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Buddy Bolden's Photo: The Solution to an Eighty-Year-Old Riddle

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In their 1939 monograph *Jazzmen,* Frederic Ramsey Jr., and Charles Edward Smith presented the photograph of a sextet from New Orleans, which prominently features a cornet player. This cornet player is Buddy Bolden, the (proto)jazzman, born in 1877, who conquered the whole city before being locked up at the Louisiana State Insane Asylum where he would spend the second half of his life—from 1907 until his death in 1931.[1] With the exception of a handful of brief articles written by African American journalist E. Belfield Spriggins in the early 1930s for the *Louisiana Weekly*, Bolden remained largely shrouded in mystery until the publication of the photo. Instead of dispelling the mists of its mystery, this picture gave birth to a parallel, self-contained enigma. Before delving into the puzzle and its solution, it is worthwhile to first examine two controversial aspects of that photo that remain subjects of disagreement to this day: the dating of the image and the identification of the two clarinetists.

Researchers have placed the date of this document somewhere between *Jazzmen*'s generic claim of "before 1895" and Donald Marquis' 1905, as argued in his 1978 monograph *In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz*.[2] In their 1967 monograph *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album*, Al Rose and Edmond Souchon suggested 1892, only to revise their estimation to 1902 in the book's third edition, published in 1984.[3] According to the late music professor Alden Ashforth, the photo was taken between 1899-1903 (*Annual Review of Jazz Studies,*1985). This estimation is grounded in the biography of Willy Cornish, the trombonist pictured in the shot. Ashforth contends that, before 1899, Cornish was enlisted in the Spanish-American War (a fact for which we have

[1] Frederic Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, *Jazzmen* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1939).

[2] Donald Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz* (Baton Rouge, LA Louisiana State University Press, 1978); this essay will reference the Revised Edition (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

[3] Al Rose and Edmond Souchon in *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1967); Third Edition Revised and Enlarged (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

solid evidence) and by 1904 would have left Bolden's lineup (a statement for which we have no solid evidence).[4] Dan Vernhettes and Bo Lindström, authors of *Jazz Puzzles I* (2012), lean toward a narrower timeframe between, 1904-1905, reasoning that trombonist Frankie Dusen would have joined the lineup in 1906, replacing Cornish. However, the authors do not offer an explanation as to why the photograph could not have been taken before 1904.[5] Based on this research, a scientifically reliable dating of the photograph would be between 1899-1905. This is because Cornish would have been at the front before 1899, and he would have been replaced by Dusen after 1905.

As for the two clarinetists, we know them to be Frank Lewis and Willie Warner. But who is who? For the authors of *Jazzmen,* the seated one is Frank Lewis.[6] However, in the first edition of *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album* (1967) Al Rose and Edmond Souchon reversed this claim, asserting that Lewis is the one standing and Warner the one sitting (see fig 1.).[7] The authors' thesis is supported by the biographical details they provide in the text. According to these details, Warner was born in 1865 and Lewis in 1870, and in the photograph, one appears visibly older than the other.[8] Rose and Souchon would change their position again in the third edition of their monograph (1984), designating the mature clarinetist with a mustache as Frank Lewis.[9] This is especially perplexing as they did not modify the birth dates of the two musicians, still indicating Warner as the older (and thus the seated clarinetist). Probably, the authors gave credence to Marquis' research, which identified Frank Lewis as the seated clarinetist, and forgot to address the inconsistency in the biographical data. Marquis' account of the photograph is also contradictory. The author identifies Frank Lewis as the seated clarinetist in the photo but notes in the caption that Willie Warner played the C clarinet and Frank Lewis the Bb clarinet.[10] Actually, if either instrument is in C (this will be further examined in the forthcoming pages) it is certainly that of the seated musician. However, this discrepancy has been noted by Vernhettes and Lindström (2012). Through their

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[4] Alden Ashforth, "The Buddy Bolden Photo. One More Time," *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 3 (1985), 171-180. According to some scholars, including Samuel Charters, it is possible that Cornish was part of the lineup until 1905. Samuel Charters, *A Trumpet around the Corner. The Story of New Orleans Jazz* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 87.

[5] Dan Vernhettes and Bo Lindström, *Jazz Puzzles: Volume I* (Saint Etienne, France: Jazz'Edit, 2012), 30-58.

[6] Ramsey and Smith, *Jazzmen,* 33.

[7] In the caption the authors write "in previous uses, the names of the two clarinetists were transposed." Rose and Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album*, 160.

[8] Ibid., 122, 74.

[9] Rose and Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album,* 1984 edition, 164.

[10] Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden,* 76.

biographical research, they established that Frank Lewis (b. 1872) was older than Willie Warner (b. 1877), making it likely that Lewis was the seated clarinetist.[11] In the meantime, starting from the aforementioned essay by Ashforth (1985), it is assumed, without evidence, that the seated clarinetist is Warner.

In short, the biographical sources do not agree. Of the many hypotheses, one seems the most credible. Marquis, relying on the eyewitness testimony of "six musicians who knew Willie Warner and Frank Lewis personally, plus the word of Willie Cornish, who was in the photo," asserts that "Warner is the one standing and Lewis the one sitting." These words are taken from the "Epilogue, 2005" of the Revised Edition of *In Search of Buddy Bolden*.[12] Presumably Marquis felt the need, 25 years after the first edition, to put an end to the confusion caused by his statement about the C clarinet played by Warner.

Figure 1. The "Bolden Photo" as it was published in *Jazzmen,* but now with correct caption and dating: Jimmy Jonson, Buddy Bolden, Willie Cornish, Willie Warner (standing); Brock Mumford, Frank Lewis (seated); New Orleans, 1899-1905

[11] Vernhettes and Lindström, *Jazz Puzzles: Volume I,* 54,55.
[12] Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden,* 153.

Nonetheless, these controversies, made even more insidious by less-than-rigorous investigations, pale in comparison to the massive bone of contention that has been brewing for decades over one aspect of this photo:

Was the photo that Bella Cornish, the trombonist's wife, gave to the authors of *Jazzmen* mirror printed?

This is what Rose and Souchon claim in their first edition of *New Orleans Jazz*. In fact, they published the photo reversed, because they believed that they were compensating for the incorrect, "mirrored" orientation.[13]

Figure 2. Bolden photo (Rose and Souchon, *A Family Album,* 1967).

