

Millersville University

The Power of Photojournalism: How an Image Can Inform and Affect Our Perception of Events

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ABSTRACT

Photojournalism as a practice and as an institution has shaped the landscape of media forever, introducing visual elements to stories and events being reported on, and this is an irreplaceable facet of modern media worldwide. Photographs can have a massive impact on one's perception of events, and visuals can forever be embedded in our minds in relation to certain times in modern history based on the photo coverage. The work that photojournalists contribute to the world, and the risks they oftentimes take to capture historical, news-worthy events often goes unappreciated and under-recognized, and in exploring photojournalism as a profession and how important the work of photojournalists is, the hope is to show how these crucial members of our media institutions are, and why they should not be taken for granted. Through exploring sources and literature on photojournalism and visual literacy, the synthesis of all these ideas led to this thesis exploring four main areas: photojournalism in the current era of social media, photojournalism's connection to tragedy, how photojournalism can transcend language barriers, and notable photojournalists who made significant contributions to the profession. In each of these dedicated topics, the goal is to reflect on these ideas, state examples relating to every main idea, cite sources that relate to the context of the examples and arguments being made, and develop an overall conclusion of the in-depth look into photojournalism as a key component of our communication-based society and world. There will be added emphasis on the argument of photojournalism having a noteworthy impact on our perception of events, informing them equally as affecting them, as well as a strong case for the urgent need for developing a strong visual literacy to be an informed consumer of media, especially in the modern era where edited, altered, and fake images proliferate widely.

Keywords: photojournalism, culture, impact, tragedy, language, visual literacy, social media, artificial intelligence (AI)

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PART ONE: Photojournalism in the Age of Social Media

From the very start of newspapers including photographs from employed journalists to the modern era of contemporary social media where everyone on these platforms has the ability to capture, record, and share photos/videos to a vast worldwide audience, photojournalism has undeniably evolved over time. The timeline of photos being included by printing presses to now posting a photo or video on Instagram or a similar platform is a long-ranging one, with the former dominating for a majority of the time until TV news came along, as well as social media eventually. While social media has only been popular for a little under two decades now, it has rapidly revolutionized communication, creating instantaneous lines of connect between a user and the entire Internet and world, allowing for information to proliferate much faster. This has its pros and cons, but its impact on photojournalism as a whole cannot be understated. Additionally, in the current social media landscape where images and videos can be heavily edited and altered to portray a false reality, there is no better time to stress the urgency of a global conversation around visual literacy and developing this crucial skill in the face of AI and other tools used to manipulate audiences of this altered content.

History of Photographs and Photojournalism in Print Media

While photography as a process has a history dating all the way back to the early 1800s, it took a couple decades before printing presses and publishers had the ability to incorporate these photographs into their work. The first ever photograph to be included in print news occurred in a French weekly periodical titled *L'Illustration*, including a photo of Parisian streets

being barricaded due to a worker's strike taking place on July 1st, 1848.¹ The United States took longer in implementing photography into printed media, with the first photo appearing in March 1880 in the New York's *Daily Graphic*, depicting a shantytown in New York.² For the decades that followed, photographs were included in a majority of all printed materials, ramping up in amount of photos and frequency over time with improved technologies and capabilities. This inclusion of a visual element and side to the story allowed news to be accessed by the public in a whole new way, showing them a snapshot of the exact story or event they are reading about.



Figure 1.1: The very first image ever published in a print newspaper was the above photograph, showing a Paris street blocked off during a worker's strike for their rights in June of 1848 in a French weekly periodical (*L'Illustration*)

Adding photography to print publications such as newspapers had an undeniable impact on how information is consumed in our society, and influenced what sticks out to the reader in digesting the news provided in the paper. As Jay Cope and other students at the University of

¹ Piper, Grant. (2021, July). "The first photograph ever used in news," *Medium*, <https://medium.com/exploring-history/the-first-photograph-ever-used-in-news-e87fa3f9eebf>

² Ibid.

Oklahoma note in their study on the impact of images in print media, “In a news story, the photograph serves to draw attention to a big story, further illustrate statements made in the story, and give the readers’ more details about the information presented.”³ Notably, on the front cover of a newspaper or magazine, the first item that often attracts our attention as the audience are the visual components, or images, displayed on the print, then either enticing or repelling us based on our personal interests. Cope and others go on to note that “By nature the visual medium demands receiver attention,” and that “The news photograph connects the reader a story in a way that text alone cannot,” citing examples such as wartime, showing pictures and visual media captured on the frontlines, involving the audience in the horrific action even if they were anti-war.⁴ News publications at times will make promoting negative events such as war through their imagery and shocking, alluring depictions of the conflict their main goal, doing their best to sway public opinion on matters such as involvements in wars so long as those promoting this violence benefitted from the war financially or in some other manner.⁵

The inclusion of photography in journalism certainly had its benefits in adding more to the story presented, showing a visual corresponding to the context of the text, but this technological advance had its detractors as well. Walter Benjamin in his work explores art in the age of mechanical reproduction, and overall argues that in the ability to produce images and art rapidly and at a widespread pace, they lose some of their inherit value, stating “Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art,” eliciting less of a reaction in

³ Cope, J. & other university writers. (n.d.). “Image impact in print media: A study of how pictures influence news consumers,” *University of Oklahoma*, <https://www.ou.edu/deptcomm/dodjcc/groups/05B/paper.pdf>, (p. 7)

⁴ Ibid., (p. 8-9)

⁵ Ibid., (p. 7)

seeing a news photo for example than a singular Picasso painting in a museum for instance.⁶ In the book *Image Brokers: Visualizing World News in the Age of Digital Circulation*, Zeynep Gürsel notes that “there was much resistance to photography on the part of many journalists,” going on to state that those who were opposed felt “threatened by this alternative language [and] argued that pictures would encroach upon the written word, the source of journalistic dignity.”⁷ Writers for publications worried that the enticing and aesthetic nature of photography would not add to, but rather take away from, the original text of the story, as readers and especially browsers of the news would most likely see the image, read the headline, and move on without properly digesting the corresponding story. This argument certainly has validity to it, as a 2018 study by the American Press Institute found that there is a disconnect between how Americans describe their news habits versus how journalists predict the average consumers’ habits. The American Press Institute notes that “Journalists view the public as more passive news consumers who focus on opinion and read less in-depth,” and 37% of Americans surveyed state they bump into news or find out news without actively seeking it, but journalists estimate this is more likely near 72% in reality.⁸ The study also states that 4 in 10 people claim they read the headlines daily, but this indicates that they most likely see a headline and a corresponding photo, but do not dive deeper into the story itself.⁹ The findings of this study most certainly support the claims and fears of journalists who were apprehensive to the inclusion of photography in news.

⁶ Benjamin, Walter. (1935/translated in 1969). “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.” *Schocken Books (NY)*, retrieved from Dr. Spicer (p. 14)

⁷ Gürsel, Zeynep Devrim. (2016). *Image brokers: Visualizing world news in the age of digital circulation*. University of California Press (Oakland, CA), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=dc7c375e-18c8-3558-b055-6c73295f1497>, (p. 51)

⁸ The Media Insight Project. (2018, June). “How Americans describe their news consumption behaviors,” *American Press Institute*, <https://americanpressinstitute.org/americans-news-consumption-2/>

⁹ Ibid.

