocket launch that was delayed by weather, and a college commencement where the President gave the address – all the while knowing “something historic” was to happen on the weekend, but not yet knowing what.

When the event commenced, Souza walked with Obama to the Situation Room, chatting about the matter. In a preliminary meeting, he made 140 images, during the event he made about 100 images, then in subsequent meetings on how to break the news and whom to contact he made several hundred more photographs – for a day’s total of 1,003. We learn that he only made about 100 images because his camera was quiet but not entirely silent and he did not want to disrupt the concentration in the room. He was shooting with a digital camera capable of making some hundreds of images on a single storage card, yet for the time he was in that room he was making photographs at the same rate to which Stoughton had been constrained. Again, while the moods in both situations were serious, the Situation Room mood required the least possible photographic interference.

While Stoughton rushed from Air Force one to a Dallas newspaper darkroom in order to get his photo “on the wire” as quickly as possible, we learn from the Instagram video that Souza gave his files to the White House photography staff and went home sometime after midnight. He returned early in the morning to do a “rough edit” of the 1,003 down to 50 images that best gave a sense of the event. He printed the one now known simply as the Situation Room photograph and noticed what seemed as if it might be classified material in front of Hillary Clinton. This required confirmation – it was classified; it required consideration of whether the picture could be released to the public with the classified portion digitally obscured – a possible violation of the concept of not altering White House photographs. As we see in the EXIF data, it was released with the alteration; in the Instagram video we learn that it was an extensive discussion and the only photograph ever released that way from the Obama White House.

Also, in the Instagram video Souza explains that he is often asked exactly what moment in the raid on bin Laden is recorded in the Situation Room photograph and that he cannot say. He has the time stamp on the image file, but until the official timeline of the operation is declassified he cannot link the operational time to his file’s timestamp.

## **Spatiotemporal Particulars**

Ken Johnson wrote in 2011: “Rarely has a photo revealed so little while evoking so much. It shows an intent President Obama and other officials in the White House Situation Room, but tells little about what exactly the situation is, except that they are watching something off to the left” (Johnson, 2011). This leads us back to questions of what are we seeing? What do we need to know to know what we are seeing? What did the photographer mean for the intended audience to see?

Immediately after the Kennedy assassination, the White House needed a photograph to assure the world that, despite the shocking death of the president, there was continuity of government; immediately after the bin Laden raid, President Obama called several world leaders and made a televised speech – there was no pressing need for a photograph of the Situation room to calm fears. It should probably be noted that some quarters have asked for a photograph of bin Laden’s body, but that is another issue.

When Ken Johnson was writing his article about the photograph, he could assume most who saw the photograph would recognize Obama, but that assumption might not hold so strongly as time passes. As the event pictured recedes into the past, fewer viewers are likely to have the situational particulars to associate the pixels of the image with particular details of experience. Think of the days when photo prints were put into albums – a set of particulars themselves receding into history – how many people experienced the frustrations of trying to remember, “Was that my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or 19<sup>th</sup>?” or “I wish someone had written down who the woman on the left is.” Recently we were showing the Stoughton photographs to some people in their 20s, many from countries other than the United States; when we asked, “What does this mean?” one student responded: “That is not in our history books.” A lovely demonstration of the need for context beyond names of objects in the photographs.

We can look at the additional situational particulars provided by the photographer to explain more to those of us who were witness, in any sense, to an event and to provide proximal bridges for those who were not witnesses. For those of us who were high school students at the time of the Kennedy assassination, the Johnson image is likely still a significant spatiotemporal particular – a direct link to the memories of that day; for those somewhat younger, the picture may be a “my parents told me they could remember exactly where they were when they heard the news” particular; for younger viewers it may be a link to a history lesson or trip to Dallas or even simply “some people in a room.”

## Proximity, Anecdata, Spatiotemporal Particulars

We can see in the EXIF data for Souza’s “Situation Room” that the shutter was open for 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second – a very short time at human scale. We can ask: Is that enough time? To which we might well respond: “Enough time for what?” That moment’s worth of photon data shows who was in the room, though it tells neither names nor titles nor functions. Serious concentration is evident, though the picture alone does not tell us what sort of event is requiring the serious attention; nor does it tell us how long the attention has been so rapt nor whether the previous or next moment would have shown excitement.