Their reasoning for this seems almost formal: in photographs of New Orleans jazz ensembles, the double bass is traditionally on the right—additionally, they have removed the cropping, allowing us to see a strange object in front of Frank Lewis' feet, which will addressed shortly. In his *In Search of Buddy Bolden,* Donald Marquis does not take a position and publishes the photo twice, one for

[13] Rose and Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album,* 1967 edition, 160.

each direction.[14] Then, in 1985, Alden Ashforth intervened in a way that seemed final. The double bass had to be on the right, otherwise the wind instruments would all be reversed.[15] However, it had not escaped anyone's notice that fixing the woodwinds would complicate the strings: both the guitarist and the double bassist would in fact turn out to be left-handed and Mumford (as known from the evidence gathered by Marquis) and Johnson (of whom we also have photographic documentation), were not left-handed.[16] Ashforth dismisses the matter, claiming of not knowing "for whatever fanciful reason" the two musicians posed as left-handed.[17] "For whatever fanciful reason" was too flimsy explanation to convince ethnomusicologist Gerhard Kubik who, in a 2009 issue of *Jazz Archivist* magazine, posits a photomontage theory. His idea is that the photographer didn't have lenses capable of capturing the entire band, so he did it in two takes. In the first shot he captured the two clarinetists and Cornish; in the second shot he took the picture of the double bassist, the guitarist, and Bolden; and finally, he mounted the two negatives by flipping the second one so that the double bass, as per tradition, would appear on the right.[18]

This narrative didn't persuade those who, a few years before Kubik's publication, had already adopted another theory. Floyd Levin's collection of short essays, *Classic Jazz* (2000), briefly describes Bolden's photo as a "faded tintypes."[19] He only dedicates these two words to the picture (the second of which is incorrectly plural). However, this spark was enough to fire up Brian Wood's curiosity. In the 2001 issue of *New Orleans Music,* Wood hypothesizes that the photo of Bolden is, in fact, a tintype, which accounts for the inversion as a consequence of the photographic process, providing an explanation to the mystery.[20] In that same issue, Justin Winston and Clive Wilson give credence to the tintype hypothesis, though a flaw remains: indeed it explains why the woodwinds are reversed but it does not give reasons why the double bass and guitar are gripped "*à la* left-handed." The explanation they give is that the photographer, knowing that the picture would come out laterally inverted, asked

[14] Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden,* 79, 80.
[15] Ashforth, "The Buddy Bolden Photo. One More Time," 171-180.
[16] Marquis got confirmation from family members that Mumford was also not left-handed, 77. Two photos of Johnson, by Arthur Bedou, showing him right-handed are well printed by Vernhettes and Lindström, *Jazz Puzzles: Volume I,* 70, 71.
[17] Ashforth, "The Buddy Bolden Photo" One More Time," 176.
[18] Gerhard Kubik, "The Mystery of the Buddy Bolden Photograph," *The Jazz Archivist* 22 (2009), 4-18.
[19] Floyd Levin, *Classic Jazz: A Personal View of the Music and the Musicians* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 197.
[20] Brian Wood, "Buddy Bolden and Billy the Kid," *New Orleans Music* 5 (2001), 6-9.

the two musicians to reverse their instruments.[21] In the 2010 issue of *The Jazz Archivist*, Vic Hobson provides additional evidence in the form of a tintype depicting a musician holding the guitar as if he were left-handed. He arrives at this conclusion by noting that the guitar strings in the photograph are mounted backwards (with the low strings on the bottom). He later hypothesized that the flipping of the instrument may have been a regular practice when posing for tintype photographs.[22]

Still, the debate continued. In 2017, Kubik further elaborated on his essay about Bolden's photograph in the book *Jazz Transatlantic: Volume 1,* reaffirming his stance that the image is a photomontage and challenging the validity of the tintype theory. However, despite acknowledging Hobson's essay (which he cites), Kubik does not take into account the evidence of the "fake left-handed" guitarist, provided by Hobson.[23] Alan John Ainsworth just recently published *Sight Reading: Photographers and American Jazz, 1900-60 (2022)*. This substantial monograph mentions the mystery of the Bolden photograph but offers no solution.[24]

So, let us try here to solve this eighty-year-old mystery. While initially shifting our focus away from musical iconography, upon our return we will have gained a better awareness, which will enable us to effectively address these inquiries.

PHOTOMONTAGES, PRISMS, AND BUTTONS

Kubik is not mistaken when he argues that in the late 1850s photomontage was an already familiar technique that had led to such composite photograph examples as *Fading Away* (1885) by Henry Peach Robinson, which is the sum of five negatives. It should be noted that, almost thirty years earlier, Oscar Gustave Rejlander assembled more than thirty negatives in the darkroom for his *Two Ways of Life*. Mia Fineman's *Faking It: Manipulated Photography before Photoshop* also cites a successful photomontage from 1846.[25] Moreover, during the late

[21]Justin Winston and Clive Wilson, "The Bolden Photograph: A Photographic Examination," *The Jazz Archivist* 22 (2009), 19-24.

[22] Vic Hobson, "Regarding That Buddy Bolden Photograph…," *The Jazz Archivist* 23 (2010), 37-38. Hobson reiterates his theory but brings no new evidence in the monograph *Creating Jazz Counterpoint. New Orleans, Barbershop Harmony, and the Blues* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 7-10.

[23]Gerhard Kubik, *Jazz Transatlantic: Volume 1. The African Undercurrent in Twentieth-Century Jazz Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 213-219.

[24] Alan John Ainsworth, *Sight Readings: Photographers and American Jazz, 1900-60* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2022), 15, 35.

[25] Mia Fineman, *Faking It: Manipulated Photography before Photoshop* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 3.

nineteenth century, the years of Bolden's photo, manuals discussing photomontage were already in circulation. One example is the successful *Photographic Amusements* (1896) by Walter Woodbury. It is possible that the photo of the Jimmy Palao Band (1900) may contain a photomontage. The young girl sitting in the foreground (identified as Victoria Smith) appears out of scale with the rest of the band members (she is larger), she is in a different focus, and she is surrounded by a faint white halo which may indicate retouching to mask the edges of the crop.[26] But Bolden's photo is not a photomontage. Answering Kubik, if indeed the photographer did not own a simple lens capable of capturing a small group outdoors, he would not at the same time have been able to make a composite photograph.[27] However, while Bolden's photograph may not be a photomontage, it is still a form of forgery if we accept CIA expert on photographic forgery and author of *Photo Fakery: The History and Technique of Photographic Deception and Manipulation* Dino A. Brugioni's assertion that "posing people, re-enacting scenes or re-arranging objects to obtain desired effect" is a form of manipulation, a form of manipulation that, as some researchers had guessed, was captured on a tintype.[28]

Tintypes, just like the older daguerreotypes, are direct-positive photographic processes in which the picture is inverted laterally and upside-down, in a similar way as images are projected in a *camera obscura* or in the retina of the human eye. While the upside-down problem could be solved by rotating the image, the lateral inversion proved more difficult to correct by the opticians and photographers of the 1800s. As Helmut Gernsheim notes in his extensive work, *The History of Photography: From the Camera Obscura to the Beginning of the*