Social Media's Effects on and Opportunities for Photojournalism

Social media has truly shifted the hands of photojournalism from the big publications and notable photographers employed by these magazines, networks, and media companies, directly to the hands of the people. In the age of the smartphone and apps such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter/X, the ability to take a picture or video, no matter where you are in the world, and to upload it almost instantaneously to the Internet for people around the world to see, has been nothing short of a reality for many years now. This dramatic change in how pictures and videos are distributed and how they proliferate through audiences, as well as who has access to tools conducive to capturing and sharing photos that are newsworthy (being much more accessible today), has been a main driver in the era and renaissance of citizen journalism, or more specifically citizen photojournalism. In article discussing citizen journalism's relationship to social media, Kenneth Oyeniyi notes how technology has rapidly advanced, and how with the capabilities of technology's convenience today, "we can now type away our stories, record in real time our experiences, and...distribute them online without much hassle," also noting a 2021 study finding that 34% of news consumers under the age of 35 used social media for news.¹⁰ Oyeniyi also cites numerous positives to citizen journalism through social media, in that these platforms allow for diverse perspectives to report on a story, is critical during crisis scenarios and situations, and allows for communication in the reporting to be more relatable to the viewer of the message.¹¹ While some photojournalists are opposed to the uprise of citizen photojournalism, fearing their profession may be at stake with "resource-poor news organizations for which they

¹⁰ Oyeniyi, Kenneth. (2024, May). "Citizen journalism: How the internet is decentralizing information control," *Paradigm Initiative News*, <https://paradigmhq.org/citizen-journalism-how-the-internet-is-decentralising-information-control/>

¹¹ Ibid.

work [for] soliciting and publishing...citizen-shot news images,”¹², the ability for citizens to capture photos and videos and share them online in a journalistic way, spreading awareness of events and reporting on important information, can be absolutely invaluable to the general public and news consumers worldwide.



Figure 1.2: Still frame from viral social media video taken by Darnella Frazier, showing Derek Chauvin tragically and horribly kill George Floyd with excessive force in broad daylight (*NDTV*)

Take the case of George Floyd for example. In the summer of 2020, a man named George Floyd was tragically killed by a police officer, Derek Chauvin, and this brutal murder sparked just outrage amongst the United States and led to numerous Black Lives Matter protests in response. It is important to consider though that without the power of citizen journalism and social media platforms for photos and videos to proliferate, the killing of George Floyd may have been just another tragic statistic that inspired no grand call to action. Because this was recorded by a bystander named Darnella Frazier on her cellular phone and was able to be seen across the

¹² Mortensen, T. B. & Keshelashvili, A. (2013, September). "If everyone with a camera can do this, then what? Professional photojournalists' sense of professional threat in the face of citizen journalism," *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15551393.2013.820587>

country and worldwide. As Fauziyya Tukur for the World Press Institute writes, the killing of George Floyd “highlighted the importance of eyewitness video footage in reporting on police violence,” and notes that the video “was instrumental in bringing attention to the incident and helped galvanize public outrage.”¹³ Tukur also goes on to state how the murder of George Floyd served as an important moment for journalists, noting how it showed the need for journalists to accurately report these stories, conveying all relevant details, and that they had a responsibility to be correct in reporting and to understand the historical and social factors that play in to events of racial injustice such as these.¹⁴ The abundance of videos and photos of George Floyd’s death out in the open spread like wildfire online, serving as a call-to-action against racism and racial discrimination in the United States, galvanizing support for the Black Lives Matter protests that took place in the Summer of 2020.



Figure 1.3: Photo taken by Getty Images photojournalist Stephanie Keith, showing a demonstration of the many Black Lives Matter protests that sparked after the killing of George Floyd, who is depicted in signage at the protest (*Getty Images*)

¹³ Tukur, Fauziyya. (2023, March). “How George Floyd’s murder impacted journalism in the United States,” *World Press Institute (WPI)*, <https://worldpressinstitute.org/how-george-floyds-murder-impacted-journalism-in-the-united-states/>

¹⁴ Ibid.

The just outrage and reaction from this police killing, with Floyd being far from a stand-alone example of such brutalities among certain police officers targeting minorities, led to activism and protests that got a clear message across: the lives of black people in the United States were just as valuable as any other races' lives, and should be treated as such. Social media campaigns and on-the-streets movements all sparked from this killing, but if George Floyd did not have photo and video evidence of being killed, this story may have been swept under the rug or been another statistic of many, unfortunately. Luckily, Frazier was close by with a cellular device and was able to record the entire, awful killing of Floyd, leading to protests, action, and conversation about protecting the rights of black Americans spreading all across the country, and the eventual and just conviction of Derek Chauvin. Thus, the power citizens now wield in the ability to capture tragic events and injustices such as these on their smartphones, which most people carry with them at all times, proves how important citizen photojournalism can be in getting an urgent message across to others via channels and platforms on social media.

Pros and Cons of Photojournalism Through Social Media Platforms

Social media can certainly be a tool used for lots of good in the world, helping those in times of need and getting the word out about tragic events, but can also be used with malice and be quite harmful in intentional spreading of misinformation and hate speech. One benefit of social media platforms in the modern era is that they have the capability to share photos and videos from anywhere in the world, allowing for national emergencies to be broadcast by citizens impacted by them, as well as official messaging from the government and non-profit organizations providing aid. A perfect example of social media being used as a tool for spreading information and news about a devastating event was seen in the tragic Haiti earthquake in 2010. Mercedes Bunz, a writer for The Guardian, notes how many official communication lines were

down following this horrific natural disaster, but “Social media partly made up for the lack of information from the affected area on what had happened and what was most needed,” with local citizens and residents of the area posting to Twitter (at the time) to show the destruction of their homes, and what resources and assistance were urgent.¹⁵ Bunz goes on to note how CNN, a major news platform, was likewise using social media during the Haiti earthquake to fill in the missing gaps in their information and to enrich their work, even with seven reporters and journalists on the ground in Haiti at the time.¹⁶ Megan Ondrizek also notes that “Social media – and Twitter specifically – became a central tool in the fundraising efforts that raised millions of dollars for the country,” showing how social media and the citizens using photos and videos to report on the disaster in Haiti to spread awareness allowed for \$8 million of donated aid to help those affected by the earthquake.¹⁷ Natural disasters such as these prove how social media can be an excellent tool for photojournalism, professional and citizen alike, to report and spread awareness of the event for the world to see and for support to come in more urgently. But social media is also a great tool to be used for malice and manipulation in the wrong hands, so there are cons that exist to photojournalism on social media.

¹⁵ Bunz, Mercedes. (2010, January). “In Haiti earthquake coverage, social media gives victim a voice,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/pda/2010/jan/14/socialnetworking-haiti>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ondrizek, Megan. (2015). “The role of (social) media,” *University of Miami*, <http://ucomm.miami.edu/archive/communications/haiti/role-of-social-media.html>



Figure 1.4: Twitter image upload from Haitian users impacted by the 2010 Haiti Earthquake, showing the power of digital citizen photojournalism, capturing the terrible conditions and having a platform to ask for help and spread awareness (*Twitter, Getty Images*)

As mentioned earlier, some photojournalists oppose the uprise in citizen journalism, with some seeing it as a very threat to the institution of photojournalism and news reporting altogether. Stuart Allan notes how severe the contrast of photojournalists to citizens with cameras were in the UK, stating that “frequently the professional status of the photojournalist was defined in stark opposition to the ‘amateur paparazzo’ prior to the death of Princess Diana,” and notes Sonenshine’s contribution to *Newsweek* saying that the paparazzi is “ ‘a new and growing army of information-gatherers in a media age in which information-gathering has somehow gotten confused with newsgathering.’ ”¹⁸ This is a fair critique of those seeking for profit or attention in the pictures and videos they take in reporting of events, not truly covering the news but possibly attempting to clickbait or shock audiences, versus professional photojournalists who portray events without bias as best as they can, as well as reporting the truth of the news and event.