One might ask why not make video and audio recordings? At the time of the Johnson inauguration photograph, the preparation for making a 16mm film with audio would likely have taken longer than the entire time the plane sat ready to leave; it would have required a large camera on a tripod and bright lights – which the limited space on Air Force One could not accommodate. In the case of the Obama photograph, a reasonably high-quality video could have been made with essentially the same equipment as made the still photographs, but narration of the event and accompanying discussion of strategies would likely have to be classified, possibly rendering the video unsuitable for release to the public.

Another issue arises out of the technology – in the Stoughton photograph the viewer has no color data. For the original purposes of the photograph this is of little consequence; however, even at the time, Jackie Kennedy’s fashion was a matter of public interest. Especially after her suit was covered in her husband’s blood, the color became a matter of intense interest and even some controversy over whether or not any blood shows in Stoughton’s photograph.

We tried a little experiment and ran Stoughton’s photograph through three online colorizing engines (see Note at end) – each used artificial intelligence and none required more than 10 seconds to produce results. The results varied in quality of coloring within the lines – recognizing the boundaries of discrete objects – but they all looked like color photographs. However, not one rendered Jackie’s raspberry pink.



We do have a Cecil Stoughton color photograph of the raspberry ensemble at the time of arrival in Dallas. We could look at lack of color data and at the lack of the motion and audio components of events as technological distance or weakening of the possible proximal ties between a record and an event. Other photographs, personal accounts, and even simple understanding of the recording processes can alert us to what is lacking – sometimes filling in what is missing, sometimes only acting as a caution to interpretation.



Even these simple colorized images raise a growing concern in trusting photographs to present photon data of a significant event – deep fake proximity. Deleting people and objects from photographs or adding them in has been practiced since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Analog techniques could be convincing to the casual glance, but were generally detectable with some close scrutiny. Digital additions, deletions, and alterations can be nearly undetectable and are the subject of considerable research. Digital forensics researcher Hany Farid notes: “Stalin, Mao, Hitler, Mussolini, and other dictators routinely doctored photographs so that the images aligned with their messages... They knew if they changed the visual record, they could change history” (Farid, 2019). Digital manipulation requires “...techniques for reverse image searches, metadata analysis, finding image imperfections introduced by JPEG compression, image cloning, tracing pixel patterns, and detecting images that are computer-generated” (Farid, 2019).

Through close analysis of two famous presidential photographs, we have demonstrated the value of proximity – the proximity of a recording device to the event, the representational abilities and constraints governing the richness and functionality of the representation, and the contextualizing roles of various sorts of anecdotal data – to understanding and instilling relevancy over time.

We emphasize that both of these photographs were made as the only records and each by the only individual with a camera at the event. Now, 58 years after the Johnson swearing in photograph and 10 years after the “Situation Room” image, it is routine that many more recording devices are typically on scene. The *New York Times* produced a visual investigation of the events of January 6, 2021 in Washington, DC, of which it said: “A six-month Times investigation has synchronized and mapped out thousands of videos and police radio communications from the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, providing the most complete picture to date of what happened — and why” (Khavin, 2021).

Most of those recording devices are sophisticated and highly portable and capable of recording video, sound, and GPS location data. This promises more sorts of data, triangulation of representations, path tracking, and multiple