[26] https://louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/lsm-jaz%3A12343

[27] It would be quite unlikely that any photographer, even an amateur, would not possess a lens capable of capturing a group of six people crammed together outdoors. Amateur photography from at least three decades prior to the Bolden photo is full of group pictures. The particular technique of photomontage to make a satisfactory composite photograph, however, was reserved to the professionals. It is considered entirely unlikely that Bolden's photo is a photomontage, supporting instead my thesis, which will be detailed in the following pages: Serge Plantureux, one of the world's leading dealers in ancient photography and *cabinet d'expertise et d'investigation* (*experts près la cour d'appel de Paris*); Maria Francesca Bonetti, head of photographic collections at the National Institute for Graphic Arts; Michele Smargiassi, author of *Un'autentica Bugia: La fotografia, il vero, il falso* (*An Authentic Lie: Photography. The True, The False*) Roma, Contrasto, 2015; Gabriele Chiesa, co-author alongside Paolo Gosio of *Dagherrotipa, Ambrotipa, Ferrotipia. Positivi unici e processi antichi nel ritratto fotografico* (*Daguerreotype, Ambrotype, Tintype: Unique Positives and Ancient Processes in Photographic Portraiture*), Youcanprint, 2014; Bálint Flesch, archaist photographer, historian of ancient photography and collaborator of the Hungarian Museum of Photography.

[28] Dino A. Brugioni, *Photo Fakery: The History and Technique of Photographic Deception and Manipulation* (Dulles, Virginia: Brassey's, 1999), 111.

Modern Era, inventors developed prisms and mirrors capable of correcting the lateral inversion of images. This practice of adjusting inverted images can be traced to the early days of the medium. Photography's official birth year is 1839, and methods for correcting lateral inversion in images were developed as early as 1840.[29] The Southern Daguerreotype Portrait Gallery of Edward Jacobs and C. E. Johnson in New Orleans is an example of an establishment that possessed such a contraption. In an advertisement published in the December 10, 1845 issue of the *Daily Picayune* they proudly informed that their daguerreotypes were "taken without reversing the object."[30] Although the most prestigious photographic studios could afford such optics, it is still unclear how to determine whether or not a direct-positive photograph has been "adjusted" with a prism. The literature on the subject does not provide reassuring answers. The expert Lorenzo Scaramella, author of *Photography: History and Identification of Photographic Processes*, writes: "Normally we cannot know whether the photographer used this device (tilted mirrors or prisms), except, of course for known subjects."[31] That said, through the examination of Bolden's photograph, I was able to develop a methodology for resolving this issue.

Figure 3. Unidentified soldier in Union cavalry - tintype, hand-colored, 1861-65, detail.

[29] Helmut Gernsheim, *The History of Photography: From the Camera Obscura to the Beginning of the Modern Era* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966).
[30] Margaret Denton Smith and Mary Louise Tucker, *Photography in New Orleans: The Early Years, 1840-1865* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 43.
[31] Lorenzo Scaramella, *Fotografia: Storia e riconoscimento dei procedimenti fotografici* (Rome: De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2003), 194.

Figure 3 shows a detail of a tintype of a Union soldier.[32] The image is certainly inverted. This is made evident by the buttons. When it comes to clothing, buttons serve as a fixed point to determine whether the image is inverted or not. Buttons on men's clothing are always on the right side and have aligned with this gendered standard for centuries.[33] The widespread use of buttons on clothing in the nineteenth century makes it straightforward to determine whether a photograph is a direct positive. In those cases where buttons are not clearly visible, checking the direction of lacing is just as good.

Other clothing details cannot confirm whether the picture is reversed or not. My analysis of over 800 photos revealed that in over 85% of cases the chain watch (like the one that Frank Lewis wears in his waistcoat in figure 2) was worn in the left breast pocket. However, 85% and certainty are two very different concepts.[34] Male lacing will therefore be the only litmus test for us to use in the next dive, the last one that I will take into the extra-musical sphere.

RIGHT AND LEFT, MILITARY AND MIRRORS

The reversal of images was perceived as a problem by photographers and sitters alike. It is no accident that the few studios in America that used talbotypes, a negative-positive process that did not reverse the image laterally, emphasized this benefit of working with them. For example, Maguire & Harrington's New Orleans studio in 1850 assured that they would immortalize "the sitter without any reverse effect."[35] Studios that were not able to correct for lateral inversion were often subject to critique. A telling incident was the episode reported by Robert Taft in his *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History 1839-*

[32] *https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.32647/*

[33] According to Helmut Nickel, Stuart W. Pyhrr and Leonid Tarassuk, authors of *The Art of Chivalry: European Arms and Armor from The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, 1982, The American Federation of Art, the male lacing has been on the right since the time of medieval armor. "To ensure that an enemy's lance point would not slip between the plates, they overlapped from left to right, since it was standard fighting practice that the left side, protected by the shield, was turned toward the enemy" (18). Relative to men's clothing, the only exception is the Chassidic Jews whose clothes have buttons on the left side. Women's clothing began to distinguish itself from men's clothing by providing buttons on the left side around the 1870s. Alexa Bender and Chloe Chapin, personal emails, May 2022.

[34] My study was conducted on photographs published in the volumes: Joan Severa, *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans & Fashion, 1840-190*0 (Kent, Ohio, The Kent State University Press, 1995); Priscilla Harris Dalrymple, *American Victorian Costume in Early Photographs* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991). Daguerreotypes, ambrotypes and tintypes of the Museo Nazionale della Fotografia di Brescia (National Photographic Museum of Brescia - Italy) were also analyzed.

[35] Smith and Tucker, *Photography in New Orleans,* 57.

1889. According to the story, a daguerreotype was taken of a lover posing with his hand over his heart, and the next day the sitter returned to the studio displeased that his hand had ended up on the wrong side.[36] In short, right and left was no small matter.

Attention to lateral direction of the image had somehow been lost during the twentieth century. In some publications, for example, the famous shot captured by Professor Harold Edgerton of a bullet passing through an apple correctly follows the left-right directionality, while in others it proceeds in the opposite way.[37] The photo *Bandit's Roost* (1888) by Jacob Riis has been reversed in several publications. In Mary Marien's authoritative *A Cultural History of Photography* the bandit holding a stick (or perhaps the barrel of a rifle) is on the right side of the image, while in André Gunther and Michel Poivert's equally authoritative *History of Photography* the villain ends up on the left side. The buttons, which the scholars evidently did not take into account, are a clear indication that the second publication is in error.[38] In the book *American Musicians*, the photograph of Roland Kirk playing two saxophones, taken by Lee Friedlander, was initially published inverted, however, it was later corrected when it was used as the cover of the Atlantic LP *The Inflated Tear*.[39] The same path is mirrored, pun intended, in Francis Wolff's photo of Fats Navarro, which annoyingly appears mirrored on the Blue Note LPs *The Fabulous Fats Navarro Volume 1* and *The Fabulous Fats Navarro Volume 2*.[40] Bolden's photo could thus be added to this list of careless errors (with the single exception that we have yet to identify the right and wrong sides).