¹⁸ Lister, Martin. (2013). *The photographic image in digital culture*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group (London/NY), retrieved from Google Scholar. (p. 188)

Likewise, with the availability of tools to edit, manipulate, and completely create images and videos to portray false narratives online, social media can be a tool used to spread misinformation at a rapid pace, sometimes beating out the truth and reality. Therefore, the importance of possessing the skill of visual literacy cannot be understated in the world of today's constant news cycle, where misinformation can pass by without even recognizing it.

The Importance and Need for Visual Literacy in the Changing Landscape of Visual Media

Photographs are a very powerful tool for news stories, making photojournalism a quintessential part of news reporting in the modern era. Irwin notes in her book *Survey of Media* that “journalism is not specifically media but a way to create news shared throughout media history,” and pictures being included in this process with developed technologies changed the way news was reported forever.¹⁹ Pictures and photos are powerful in the sense that they can elicit very strong and different reactions, with Alpuim and Ehrenberg noting an example of a picture of a huge dog eliciting both joy from some people and fear from others terrified of such animals, making reactions to photographs “far from ‘universal.’”²⁰ It is also proven that humans can process an image as fast as 13 milliseconds based on an MIT 2014 study,²¹ showing that no matter how eloquent an article is for a news story, the image is what the audience will always absorb first. Michael Ranta also writes extensively on the ability of pictures to contain and create a narrative, citing “the existence of temporal and narrative aspects in pictorial representations” and many examples in art depictions in history where “pictures seem to have a relatively

¹⁹ Irwin, Stacey O. (2025). *Survey of media*. Routledge (NY), retrieved from Dr. Irwin, (p. 78)

²⁰ Alpuim, M. & Ehrenberg, K. (2023, August). “Why images are so powerful – and what matters when choosing them,” *Bonn Institute*, <https://www.bonn-institute.org/en/news/psychology-in-journalism-5>

²¹ Ibid.

straightforward narrative function.”²² While Ranta focuses mostly on drawings and art, the same can certainly be said for photographs telling a story and containing their own narratives based on how they are portrayed.

Visual literacy is a skill that is essential to being an informed consumer of news and to ensure you are not misled by photos and videos distributed through news and social media platforms. Diane Cordell defines visual literacy brilliantly, both simply in quoting that “Visual literacy is the ability to read and write images,” but goes on to add that visual literacy “refers to a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences,” allowing for better comprehension and conversation skills in the world of visual communication and media.²³ Especially in the modern world of digital news and photo-sharing, Spalter and Dam make the assertion that “One cannot understand the digital visual world without grasping the great change that computer technology has brought to image making and sharing,” with a plethora of software to tweak and manipulate images, as well as a whole new way of representing discrete and abstract ideas into visual information.²⁴ This is a very true sentiment, as without the knowledge of all the ways photos can be misrepresented and aim to get you to believe something untrue as the consumer, it is only a matter of time before someone misleads you with their work. This is especially concerning with

²² Ranta, Michael. (2011, January). “Stories and pictures (and non-pictorial objects): A narratological and cognitive psychological approach,” *ResearchGate*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298813846_Stories_in_Pictures_and_Non-Pictorial_Objects_A_Narratological_and_Cognitive_Psychological_Approach, (p. 7)

²³ Cordell, Diane M. (2016). *Using images to teach critical thinking skills: Visual literacy and digital photography*. Libraries Unlimited (CA), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=ec468ca8-8d95-3177-978c-32ed9e179c61>, (p. 2)

²⁴ Spalter, A. M. & Dam, A. (2008). “Digital visual literacy,” *Theory Into Practice*, (47(2), 93-101). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40071529>, (p. 94)

the sheer volume of images and content young people are exposed to in today's society, with Subhani citing that "In the age of social media, adolescents process hundreds of visual images every day without actively questioning the authorship, intended audience, credibility, or purpose," which is certainly alarming.²⁵ Therefore, with the influx of photo and video content proliferating online constantly, and especially with the ever-increasing threat of AI image and video creation, and how malicious the extremes of this can be, it is more pressing now than ever to develop this fundamental skill.

Photographs are often taken or published in a certain way to highlight key aspects of the image amongst the frame, and this is due to a focus on the photo's composition. Campbell and Jensen define composition as "the creative activity of placing objects within a frame" in an image, and go on to state that photographers and image editors are often "directing viewers to notice certain elements within a frame, purposefully communicating our ideas through visual language."²⁶ Szabó supports this notion in her work as well, stating that visual elements have a notable impact on text in an online reading, and can modify the meaning of the message and influence how the reader's attention is diverted during the reading, often leading them to focus on particular aspects of the story, whether positive or negative.²⁷ In general, the most professional journalists can be trusted, as at the core of the profession, in photographs published, "regardless of [their] inflection, is the implicit promise to provide an impartial record of a chosen

²⁵ Subhani, Kiran. (2015, November). "Photos as witness: Teaching visual literacy for research and social action," *The English Journal* (105, 34-40). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26359353>, (p. 35)

²⁶ Campell, R. & Jensen, J. (2014). *Media in society: A brief introduction* (Chapter on Visual Literacy specifically, Ch. 3), *Bedford/St. Martin's Publishing*, retrieved from Dr. Spicer, (p. 55)

²⁷ Szabó, Krisztina. (2016). "Digital and visual literacy: The role of visibility in contemporary online reading," *In the Beginning was the Image: The Omnipresence of Pictures: Time, Truth, Tradition* (103-112). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2t4cns.12>, (p. 107-108)

moment in time, and in a manner consistent with journalism's wider investment in ethical codes and standards."²⁸ This is generally true, but there are certain photojournalists and social media users who purposely mislead their audiences with edited photos, most notably with AI in recent years, and this is why visual literacy is such an urgent skill to possess.

With the current rise in use and capability of AI (artificial intelligence) tools to generate and create photos/images as well as videos, the need for informed media consumption and comprehension, as well as an urgency around the conversation of prioritizing visual literacy in observing and interacting with visual media and content, is now more pressing than ever. In their work *Exploring Visual Literacy Inside, Outside, and Through the Frame*, Farris and Pattenden cite actions they took in their research to develop visual literacy of their students in analyzing video content in television, acquainting them with visual techniques in this media form and giving them an overview of the codes of television and analyzing shots from TV.²⁹ This can be effective in learning the skills necessary to break down an image and understand what is being conveyed, and even in discerning if an image is edited or manipulated to mislead the audience. Other actions that one can take to inform their family and friends about visual literacy and the need for this ability in the world of social media and content manipulation is to discuss with them core components of images, give them a checklist of things to think through in analyzing photos, such as what is being conveyed and what reaction is the photo/video trying to evoke in you as the audience, and remind them to be cautious of the sources of information online. AI can be useful in a lot of cases, but it can also be absolutely harmful and destructive when used for

²⁸ Patrick, C. & Allan, S. (2013). "The camera as witness": The changing nature of photojournalism," in *Journalism: New Challenges*, CJCRC (Bournemouth), retrieved from Dr. Spicer, (p. 164)

²⁹ Farris, A. & Pattenden, F. (2020). *Exploring visual literacy inside, outside and through the frame*. Brill (MA), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=e971c87d-ad55-30bf-967a-b29713ef4a72>, (p. 180-181)

misinformation and for portraying false, even sometimes hateful, narratives that are far from reality, making events happen that never did or forcing people to say words they would never utter. Therefore, having the ability to see an image while simultaneously discerning its meaning, intent, and purpose while being able to communicate these thoughts effectively, or visual literacy in short, is an essential and fundamental skill to have as a user or consumer of any news channels and social media platforms in the modern era most notably.