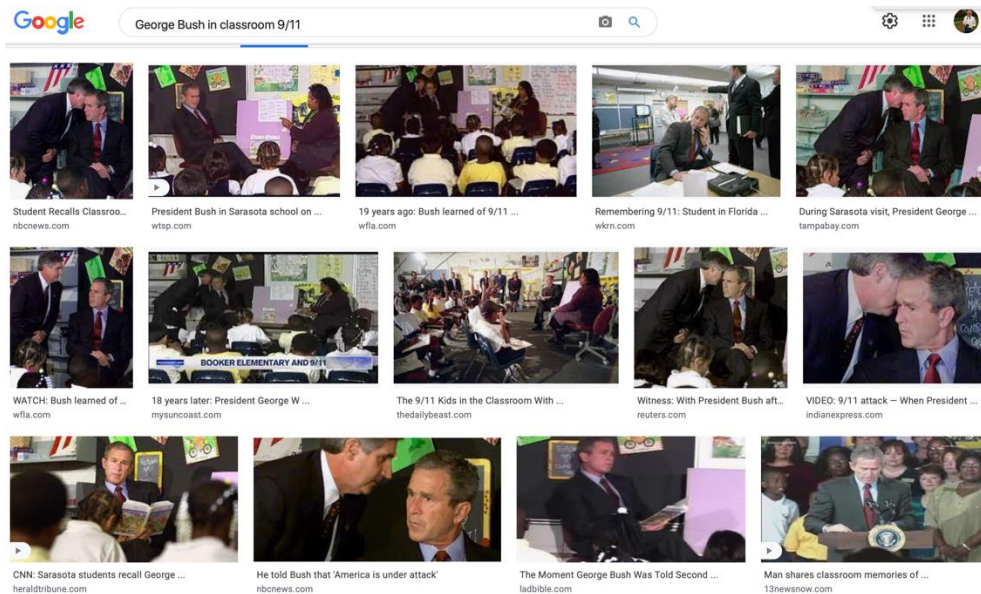
representational agendas – news media reportage, participant eyewitness views, police recordings of events and reactions. Intriguing potential is balanced by two points: each of the recording devices has its own limitations; the agglomeration of all the representations requires organizing principles and, perhaps, selection practices that impose their own distancing from individual perceptions of the events. Ensuing archival processes are impacted by these limitations, as archival practices themselves can pose limitations depending on purpose, space, and available metadata.

We assert that the greater the distance – temporal, spatial, cultural – a person holds from an event, the greater the need for connecting threads between that person’s abstract universals and the particulars of the event. A photograph is an exquisite representation of the surfaces in front of the camera; yet, as with all representations, the highlighting of certain attributes, necessarily means leaving some behind (Marr, 1982). Some of the attributes left behind are due to technical capabilities of the recorder and some are the choice of the photographer. For a photograph to function as one of those connecting threads a viewer must know both the representational capabilities of the medium at the time of making and the intended purpose. As with any representation, the functionality of a photograph depends on the viewer understanding the making of the representation.



An intriguing companion for analysis along with the Stoughton and Souza photographs of presidents at times of crisis is the image of Chief of Staff Andy Card whispering into the ear of President George W. Bush. Again, there is nothing about the photograph that “says” George W. Bush, and we had to look up the name of the Chief of Staff, for it is not evident from the photograph itself. We can see words on objects in the photograph – Reading makes a country great! – though they are not native elements of the photograph. Again, the single photograph tells us nothing about what crisis is at hand. The significant difference with this image is that the event was recorded by multiple cameras – both still and moving images.

Indeed, if one does a Google search on “George Bush in classroom 9/11” several images come up showing different moments – Card’s head at different distance from Bush’s head – and different angles and different framing.



Television station Fox 13 Tampa Bay uploaded a two-minute video to YouTube showing the president listening to children, already knowing about the first plane strike in New York; then showing the chief of staff entering the shot and whispering; then Bush continuing with the children; then leaving, with a reporter shouting: “Mr. President, are you aware of reports that a plane crashed...?” and Bush responding, “We’ll talk about that later.”



Twenty years later, we find through online search tidbits of proximity data scattered throughout search results. Data that offers more than the eye can see in the images. Much of this data has been collected over the ensuing years offering proximity to the viewer. Much like the Johnson swearing in event, this proximity data serves to remind and inform people across generations. In sum, proximadata serves to keep the memory vividly alive.

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Note: Colorized photographs of Johnson being sworn in aboard Air Force One were produced by processing the black and white file on the following sites, in order from left to right.

- Hotpot AI: <https://hotpot.ai/colorize-picture>
- Colorize: <https://imagecolorizer.com/colorize.html>
- Online Colorization: <https://www.onlinecolorization.com/convert>