It is possible that the tintypists of the 1800s would have paid more attention to these details, having to deal regularly with sideways inversions. They would likely have scorned the oversights that are found in more recent pictures. However, even photographers who lacked prisms and mirrors did not simply

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[36] Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History 1839-1889* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964), 109-110.

[37] The correct version is in Harold E. Edgerton and James R. Killian, Jr., *Moment of Visions: The Stroboscopic Revolution in Photography*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964), 107. The image is mirrored on the cover of William S. Johnson, Mark Rice, Carla Williams, *A History of Photography From 1839 to the Present* (Köln: Taschen, 2012).

[38] Mary Merian, *A Cultural History of Photography, 4th Edition* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2014), 203; André Gunther and Michel Poivert, *Storia della fotografia* (*History of Photography*) (Milan: Electa 2008), 381.

[39] Lee Friedlander, *American Musicians* (New York: D.A.P., 1998), 227; Roland Kirk, *The Inflated Tear* (Atlantic- SC 1502).

[40] *The Fabulous Fats Navarro Volume 1* (Blue Note BLP1531) and *The Fabulous Fats Navarro Volume 2* (Blue Note BLP1532).

tolerate this lateral reversal. Instead, they devised various methods to mitigate it as much as possible.

In the previous example we discovered the revealing trick by looking at the buttons of a Union private. A captain will reveal another.

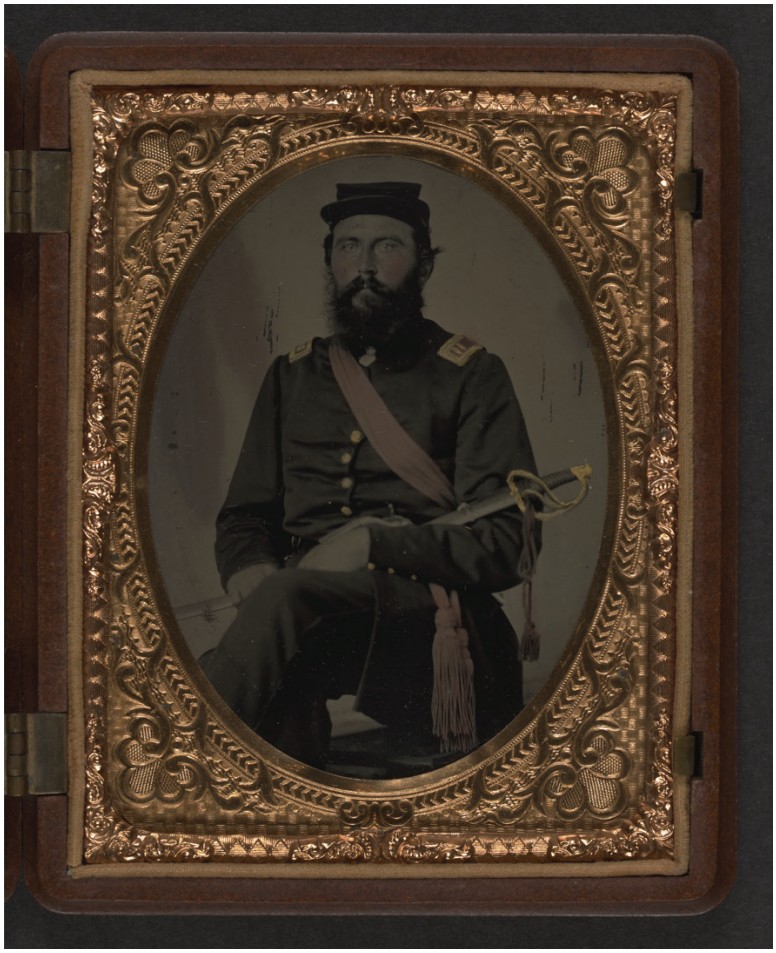

Figure 4. Unidentified soldier in Union Captain uniform, tintype, hand-colored, 1861.

The buttons on this hand-colored daguerreotype reveal that the image is inverted, yet the distinctive sash which marks the captain's rank is not inverted.[41] This suggests that, in the studio photographer and sitter opted to "manipulate" reality, as Brugioni put it, so that the lateral inversion of the image would be somehow correct. This can be observed in numerous military pictures similar to figure 5, indicating that this was a widespread practice.