PART TWO: Photojournalism and Tragedy

Tragedy is unfortunately a part of life, and occurs all too often, but in the age of photography, videography, and photojournalism, we live in an unprecedented time when emergencies and tragedies are brought to our attention from all the way around the world instantaneously via news on TV and the Internet. Witnessing horrors and gut-wrenching images from tragic events, whether from national emergencies, disasters, wars, or political insurrections and assassination attempts, the audience member is transported into the heart of the issue, seeing the reality of the situation before it can be portrayed or lied about verbally or through text. Images are undeniably powerful in evoking emotions and responses from the audience, so our ability in modernity to capture tragic events on film allows the truth to be exposed and to spread awareness so others can help as able. The impact photojournalism has had in showing both the great and harsh realities of the world shows the power in this profession being able to explore both the best and worst of humanity and the world around us, and images attached to tragedies are especially notable and often stick with the audience for their whole lives. The following are a select few examples of photos and videos attached to tragedies that produced a significant reaction around the world at the time, also showing how images are shown to the audience or portrayed can severely impact the perception of events.

The Impact Visual Evidence of Tragedy Can Have on the Viewer

Images, pictures, and videos often affect us significantly more than printed text, and this is even more notably the case in the face of tragedy. When horrible conflict, casualties, accidents, and attacks are witnessed by an audience through a visual medium, they are often much more impacted and moved by the event, engaging them and at times leading them to action. In the era

of photography and videography, countless horrors and atrocities have been documented, from wars to terrorist attacks and everything in between, allowing the world to see the truth behind disturbing and awful events and realities. The picture attached to a news story or a headline catches our eye before anything most commonly, and thus has a lot of influence on our emotions and interest in a story, especially in cases of breaking tragic news. The following are a few of many notable examples of tragedies, disasters, and horrible events that were documented extensively thanks to photojournalists and citizens near the scene, depending on the context.

September 11th Attacks: National Tragedy Seen Around the World

One of the most, if not the most, tragic days in modern American history took place on September 11th, 2001, with two planes crashing into the World Trade Center, resulting in thousands of casualties. In the present century of American history, no day has even come close to replicating the tragedy and horror our nation felt as a whole on this day, with terrorist attacks orchestrated by Osama Bin Laden serving as an awful threat to the national security of our nation. This event was catastrophic and influential, ramping up security measures at airports and allowing for the Patriot Act to be in law, allowing for breaches of privacy insofar as they can prevent future potential terrorist attacks. The shock of this event was so real, that in the first few days after the attack, Jennifer Good notes in her book on September 11th that the photographs completely took over newspapers in the days of the aftermath, but ultimately provided a “range of views represented [that was] in fact very narrow,” with only four types of photos being published, three of which were the ruins observed by witnesses, the attack being watched by observers, or images of people capturing their event on their own cameras, to ultimately avoid

“showing the scene itself” when possible.³⁰ The fourth type of image that proliferated widely was of the attack on the World Trade Center itself, with Good noting how this was the most prominent type to be published in the aftermath of 9/11, whether the picture be during or directly after the impact of the planes into the towers.³¹ It is clear how in the coverage of the attack itself through imagery, and devastating imagery of those impacted by this horrible tragedy, dominated the news cycle for quite some time after the tragedy. This was quite clearly a devastating day for Americans, especially those who had family that worked in or was associated with the World Trade Center and was injured or killed that day.



Figure 2.1: Image captured by Sean Adair during the tragic terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11th, 2021 (*Reuters*)

The sadness this carried as an event, and the heartbreak it induced all across our country, with everyone around the world being a universal eyewitness to this horrific event, it is clear that this was an instance of shared, communal trauma. Good argues in her work that this indeed was a traumatic event that we need to discuss and get past together, and cites that “some commentators

³⁰ Good, Jennifer. (2015). *Photography and September 11th: Spectacle, memory, trauma*. Routledge (NY), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=f0ee7119-4e51-3316-a81f-0795847b219f>, (p. 17)

³¹ *Ibid.*, (p. 17)

and trauma theorists...accepted [it] as self-evident that September 11th counts as a traumatic experience for the national civilian population,” which is an assertion she agrees with, as we all witnessed tragedy on such a large scale.³² Despite seeing such awful images and destruction right before our eyes in the papers and on television, the impact the visuals of this tragedy had on Americans was undeniable, as it rallied us to unite together despite our political differences in the face of horrific loss, and overall reminded the nation that we have to stick together and support each other through adversity, especially to a degree such as 9/11.

World War II Imagery, Documenting Devastation Across the Globe

Arguably the most horrific and tragic period in world history was World War II, with the death toll and casualty count in the tens of millions, with unspeakable atrocities occurring globally and catastrophic damage taking place both in destruction of entire nations as well as in disintegrating cultures and massive numbers of members in ethnic populations. The photographs at that time were devastatingly tragic, most notably in the photos and footage taken in the concentration camps once they were investigated and shut down. Without the visual image of just how extreme the tragedy of the Holocaust was, audiences around the world would not have been able to feel the weight or the severity of the issue, and why Germany needed to be stopped, or what the end result of them winning could have looked like. Other photographs taken on D-Day, Pearl Harbor, and of the atomic bombs and aftermath in Hiroshima and Nagasaki for instance, all showed the horrors and tragedies war contained from every side, painting no one party in a completely positive light, as every country contributed to the massive death toll of this World War and global conflict heavily. This was one of the most well-documented times in the

³² Ibid., (p. 49)

past century, due to the devastation and tragedy that stretched all across the world, and in the visual evidence and photographs attached to battles, camps, and attacks associated with WWII, the general public was able to be exposed to the harsh realities of the situation, seeing the pure evil and atrocities being committed in real time, raising awareness and galvanizing support to put an end to Nazi Germany's takeover of Europe at the time.



Figure 2.2: Haunting photograph capturing U.S. Senator Alben W. Barkley inspecting the horrors and atrocities in a German concentration camp at the end of the Holocaust and WWII
(*United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*)

The Hindenburg Disaster: How Visuals of a Fatal Accident Shocked Audiences

Not only tragedies in war and in terrorist attacks have made impacts in the photos that arose from these horrific events, but terrible accidents and tragedies such as the *Hindenburg* Disaster were also documented and made impacts with the images attached to the events.

Thomas Paone notes that on May 6th, 1937, “the German airship LZ 129 *Hindenburg* burst into flames while attempting to moor at Naval Air Station Lakehurst, in New Jersey,” and the historic

image of the air vessel sinking down in flames made widespread news at the time.³³ Prior to World War II, the Germans and Americans worked together after this disaster to determine the cause of the disaster and crash, with the Coast Guard and Marines guarding the crash debris, which they eventually found was the cause of a leaking gas cell, and potentially a mix of hydrogen, oxygen, and static electricity.³⁴ Due to the international nature of this accident and tragedy, the pictures and stories surrounding this shocked the entire world, and is one of the most well-known disasters in aviation's entire history. The renowned photo of the blimp engulfed in flames is an example of how tragedy can be horrifying and shocking, just as equally as they can be picturesque and eye-catching. Awareness of this event was spread globally very quickly, and the image that proliferated alongside this story of a German aircraft catching fire and crashing near the U.S. certainly made impacts in how shocking and massive the scale of this tragedy was, and this image surely stuck in audiences' minds for quite some time, with its perfect eye-catching composition juxtaposed with a tragic accident.

The Complex and Controversial Case of Donald Trump: How Images Can Produce Polar Opposites Reactions Based on Context and Image Framing

Photographs of terrible and tragic events can have adversely negative effects of the general perception of anyone involved, as well as having the opposite effect for images that paint the subject in a good light no matter the context which sway general perceptions in a positive direction. A perfect example of this double-sided phenomenon in how powerful photographs and images are in molding our perception of people and events around us can be seen in our current

³³ Paone, Thomas. (2022, May). "Dealing with the aftermath of the Hindenburg Disaster," *National Air and Space Museum (Smithsonian)*, <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/aftermath-hindenburg>

³⁴ Ibid.