[41] https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.37141/

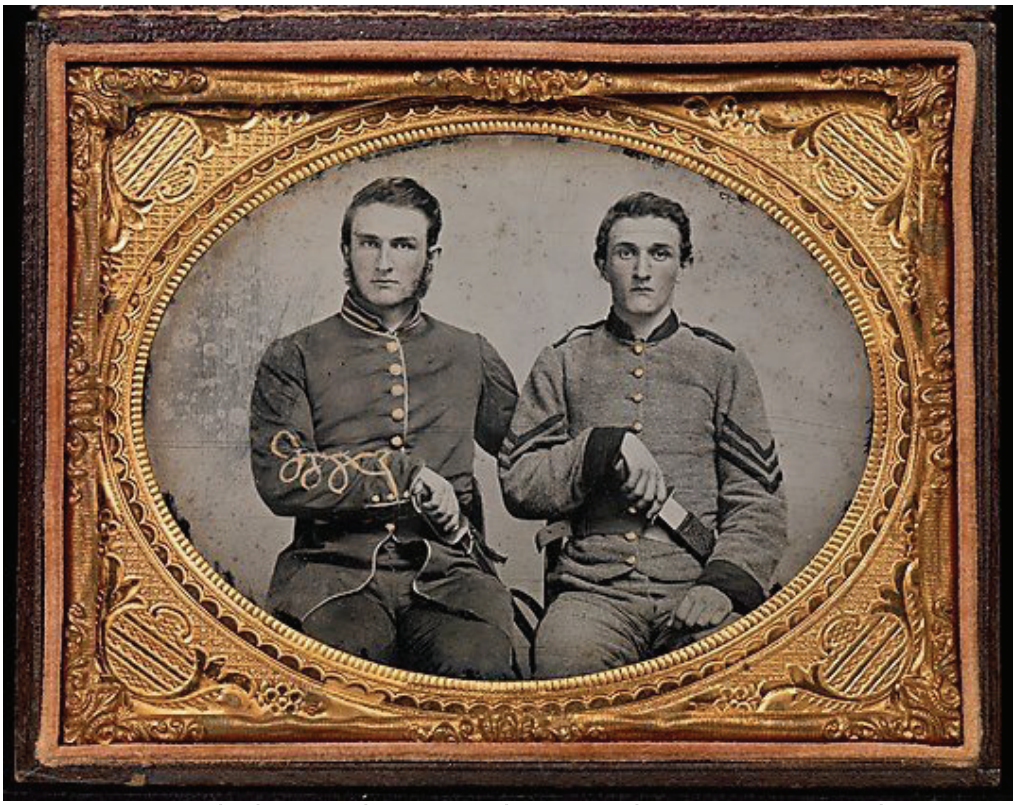

Figure 5. Captain Charles A. and Sergeant John M. Hawkins, Company E, 38th Regiment, Georgia Volunteer Infantry, ambrotype, 1861-62- David Wynn Vaughan Collection

On this ambrotype, the Captain and Sergeant were captured in an inverted image, but their weapons were positioned correctly on their left sides, ready to be unsheathed, suggesting a deliberate staging to compensate for the lateral inversion. This practice can be viewed as a variation of the earlier gimmick observed in other military images.[42] We could extend the application of this manipulation to any field: for example, to the field of inscriptions. Wherever possible the lettering had to be reversed so that they would be readable in a direct positive. In an 1850 daguerreotype of himself, which the buttons indicate to have been taken without a prism, the young Mark Twain purposely positioned three characters to spell the word "Sam" (his real name) without lateral inversions.

[42]https://www.gibbesmuseum.org/news/curatorial-perspective-photography-and-the-american-civil-war/capt-charles_and-sgt_john-hawkins_companye/. The Hungarian Bálint Flesch, one of Europe's leading experts on ancient photography, provided me with examples akin to the one in Fig. 4 of soldiers from the Austro-Hungarian army, demonstrating that the gimmick was transnational.

This clever staging demonstrates his awareness of the lateral inversion that often occurred in photographic images of the time.[43] The reader may wonder why such machinations are worth exploring when mankind has been dealing with mirrors and their (apparent) lateral inversion since the dawn of time. In his essay *Mirrors*, the semiologist Umberto Eco meditates on the differences between photographs and mirrors and comes to the conclusion that photographs and mirrors are two profoundly different phenomena since "mirror images are not signs."[44] Having acknowledged this distinction, let us now scrutinize our final example extracted from the Civil War: the individual in Figure 3, of whom I have previously only presented a fragment of the vest while closely examining the buttons. As in a poker game, it is time to reveal all of our cards.

[43] Noticed by Michele Smargiassi published in his blog "Fotocrazia": https://smargiassi-michele.blogautore.repubblica.it/2016/05/13/lo-specchio-traditore-che-abbiamo-in-tasca/, May 13, 2016.

[44] Umberto Eco, "Mirrors" in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 222-227; The semiologist reflects on the photograph by describing the photographic plate as "a freezing mirror" —a particularly fitting definition for tintype (217). The emphasis in this case should be placed on the verb "freezing," as the ability of the plate to transform an image into an object. The permanence of the image (even in the absence of the object itself) generates a series of implications that are not present when a mirror comes into play. For example, the inversion of the right and left side in a permanent image feels somewhat disturbing, whereas the same phenomenon in front of a mirror does not cause any discomfort.

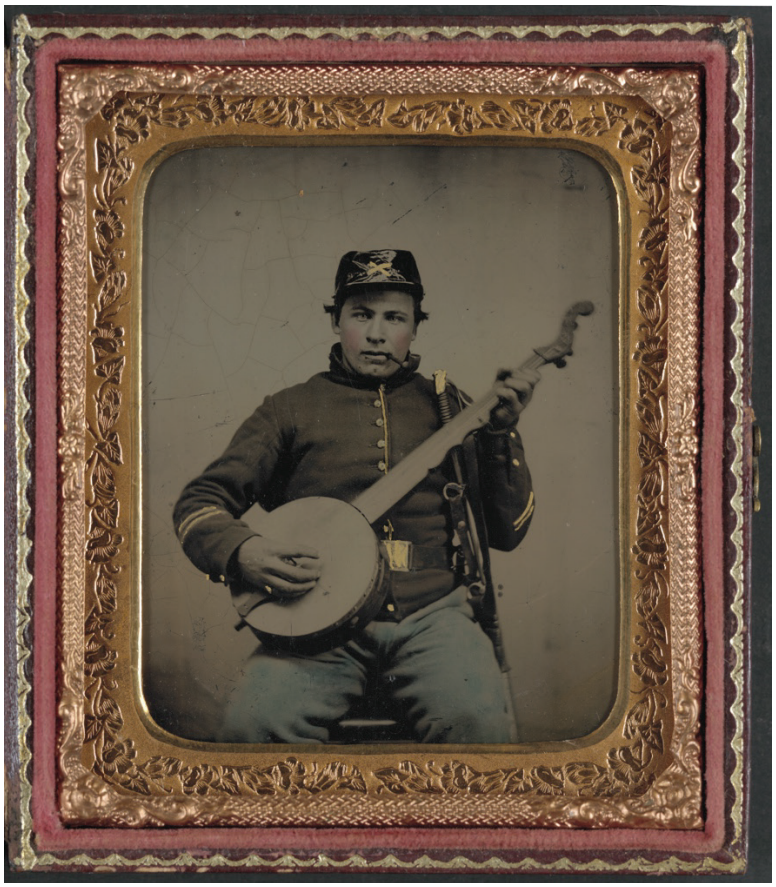

Figure 6. Unidentified soldier in Union cavalry, tintype, hand-colored, 1861-65.

The soldier wears his saber on his right side so that, in the tintype, it appears appropriately positioned on the left. However, as one can observe, the sword is not the only object the man is grasping upside-down.

BANJOS, TRUMPETS, AND DRUMS

The downward-facing tuning peg of the fifth string unequivocally confirms that the pose is a workaround of a lateral inversion (fig. 6). Photographs acquired through a direct positive procedure are full of banjo players awkwardly holding the banjo upside-down. When combined with the buttons, it provides indisputable proof of tampering. The tintype below (fig. 7), which was recently auctioned at Sotheby's for $3,000, is but one of many other examples. Hopefully,

the buyer is aware that the photographer, with the complicity of the two musicians, falsified reality.[45]

Figure 7. Banjo and Fiddler Players- tintype, hand-colored, 1860s-70s.

Uncovering the artifice when the sitters are holding banjos, fiddles or guitars is relatively simple. However, even symmetrical military drums can betray posing as it was customary for young Civil War drummers to stand in front of the camera with their drumsticks inverted to appear correct to the viewer, as in Figure 8.[46]

[45] https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/photographs-n09020/lot.77.html. Around the same time a tintype *carte de visite* depicting four banjo players was sold on eBay, all four of the players "left-handed."

[46] https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.39546/

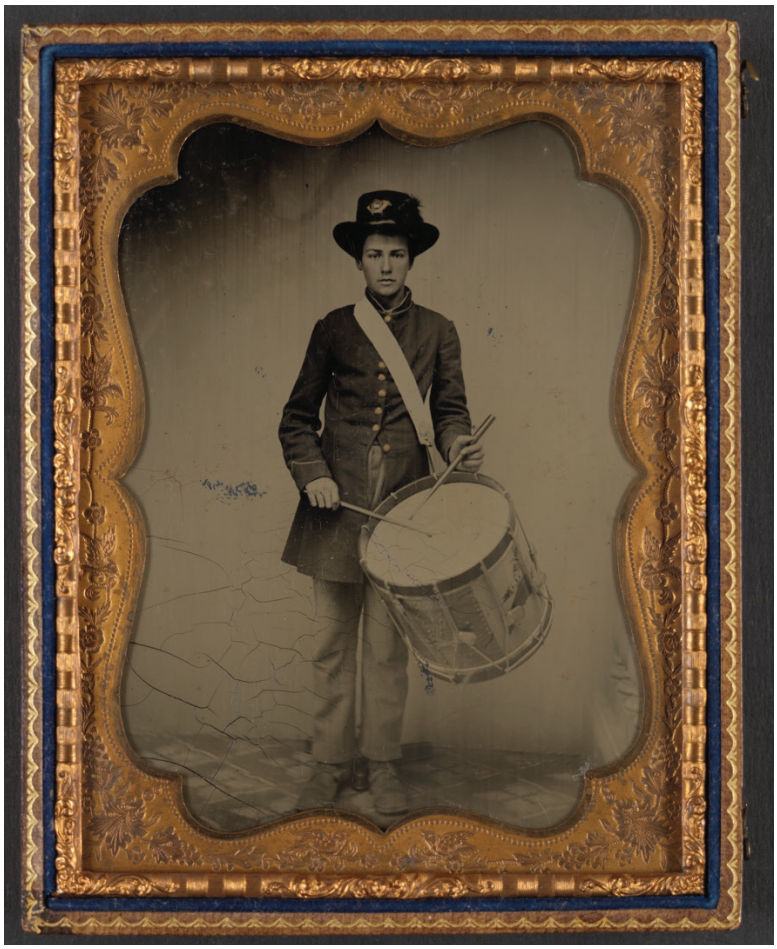

Figure 8. Unidentified young drummer in Union- tintype, 1861-65.

The situation becomes more intricate with woodwinds since the majority of them lack symmetry. This is particularly true for instruments such as the valve trumpet, or the valve trombone (and, of course, the slide trombone). However, when musicians had a cylinder trumpet (or a keyed one), they could enact the farse with a high chance of remaining undetected. This is precisely what occurred in the tintype shown in Figure 9.[47]

[47] https://store.thanatos.net/products/rare-1860s-tintype-photo-group-of-musicians-at-table-playing-music-instruments

Figure 9. Unidentified musicians, tintype, 1860s.

To counteract the lateral inversion of the image, both the trumpeter wearing the top hat and the other one opposite him on the table rotated their trumpets 180 degrees and placed their left hand on the bottom of the cylinder, creating the illusion of correctly turned valves. However, one detail gives it all away: the lead pipe underneath the bell-barrel, which is opposite of how these models of trumpet work.[48] The clarinetist in the photo also goes to great lengths to conceal the flaws of direct positive shooting: although the instrument is clearly inverted, the hand position appears to be correct. This effect was achieved because the musician placed his right hand on the lower part of the instrument. Nevertheless, a photographic examination indicates that wind players did not always engage in this simulation of hand inversion. In the same tintype, we have a tuba player who did not bother to adopt any deception (and as a result, appears reversed).

[48] This was such a well-thought-out trick that it fooled Francesco Tamiati, first trumpet of the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, and Marco Bellini, first trumpet of the Teatro Lirico in Trieste. Both musicians failed to notice the sideways tilt of the instrument. Personal Emails, December 2022.

Analysis of the main players of this musical scene highlights a prevalent trend: clients were not obliged to follow the orders of a "General" —the photographer—but had the liberty to decide to be part of a charade, an enactment that enabled them to overcome the limitations of 19th century photography. If we were to broaden this essay beyond the realm of lateral inversion issues, we would discover that photographers and clients alike were willing to make various adjustments to conform as closely as possible to reality. One example above all: in the first few decades of photography, cameras detected only ultraviolet light, resulting in an extreme sensitivity to blue, and near-blindness to yellow or red. In other words, a subject dressed in a formal blue suit would have appeared garbed in a cheerful light gray tending toward white, while a red spring dress would have come out looking like a sorrowful black garment. As a result, photographers drafted manuals on how to coordinate clothing colors.[49] Kubik asserts that such techniques, "show [a] lack of empathy. Which musician, if told by a photographer to reverse his guitar would do so willingly, or even be able to do so?"[50] But his point of view is out of focus. In fact, it was empathy that enabled photographers to instruct military personnel on the placement of their accessories or to suggest alternative clothing options to their clients. Similarly, a guitarist could be asked to reverse their instrument in order to correct for lateral inversion.

Now we return to Bolden's photo. It is consistent with this six-decades-long tradition. The guitar and double bass faked being left-handed; Warner holds his instrument without reversing it, as clarinetists would occasionally do; while Bolden and Cornish are not able to contribute to the successful staging of the trick. This tradition was still alive in the 20th century, particularly in the United States, even though it was in its twilight years. Floyd Rinhart, Marion Rinhart, and Robert Wagner, authors of *The American Tintype*, show that some tintypists were still in business in the mid-twentieth century. Robert Nix, expert in antique photography, claims to have met a tintypist on a Greyhound bus in 1952 selling three portraits for 50 cents.[51] The greyhound bus photographer was most likely the very last of his kind, a rare exception. However, his younger colleague who took Bolden's photo half a century earlier, was not. To further illustrate this

[49] A rather detailed handbook about clothing was published in Boston in 1840 by Françoys Gouraud; Gernsheim, *The History of Photography,* 122-23.
[50] Kubik, "The Mystery of the Buddy Bolden Photograph," 7.
[51] Floyd Rinhart, Marion Rinhart and Robert Wagner, *The American Tintype* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 110. To grasp the importance of tintypes on American culture. See also Steven Kasher, *America and the Tintype* (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl, 2008).