President of the United States, Donald Trump. Two instances specifically where coverage of events in photos and videos worked against Trump and also in his favor were the January 6th Capital Riot and Attack in 2021, as well the assassination attempt on his life in Butler, PA in July 2024 on the campaign trail. Taking a deep dive into both of these events and the reporting, information, and literature available on these recent pivotal moments in American history, arguably for the worse in both instances, will provide a unique opportunity to see how Trump went from a convicted felon, almost thrown off all ballots by getting impeached twice, to a populist candidate that won in a landslide in the recent 2024 election.

January 6th Capitol Riot, Attack, and Attempted Insurrection (2021)

One of the worst, if not the absolute worst, days in the last 20 years in American life and politics, was January 6th, 2021. On this day, the sitting President Donald Trump, refusing to concede the election that he had rightfully lost to Democratic candidate Joe Biden, urged his supporters to riot and protest outside the Capitol which eventually led to them breaking in and trying to interrupt the process of the votes being counted and confirmed amongst Congress. Five photographers from Getty Images, including Win McNamee, Drew Angerer, Spencer Platt, Samuel Corum, and Jon Cherry were on the front lines of capturing the inside and outside of the Capitol building during the riots, before and after the building was broken into. Many other photojournalists and citizens were there, capturing the event in real time which proliferated online at the time, showing the disturbing reality of modern day politics. January 6th serves as scary example of political division in our country, and the tragedies and injustices against democracy it can result in during extreme cases. Brave photojournalists risking their safety and lives to capture this event so clearly, allowing the American public to see the horrors of this Capitol storming and the implications it had for the safety of our American institutions such as

peaceful transitions of power and the official proceedings ensuring democracy is fulfilled, no matter the result of an election and who likes it or not.



Figure 2.3: Pulitzer Prize winning photograph from Jon Cherry of Getty Images, capturing Trump supporters and the Proud Boys meeting to storm the Capitol on January 6th (*Pulitzer*)

The images and videos circulating social media at the time were shocking and terrible, showing an attempted overthrowing of democracy itself by interrupting the official proceedings for confirming the next president elect, who was Joe Biden. Seeing supporters, including far-right extremists, of the losing candidate in the 2020 election be riled up by Trump to protest at the Capitol try to disrupt the transition of power based on a democratically-elected candidate was a horrible event to watch unfold, and it serves as one of the worst days in recent American history. Due to his delay in asking supporters to stop rioting and storming the Capitol building after adding fuel to the fire for them to do so, as well as posts not denouncing but affirming his deranged supporters, Trump was kicked off of then-Twitter, and was impeached for the second

time in his first term.³⁵ January 6th was a terrifying and awful event, turning many moderates against Trump, showing him in a very negative light, condoning something so unconstitutional, illegal, and unethical. In fact, his involvement in this riot and attack on the Capitol, with Trump supporters storming and sieging the Capitol building, was almost, and arguably should have been, the last straw in Donald Trump's political life. That is, until something happened on the 2024 Campaign Trail that was tragic, but where Trump survived narrowly and was depicted showing bravery in the face of strong adversity, and even near death.

Assassination Attempt of Former President / Presidential Candidate Donald Trump (July 2024)

On July 13th, 2024, former President Donald Trump was on the Campaign Trail, seeking his second term in office, when he was speaking at a rally in Butler, PA. Not long after he started delivering his speech, Thomas Matthew Crooks took shots at Trump from a nearby rooftop, striking Trump in the ear. Had Donald Trump not turned his head to look at a chart in this moment, history could have played out much differently in American life and politics. Just as January 6th had casualties and injuries for officers and others, the shooter firing multiple shots in the attempt to kill Trump ended up killing one and critically injuring two audience members in attendance at the rally.³⁶ Many theories have circulated about the Secret Service's mishaps on that day and lack of action in time, as well as if the assassination attempt was even truly reality and if certain aspects of the shooting were designed or coordinated to make Trump look better

³⁵ Mascaro, L., Jalonick, M. C., Lemire, J., & Fram, A. (2021, January). "Trump impeached after capitol riot in historic second charge," *Associated Press (AP)*, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-impeachment-vote-capitol-siege-0a6f2a348a6e43f27d5e1dc486027860>

³⁶ Armstrong, Kathryn. (2024, July). "Who are the Trump rally shooting victims?", *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce586kxjvnyo>

going into the election, which will be discussed in-depth. Donald Trump was very lucky to have survived this event, and photojournalists being there at the rally to cover this important tragedy definitely served Trump well, and arguably led to him winning the presidency.

The images of Trump surviving this bullet that almost killed him and immediately standing up, fist in air, and screaming “Fight!” immediately spread like wildfire across the country, and only ignited the passion of his supporters and conservatives across the country. Despite his continued documented hateful rhetoric on the campaign trail towards immigrants and promoting false promises and policies that ultimately did not work as advertised/promised, this photo alone carried him to a popular vote win. Although Trump openly and candidly spoke about dismantling entire necessary departments of the government, such as the Department of Education, and threatened on over 100 occasions to legally prosecute and “punish” those who he perceived as political opponents,³⁷ Trump ended up carrying an electoral win against Harris of 312 to 226, and got 77.3 million votes as opposed to Harris’ 75.0 million votes. While there is speculation that Trump may have rigged the election, and certainly bordered on unconstitutional with bribing voters to vote for him through his surrogate Elon Musk with potential for \$1 million winnings, so long as they promised to vote Trump.³⁸ Due to voters mostly focusing on events like this that portrayed Trump as a patriot, American flag waving behind him as he raised his fist in the air in a fighting, brave spirit, they turned a blind eye to all of the negative things Trump was spewing at the time, and led him to the White House for a second time. It is arguable that

³⁷ Dreisbach, Tom. (2024, October). “Trump has made more than 100 threats to prosecute or punish perceived enemies,” *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/2024/10/21/nx-s1-5134924/trump-election-2024-kamala-harris-elizabeth-cheney-threat-civil-liberties>

³⁸ The Associated Press. (2024, November). “Elon Musk’s \$1 million-a-day voter sweepstakes can proceed, a Pennsylvania judge says,” *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/05/g-s1-32345/elon-musk-voter-sweepstakes-proceed>

this attempt on his life, and seeing Trump seem to be so courageous in the face of this near-death experience, galvanized his support and led him to an election win as a populist candidate.



Figure 2.4: Famous photo taken by Evan Vucci, depicting Trump raising his fist after an attempted assassination attempt on the 2024 Campaign Trail (*Associated Press / AP*)

This event also sparked a lot of debate about the reality of what happened that day, with some sources making false claims that were disproven by others, and some theories and doubts bringing both Trump supporters and opposers to an area of agreeance. In the following days after the assassination attempt in Butler, PA, tons of conspiracies and ideas started to flood the Internet, most of which were disproven and some that the jury is still out on. The Associated Press (AP) identified some of the main claims and theories proliferating online, calling out the popular theories and ideas that proved to be false. Some of these included the Secret Service supposedly smiling around him when he got shot at, the shooter hitting Trump in the chest as well as the ear, and possibly the most egregious, that the Secret Service was complicit and allowed this to happen.³⁹ The AP cites that a law enforcement sniper assigned to the rally made a

³⁹ Goldin, M. & Klepper, D. (2024, July). "FACT FOCUS: A look at false claims around the assassination attempt on former President Trump," *Associated Press (AP)*, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-rally-shooting-fact-focus-election-c02bcff9f4210e890c0003a1f85044f7>

claim that the Secret Service ordered him not to eliminate the suspect who was planning to kill the president, but debunks this claim, stating the law enforcement officer faked their credentials and identity and that no such order was given, but this was merely a rumor started by a 4chan message board.⁴⁰ While there have been claims like the aforementioned ones that have been debunked by good-faith journalists, there is still a lot of debate and theories surrounding this assassination attempt of Trump, with some even doubting the reality of how this event was portrayed in the media.