point, let us look at the tintype of a young Jimmy Palao, which the late scholar Lawrence Gushee has dated around 1900.[52]

TINTYPES AND POCKET OBJECTS

Several other clues indicate to us that the legendary photo of Bolden is a tintype. Among these is the fact that Willie Warner appears so tremendously out of focus. This is not a focus problem, as it has been assumed, but an exposure time problem. The tintype needed 4-5 seconds to capture the pose and in that time frame (which photographically speaking is very long) it was easy for someone to fail to stand perfectly still, resulting in a blur. On the other hand, the poor quality of the photo cannot be solely attributed to the photographic process itself. Tintypes were one-of-a-kind objects, and the only way to reproduce them was by photographing them, which often resulted in a loss of detail and definition. Further examination of the negative can reveal specific details about this situation. The photograph that Ramsey took of the image provided by Bella Cornish, which is currently stored at the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University, is, in fact, a reproduction of a reproduction.[53] In other words, contrary to previous beliefs, the wife of the trombonist already had a photographed copy of the image, rather than the original. The analysis of the negative confirms this (fig.10).

[52] Lawrence Gushee, *Pioneers of Jazz: The Story of the Creole Band* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 30.

[53] Bella Cornish's photo, which was for a long time kept by Sidney Bechet's brother Leonard, has been lost.

Figure 10. Ramsey negative- late-1930s.

Notice the wavy line of the tintype (point 1), the line of Bella Cornish's photo (point 2), and the line of Ramsey's photo (point 3).[54] As the photo was copied again and again, details gradually disappeared.

Finally, let us dive into an analysis that will help us identify the two mysterious objects that have puzzled researchers for years: the semicircle in front of Frank Lewis's feet and the one in the upper left corner of the negative. According to Samuel Charters, the object at the bottom of the photo resembles a saxhorn.[55] Kubik proposed that it might be "perhaps a container of some sort or a pail."[56] Justin Winston and Clive Wilson think it might be the "bell of a mellophone."[57] Under a post by David Sager, someone speculates that it could be "the top rim

[54] I owe much observations on the negative to Gabriele Chiesa.
[55] Ashforth, "The Buddy Bolden Photo" One More Time," 171-72.
[56] Kubik, "The Mystery of the Buddy Bolden Photograph," 6.
[57] Winston and Wilson, "The Bolden Photograph: A Photographic Examination," 21.

of a phonograph."[58] Vic Hobson lists several possibilities, such as "Ghostly accordions, phantom trombones, coded inscriptions, unexplained scratches," concluding that "there should be enough there to keep us all going for the next seventy years if the original copy negative can be found – happy hunting!"[59]

We will not wait seventy years to offer a solution to this mystery. The enigmatic objects (including the semicircle above Warner's head, which has been unfairly overlooked) are not musical instrument bells or pails, but rather much smaller objects. They are so small that, during my previous lecture on Bolden's photo, I was able to bring several to show the audience by slipping them all into the pocket of my jacket. The objects in question are actually push pins, and they are not a part of the scene in the photo, but rather outside of it. As previously noted, the only way to obtain a copy of a tintype was to photograph it. It is logical to assume that this was accomplished by placing the specimen on a table and positioning the camera above it, as Ramsey did when he photographed Bella Cornish's copy in the late 1930s. (In Figure 10, one can clearly see the blanks of a wooden table on the far-right side of the image). But during the 19th century, and even during the time of Bolden's photo, cameras were unwieldy and difficult to move. Therefore, another solution was employed: leaning the tintype against a wall and securing it with pins or clips. This method sometimes resulted in a compromised outline, which would then be cut out. An example of this can be seen in Figure 11, and Bolden's photo, or rather the copy of a Bolden tintype made in the early 20th century (perhaps the very copy owned by Bella Cornish), is another example.

[58] This hypothesis is by Tom Henshaw and is also supported by David Kunian, Curator of The New Orleans Jazz Museum. https://blogs.loc.gov/now-see-hear/2014/11/the-elusive-buddy-bolden/

[59] Hobson, "Regarding That Buddy Bolden Photograph…," 38.

Figure 11. Portrait of two little girls, daguerreotype copy of a daguerreotype, 1980s.

THE SEATED LEADER

There are still some controversial points about the photograph in question. Two additional inquiries have arisen. What is the size of the clarinet that Frank Lewis is holding against his leg, and who is leading the ensemble? Some scholars suggest that these two questions may be interconnected. As for the size of the clarinet, there is some consensus among scholars. Alden Ashforth has noted that the clarinet played by the seated musician appears to be shorter and in the key of C, while the standing clarinetist is playing a Bb clarinet.[60]

I sought input from a colleague, Lucio Magistrelli, a clarinet professor at Milan's Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory, owner of one of Europe's widest clarinet

[60] Ashforth, "The Buddy Bolden Photo" One More Time," 11-67.

collections (over 260 pieces!). However, Magistrelli's conclusion was not based on the length of the instrument. Instead, he considered two other factors, with the second appearing to be conclusive. Specifically, the barrel of Lewis's clarinet (seated) is shorter than Warner's, but more importantly, the distance between the metal ring of the bell and the F-key that is played with the little finger on the right hand is noticeably shorter (see Figure 10, items 4a and 4b).[61]

Karl Gert Zur Heide's article in *New Orleans Magazine* (1994) also supported the conclusion that the clarinet in question was in C. In addition, Zur Heide identified the seated clarinetist as the band leader based on the assumption that the musician played that particular instrument. However, according to the testimony of Bunk Johnson, a New Orleans jazz musician, the real leader was violinist Joseph "Dada" Brooks, who was not present in the photo. The only instrument in the orchestra that could have read the violin parts without difficulty was the C clarinet. Many years ago, Charlie Elgar, a New Orleans violinist, was asked for his opinion and he thought it was well-founded. Additionally, clarinetist Lawrence Duhé claimed that fellow musician Big Eye Louis Nelson, who played the C clarinet in some New Orleans orchestras, would sometimes play the violin lead.[62] This hypothesis, which is not merely speculative, is further supported by another piece of evidence: the photograph itself. Despite the misleading orientation of the photograph and its out-of-focus quality, which makes it difficult to discern details, it is nevertheless clear on one key point. One member of the group is standing while another is seated.