There are also lots of theories amongst the American public that the shooting at the rally was entirely staged, and was orchestrated to paint Donald Trump, a candidate with lots of negativity and baggage attached to his name, in a more favorable light. Marianna Spring for the *BBC* notes two polar opposite voters politically, Desirée and Camille, who despite their differences (the former is very conservative, and the latter is a Democratic loyalist) came to agree on the idea that this whole ordeal was set up, or faked.⁴¹ Desirée, who online is known by the alias “Wild Mother,” based her claim of the assassination attempt being staged by the team surrounding Donald Trump’s campaign “in order to frame his supposed enemies in the ‘Deep State.’”⁴² Camille, on the other hand, believed that “Trump’s team orchestrated this to boost his chances of winning the election,” which ended up happening, and she was influenced by social media posts just as Desirée was, albeit from a more liberal algorithm showing like-minded anti-Trump voters making claims of the attack being staged.⁴³ In analyzing these two voters’ perspectives, Spring does reach the conclusion that “There is no evidence to support either of the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Spring, Marianna. (2024, September). “How social media assassination conspiracies are uniting pro- and anti-Trump voters,” *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvglm0rjy2go>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

women's theories," and notes how social media posts without substantial evidence and promoting conspiracy theories lured voters like Desirée and Camille in, being some of "many recruited into this way of thinking – by July's assassination attempt and the social media algorithms drawing people deeper into an online world detached from reality."⁴⁴ It is hard to find substantial evidence to support any fully-grounded claims about this event, notably with so many details being kept from the public, but this looming conversation and doubt around an event so serious and which depicted severe conflict and violence, with heavy implications into the possible ulterior motives of American politicians, does not only have consequences for individuals but for societies as a whole.⁴⁵

Comparative Analysis of Both Events (How the Framing of a Subject Matters):

In both of the aforementioned events, it is clear that the photojournalists present (whether professional or citizen) and the photo/video coverage of these events in general influenced the public reaction and reception to these events massively, for better or worse. When the events or phrases "January 6th" or "Trump assassination attempt" are mentioned, most will likely think back to the images that circulated heavily around these times, both of which were tragedies in that multiple people died at each event. This supports the assertion that photos attached to events such as these will leave much more of an impact on the perception of events for the viewer versus any text or article that could be written on the event, however insightful. For January 6th, there is abundant photo evidence of this horrible attack on American democracy and democratic values, with some photojournalists even winning Pulitzer Prizes for their work in capturing this

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

riot and attack and risking their lives and safety to do so.⁴⁶ As most saw the atrocities committed at the Capitol that day, support for Trump dropped significantly, and many right-minded voters turned their backs on the candidate, with this being an uncrossable line in attempting to overturn an election's results in Trump's favor. Therefore, the abundant photo evidence surrounding this attack overshadowed any of Donald Trump's lies or attempts to lessen the severity of the situation in his wording, and gave direct view into the illegal insurrection of our Capitol.

Regarding the assassination attempt of Donald Trump, the images and video clips from the rally spread like wildfire in mid-July of 2024, swaying certain voters who were compelled by this image painting Trump in a very picturesque and positive way. Seeming brave in the face of a near-death experience affected and mobilized his supporters to carry the popular vote in the following presidential election, even after less-popular sitting president Joe Biden dropped out of the race to allow his more popular vice presidential candidate, Kamala Harris, to compete against Trump in the 2024 election. This image of him with his fist in the air became very popular amongst supporters, with many seeing an attempt on his life as only further reason to support and vote for him, and this photo was merchandised, posted, and proliferated all over the nation. This shows clearly how despite negative and terrible events such as January 6th, which lowered support for Trump and showed how egomaniacal he was in attempting to overthrow democracy and stay for a second term despite losing, he came back and won a second term with positive media coverage and images such as the one after he was shot at the rally, rallying support for the former President. In fact, due to the double-edged sword of photos and videos being able to

⁴⁶ The Pulitzer Prizes. (2022). "Win McNamee, Drew Angerer, Spencer Platt, Samuel Corum and Jon Cherry of Getty Images," *The Pulitzer Prizes*, <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/win-mcnamee-drew-angerer-spencer-platt-samuel-corum-and-jon-cherry-getty-images>

influence people's perceptions of others and events in general, this positive support around Trump after the assassination attempt led him to a second term, allowing him to pardon the very criminals who stormed the Capitol building on January 6th.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The White House. (2025, January). "Granting pardons and commutation of sentences for certain offenses relating to the events at or near the United States capitol on January 6, 2021," *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/granting-pardons-and-commutation-of-sentences-for-certain-offenses-relating-to-the-events-at-or-near-the-united-states-capitol-on-january-6-2021/>

PART THREE: Photojournalism Transcending Language

A popular, yet cliché, phrase and idiom is that “A picture is worth a thousand words,” and while this is true in how much photographs and visual media in general can convey to us, I find it more notable and profound that photos, and the works of photojournalists, transcend language barriers and show the nature of foreign events, celebratory or tragic, in images alone. No matter where you are in the world or what language you speak, when photos or videos show people in other countries either suffering or overjoyed, the message gets communicated regardless of the language barrier. Visuals go beyond the words or reporting associated with an event, and show the situation in its objective reality, allowing those around the world to get a unique glimpse into life around the world, whether amazing or tragic. By this same logic, allowing the audience to connect with experiences of others around the world regardless of their language and cultural differences promotes and builds empathy in the news consumer. In protests, wars, and tragedies alike, the photos attached to these events and eras transcend the verbal or written language corresponding to them, showing the heart of the story and issue visually for all to understand.

Protesting Visually Through Photographs: Getting the Message Across Without Words

Some of the most common examples of photographs and visual reporting through photojournalism that have transcended borders and language barriers are pictures taken in the face of a tyrannical or corrupt government being protested or carrying out atrocities against its people. These images tend to proliferate like wildfire, serving as a wake-up call to other nations of the world, and it gives us an exclusive look into the dangers that the innocent people living there are facing in their everyday lives. Select photos have become staples in famous photography, as well as crucial images of history that will forever live in textbooks, denoting

times where conflict has arisen in other countries. As Sontag writes in *On Photography*, “Photographs furnish evidence,” and “In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates,” applying especially to cases where protests occur against governments and violence often breaks out.⁴⁸ One prime example of a corrupt government being photographed, attempting to commit atrocities while being met with resistance and backlash from protestors is found in the Tiananmen Square Massacre, specifically in the ubiquitous “*Tank Man*” photograph. This historic image shows a man standing in the way of a line of army tanks approaching pro-democracy protestors in China attempting dismantling these demonstrations, exemplifying the bravery of this man to stand up for what is right and to put his life in the way of protecting others. The man in this image shows true courageousness in the face of oppression, and this visual attached to Tiananmen Square has become synonymous with the event and has made global impacts in understanding the importance of protest and the change and conversation actions of protest can bring about.