Photography has always placed great emphasis on this formal element. From the earliest days of photography, a conventional behavior was established that lasted until the early decades of the twentieth century: whether the subjects posed standing or sitting was of great importance in photographic portraiture. The famous photograph of a young Louis Armstrong standing next to a seated King Oliver might lead one to believe that this pose only reflects a criterion of generational respect, with the 20-year-old Armstrong yielding the chair to his older mentor who was twice his age. A comparable photograph is that of Harry Houdini, standing next to the seated magician Harry Kellar, despite a notable age gap of over twenty years between the two. However, the famous photograph of Memphis Minnie and Kansas Joe McCoy raises a question. Although Minnie was seven years older than McCoy, it is the latter who is seated. This observation indicates that the age discrepancy is not the only factor a play. It appears that interpersonal, social, and gendered hierarchies of the time also influenced the

[61] Personal emails and meeting, January 2023.
[62] Karl Gert zur Heide, "Who Was the Leader of the Buddy Bolden Orchestra," *New Orleans Magazine* 5, no. 2 (December 1994), 6-10.

seating arrangement, with the figure possessing the higher status most likely to secure the seated position. This trend becomes a strict rule in portraits of married and other male-female couples. Such depictions invariably reproduce patriarchal standards, portraying the man in a seated position. It is by this logic that, although Memphis Minnie was more famous than Kansas Joe McCoy, in the portrait in question the chair belonged to the latter, suggesting that marital status trumped popularity in such contexts. However, this convention transcends the bounds of the male-dominated society and, outside of the "couple-context," serves as a tool to signify the differing status of individuals. In essence, Oliver is seated not only as a sign of respect but also as a testament to his position as the preeminent trumpet "King" of New Orleans. Similarly, Kellar is seated because he is the "Dean of American Magicians," a reputation that is acknowledged by Houdini and others. In 1918, Freddie Keppard and Sidney Bechet were photographed together, both wearing elegant straw hats. Keppard was seven years old but, more important, he as the more influential musician of the two at that moment. Consequently, "King" Keppard was seated in the photograph.[63]

As a demonstration, we can use this perspective to analyze several photographs of early jazz. The shots of the John Robichaux Orchestra (1896), Superior Orchestra (1910), Peerless Orchestra (1911), New Orleans Creole Orchestra (1914), and The Original Tuxedo Orchestra (1924) portray musical groups in which musicians are arranged partly standing and partly seated: the leaders always belong to the second group.[64] Even clearer examples are those where there is only one musician seated. In the majority of the cases, the person seated is the leader. The photo of the Reliance Brass Band (1910) is a significant example. In the image there are two chairs but the second hosts a solitary snare drum so that the only seated musician is the bandleader Jack Laine (fig. 12).[65]

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[63] The photo is in Gushee, *Pioneers of Jazz,* 170. According to Gushee, it was taken in the summer of 1918. In that period Keppard was already someone who could turn down recording deals, while Bechet was still a rising star.

[64] Rose and Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album,* 1967 edition, 180, 135, 145, 162, 132. This figurative tendency is an additional clue, added to the of historical/musicological-derived ones, supporting the thesis that Buddy Bolden was, all things considered, not the bandleader. In fact, we have no photos showing the leader standing in the second row. For example, the shot of the Superior Orchestra shows Bunk Johnson standing in the second row, but he is not the leader of the group, Peter Bocage is, and he is sitting in the front. The Original Tuxedo Orchestra shows trumpeter Kid Shots Madison standing in the second row, but the orchestra leader is the other trumpeter, Oscar Celestin, sitting in the front row.

[65] Ibid, 185.

Figure 12. The Reliance Band (1910).

Further confirmation comes from photos of the Johnny DeDroit Orchestra (circa 1921), Happy Schilling's Orchestra (1924), or the Jelly Roll Morton Red Hot Peppers, images in which the chair belongs to the respective leaders Johnny DeDroit, Happy Schilling and Jelly Roll Morton.[66]

[66] Ibid, 171, 153, 143. These three photos fit into a figurative stereotype rather recurrent in early jazz and used until the first half of the thirties: The leader is seated in the center and the gaze of all standing musicians are directed towards him. This is a cliché that has also arrived in Europe as the photo of Filippo Renna's orchestra (Milan, Italy, 1933) demonstrates. The shot of Renna is contained in the photographic volume, Adriano Mazzoletti, *L'Italia del jazz* (*The Italy of Jazz* (Rome: Stefano Mastruzzi Editore, 2011), 115.

Figure 13. Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers

Returning to the matter at hand, it becomes evident that Mumford is seated in the photo in order to effectively handle his instrument, as this position is typical for guitarists in New Orleans jazz bands. It is worth noting that any of the other band members, with the exception of the double bass player, could have taken the seat beside him. However, as we have previously discussed, conventions in photographic language have dictated that the more prominent figure in a photograph would be given the seated position. While Frank Lewis's seated position cannot definitively prove his status as the leader of the group, it does provide yet another piece of evidence.[67] The stratification of clues does not

[67] It is not a proof because these were photographic trends and not absolute rules. In fact, there are photos in which the most important character is not seated, but this occurs very sporadically. In the jazz field, and in Bolden's case in particular, the photo of the Eagle Band (1915) is not a counterexample. The line-up led by trombonist Frankie Duson, Willie Warner's replacement in the formation with Bolden, was not shot as a pose but immortalizing them as they were arranged for an outdoor performance (with Duson standing). The photographic pose and the concert

necessarily lead to any certain proof but it helps to keeps scholars away from the treacherous swamps of conjecture.

THE SOLUTION TO THE RIDDLE, OR, THE COMMA RETURNING TO ITS PROPER PLACE

After extensive analysis, including the identification of the mysterious objects and the bandleader, we are here for the final question: What is the correct orientation of Bolden's picture? Despite this complex and extensive discussion, a paradoxical conclusion has been reached. It turns out that the authors of *Jazzmen* who initially published the photo in 1939 were correct in their orientation of the picture, and it should be displayed in the same manner. This includes using the "left-handed" inversion stratagem to correct the orientation of the stringed instruments, as well as reversing other visually less disruptive elements. In addition, to ensure proper composition and clarity, the photo should be cropped at the edges to remove extraneous objects in the scene, such as push pins.[68]

As Oscar Wilde once said, "I spent all morning taking out a comma and all afternoon putting it back in again." It was worse for us. Putting the comma back took us eighty years.

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setting are often two different arrangements. On the occasion of the concert of the Eagle Band see Vernhettes and Lindström, *Jazz Puzzles: Volume I,* 201.

[68] It is possible that my discovery of the voluntary reversing of instruments could have a bearing on organological studies conducted on old photographs. Relative to our field the same observations made in these pages could be, for example, of interest to scholars concerned with pre-jazz pictures. Thus, we have not simply provided the solution to the Bolden riddle but could have equipped musicologists with a methodology that could be used to analyze similar cases.

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