⁴⁸ Sontag, Susan. (1973). *On photography*, Rosetta Books (NY), retrieved from Dr. Spicer, (p. 3)

Figure 3.1: Historic photo of a protestor to the violence being committed against demonstrations supporting democracy in China, standing in the way of numerous army takes in a powerful action against cruelty and injustice from the government (*AP Photo, Jeff Widener*)

Addressing the Gaps and Assumptions of the Audience About News Story Photos

When an image, or a select few images, are included in a news story, it can be hard at times to remember that these are merely snapshots of a grander story and bigger picture, potentially painting the event in a certain manner based on the photojournalist's intent, the writer's intent, and the publication's intent. If this fact is forgotten, it allows publications and journalists to only portray a certain side of a story to elicit specific reactions from their audiences, often hiding or concealing the entire story. This is especially true when photos are manipulated or edited in some way, painting an even more untrue and fictitious reality that an uninformed consumer can be subjected to and convinced by. It is important to remember that the few photos attached to a news story are only glimpses of a situation or event, and are far from comprehensive for every side and angle of the story. One main area where gaps and assumptions can fill in the missing context of a story and lead to overall false presumptions and ideas is seen in publications choosing to portray and certain side of a story, selecting images that evoke the desired emotion and reaction from the audience based on the message trying to be conveyed. At times, the most important details or a crucial part of the story to be aware of is left out of the publication completely, perhaps with ulterior motives in excluding certain images to pain a certain narrative, such as Dorothea Lange's photos and the ones chosen and published by the FSA, or the Farm Security Administration.



Figure 3.2: Two separate photos taken by Dorothea Lange during her Great Depression work, showing the same subjects once when they first got to a food shelter versus them when they cleaned up and got resources, with only the first being published to portray the negative side of that tragic era in American history (*FSA*)

Certainly, in comparing Lange’s first photo of the mother and child looking more saddened and exhausted versus the second where they seem happy together and cleaned up, the U.S. Farm Security Administration, who was employing Lange for a project covering the effects of the Great Depression of everyday people, had more of a reason to go with the first. In attempting to get the audience to see the consequences of terrible economic disasters and how this can lead to sadness and desperation for families, agencies publishing photos from journalists they employ such as Lange have motivation to leave out the second photograph taken just moments later, to paint a picture a certain way for their audience. Tim Parkin states his opinion that “Both of these [photos] are a lie to some extent – the first is a lie where the subject has decided to show the photographer that they are happy and have a happy, clean baby,” with the first photo taken moments before the happy one also being deceitful, insomuch that the photo “only shows a single aspect of the subject’s life after having just arrived at a food shelter after a

long car journey.”⁴⁹ This proves to be an excellent example of how publications, and photojournalists themselves, can leave key information or pictures out of what is shown to the public, so far as it supports their goal in showing a specific side of a story. If a photo tells an opposite story of what the publisher is attempting to convey, such as the happy moment of the mother and child despite the harsh circumstances of the Great Depression, photos like these will most likely be left on the cutting room floor.

In other cases, news outlets or users on social media spreading news about an event can mislead their audiences with false or edited photos, which certainly paints a distorted picture of the news to the audience. Especially in the modern era where photos and videos can be equally manipulated to spread messages of things that never happened or words that were never said, it is crucial to call on the skill of developed visual literacy to distinguish between what is true and accurate versus what is false and is intentionally misleading. Lisa Fazio of *PBS* notes how photographs out of context being used to portray a certain message can be a huge problem, especially on social media, noting examples of old photos and videos being used to cover the story of an Iranian attack on a U.S. military base in January 2020, some being from training exercises and some users even sharing clips from a video game and attaching them to this news story fictitiously.⁵⁰ Fazio notes how organizations such as *The New York Times* and *IBM* have been working together to form the News Provenance Project, which is a “proof-of concept strategy for how images could be labeled to include more information about their age, location

⁴⁹ Parkin, Tim. (2012, February). “Truth and lies in photography,” *On Landscape*, <https://www.onlandscape.co.uk/2012/02/truth-and-lies-in-photography/>

⁵⁰ Fazio, Lisa. (2020, February). “Out-of-context photos are a powerful low-tech form of misinformation,” *PBS News*, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/out-of-context-photos-are-a-powerful-low-tech-form-of-misinformation>

where taken and original publisher,” which will make strides in preventing old or false photos being recirculated to portray false narratives of current events.⁵¹ Actions like this being taken are incredible movements to try and protect the sanctity of news and to allow audiences to trust news they see, especially online and on social media platforms, in fighting against misinformation and making it much more difficult to use false photos and videos when “reporting” on a story.

Diana Rusk for *BBC* also explored examples of misleading images on social media proliferating during world events, and other overall examples of photos that were lacking context or shown in a way that gave audiences the wrong impression of what was being depicted. One clear example was the 2015 Nepal earthquake, where Rusk cites a photo of a four-year-old brother protecting his younger two-year-old sister, taken in a remote village in Vietnam back in 2007, was used to cover the story and call for donations.⁵² Viewers who saw this image that spread virally on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (at the time) were misled, with a photo to appeal to emotion and evoke a response financially, and while the earthquake was devastating, the image was irrelevant to the context. Rusk quotes the photographer of the 2007 original Vietnam photo, Na Son Nguyen, in saying ““This is perhaps my most shared photo...but unfortunately in the wrong context.””⁵³ With the examples covered by *PBS* and *BBC*, it is safe to say that fallacious and deceptive images are more likely to be shared in the aftermath or the coverage of tragedies such as military base attacks and natural disasters. Thus, times like these makes it even more vital to be an informed news consumer so as to not be misled by false images shared online during these emergencies and catastrophes.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Rusk, Diana. (2015, December). “How the internet misled you in 2015.” *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-35051618>

⁵³ Ibid.

How Visual Media Can Break Down Cultural/Language Barriers and Promote Empathy

While images of isolated events, especially tragic ones, are not lived experiences for the audience, especially if they take place in a foreign land or culture, photographs depicting situations in other areas in the world can provide an excellent opportunity for building empathy. Photographs and videos are incredible at creating emotional responses and reactions from the audience, and when a consumer of visual content sees tragic circumstances around the world, it provides an opportunity for building empathy. The viewer of these images is certainly not in the shoes of a subject who may be in a war-torn country or a nation facing oppression across the world, but it gives them access to the perspective of others' lives, giving them a chance to reflect on what it might be like in their situation. One of the most powerful facets of visual media and storytelling is that it immerses the audience completely, allowing them to see the world in a new lens, and in showing the beauty and tragedy contained around the world, a news consumer can become much more informed and culturally aware of others. Most notably in protests and demonstrations, audiences can be made aware of injustices and awful circumstances in other nations, and can evoke a response and a call-to-action from across the world to address these issues, and even to influence how protests are done in other countries as well.

For instance, take this iconic and ubiquitous image of the monk Thích Quảng Đức protesting in a Saigon road by self-immolation in 1963, dying in this act of engulfing oneself in flames. This picture is very powerful in the sense of its shock factor, but also in its ability to spark conversation and spread awareness of the social injustices present in Saigon, which this Buddhist monk was protesting. Despite taking place all the way across the world, this had quite the impact in American culture, with this image spreading quickly and influencing facets of pop culture such as Rage Against the Machine's self-titled album as well as being referenced in Alex

Garland's 2024 film *Civil War*.⁵⁴ The image of this protest suicide made impressions in culture around the world, and it showed a brave and unrelenting spirit of standing up for what is right, even with measures as extreme as these, to bring awareness to the oppression his religious group was facing and making a tragic call-to-action for a solution. Thích Quảng Đức's self-immolation was not an isolated even either, as numerous others have replicated this exact style of protest in other nations and later on in history (even in modern times).



Figure 3.3: Renowned and influential photograph of Thích Quảng Đức engulfing himself in flames, protesting the oppression of Buddhists in South Vietnam, captured by a photojournalist (*AP Photo, Malcolm Browne*)

The photo included and discussed above is renowned not only for its wonderful contrast of peace and meditation versus violence and chaos and for the shock factor in the visual of a man committing self-immolation, but also for its ability to show the severity of a situation abroad. For viewers of this photograph who were not from South Vietnam, they may have never heard of the brutal oppression that Buddhists were facing at that time in South Vietnam's history, but the

⁵⁴ Forrest, Ben. (2024, January). "The cover uncovered: Rage Against the Machine's shocking self-titled defiance," *Far Out*, <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/rage-against-the-machine-self-titled-defiance/>

power this photo carries in how significant and alarming this protest is, as a monk kills himself in a painful, fiery manner that certainly brought attention to his cause. Therefore, actions as extreme as these, when captured through visual media and proliferated around the world, can bring awareness to a terrible situation that was being ignored or under-reported in a foreign country. This is yet another example of a foreign protest that despite differences in spoken language and cultural backgrounds, any audience member can see and understand what is occurring in the photo, and how powerful of a statement of protesting dying by fire intentionally truly is to show the sense of urgency surrounding the mistreatment of Buddhists in South Vietnam.



Figure 3.4: Powerful and emotional photo showing Palestinian woman reacting to her house being decimated in an Israeli airstrike during the Israeli-Palestinian War in 2024 (*CARE*)

Another prime example of how photo coverage of world events can create empathy for citizens of countries suffering from tragedies is seen in war photos and videos, taken both from professional war photojournalists as well as citizen bystanders with camera access. Payne and Brandon note how “during the twentieth century, the most violent and destructive in human history, that photography and war truly became congruent,” and ever since then, war and conflict

have been heavily documented in modernity.⁵⁵ In a very recent, and still on-going, war in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine, photo and video coverage has been much more abundant compared to wars of the past where tools for photography, let alone video, were much less accessible and feasible. Anisa Husain captured a powerful interview with a humanitarian worker local to Palestine during this conflict, named Razan, who describes the horrors she has encountered in helping those affected by the violence of this war. Razan tells her story of her work in a war-torn area, stating “It makes daily life feel like a daily prison,” and while she finds hope in the work she is doing with *CARE* to support those in need, seeing so many people lose their livelihoods and families in these tragic bombings and war actions makes her wonder if she will have the chance to ever go again.⁵⁶ These horror stories of being on the front lines of such devastating wars, especially when journalists include photos they have taken of citizens of Palestine and Gaza who were directly impacted by the attacks Israel made on their nation in the war, evoke empathy from around the world. Living in an age where the ability to see what happens in wars because of photojournalism, social media, and photos/videos shared on the news, there exists a double-faceted reality of being exposed to horrors like these and the traumatic events happening around the world, while also being informed and educated on these tragedies, and being prompted to action and raising awareness as much as you are able as a news consumer. It is clear in desperate and devastating times like these, especially in the middle of a brutal war, photos and videos reported as news, capturing the shock and horror of the war, can

⁵⁵ Payne, C. & Brandon, L. (2014). “Guest editor’s introduction: Photography at war,” *RACAR: revue d’art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, (39(2), 1-6). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43202463>, (p. 1)

⁵⁶ Razan & Husain, A. (2024, January). “For this humanitarian worker living in the West Bank, ‘Every minute, it feels like we are dying,’” *CARE*, <https://www.care.org/news-and-stories/for-this-humanitarian-worker-living-in-the-west-bank-every-minute-it-feels-like-we-are-dying/>

break down past language barriers and show the audience the humanity of the subjects exposed to these war conditions, evoking emotion and empathy.

PART FOUR: Examples of Notable Photojournalists (Their Careers & Contributions)

Throughout the history of photojournalism as a profession, numerous people from all different backgrounds, cultures, genders, and races have made important and wonderful contributions to the collection of photos detailing history, whether good or bad, so the unfiltered truth can be delivered to the people of the world. Numerous historical eras and events have been recorded and documented permanently thanks to brave photojournalists, and this ensures the truth of historic events is preserved as much as possible in a visual way. Photojournalists risk their safety and lives to capture pictures of events to share the truth with the world, and this profession is often underappreciated in society when it rather should be praised and revered. While some photojournalists are more famous and noteworthy than others, every single person who chooses to commit their lives to photojournalism and the pursuit of portraying events truthfully and spreading news and awareness of important matters is noteworthy and important. The following are ten photojournalists, both dead and alive, that I find to be particularly noteworthy and interesting to look into further beyond a surface level, detailing their impressive careers and the most notable images or contributions they made to the world or that they made to the profession of journalism as a whole.

(1) Margaret Bourke-White (1904 – 1971)

When it comes to photojournalists who were groundbreaking and revolutionary for their time, few come close to the sheer impact and notoriety of Margaret Bourke-White. As Alexander Nemerov points out in his book *Wartime Kiss* (2013), Bourke-White was one photographer out of four employed by *Life* magazine in 1936 when the publication started,

making her one of the most famous women in America at the time.⁵⁷ She was a prominent photojournalist during historic world events, capturing tragedy globally, in such events such as World War II. In the Spring of 1941, Bourke-White was sent to Moscow, Russia, where she was tasked with taking pictures of the German attacks on Russia at the time from American government offices abroad, as per Catherine A. Welch's biography on the photojournalist, *Margaret Bourke-White*.⁵⁸ Welch, in a compelling way, tells the story of Bourke-White's work as a photographer during these war-torn times, noting her bravery in these situations and that in her photographing almost all of the 22 bombings Germany did on Moscow, "Her pictures of the bombing let Americans see what Germany was doing in Europe," enabling action to stop Germany's European conquest from foreign opposition, including the United States.⁵⁹ To be one of the first female photojournalists, and to have such a sizeable impact in persuading action in part through her documentation of German atrocities at the time, it motivated other countries to join in on the World War to stop Germany, ramping up support for foreign involvement in this conflict. This goes to show just how impactful photographs and visual coverage of events over just text and reporting can truly alter one's perspective and influence decisions as dire as joining a World War.

Not all of Bourke-White's work was appreciated though, as many suspected her of being a Communist or having involvements with the Communist Party in sharing military secrets through photos with foreign entities. Throughout her career, she snapped many photos of the equipment and materials that were being designed and used for war, and this was met with lots of

⁵⁷ Nemerov, Alexander. (2013). *Wartime kiss: Visions of the moment in the 1940s*. Princeton University Press (NJ), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=230e9134-f965-34a7-ae8-22c9f06170b0>, (p. 61)

⁵⁸ Welch, Catherine A. (1997). *Margaret Bourke-White*. Millbrook Press (Minneapolis), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=765b3fa9-a928-36af-911a-12561d6cd294>, (p. 21-24)

⁵⁹ Ibid., (p. 28)

criticism and allegations, with Snyder quoting a District Intelligence Officer for the Navy at the time stating she was ““increasing her activities in photographing American subjects of military importance,”” and how they should spare the chance of “ ‘run[ning] this risk of espionage.’”⁶⁰

Others shared similar sentiments, claiming Bourke-White should be jailed and losing trust in *LIFE* as a publication.⁶¹ While these assertions were untrue, it goes to show that photographs and images hold a lot of weight, and a camera wields a lot of power in what it can share, and especially during times of war, photos will be opposed by any side that is painted in a negative light.



Figure 4.1: Photo taken by famous photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White during her tour in South Africa, showing the tragic and gut-wrenching state of the Apartheid, with racial injustice and violations of human rights and dignity being at the forefront of white leadership towards the black population of the country (*LIFE Picture Collection*)

Another important area of history and tragedy that Bourke-White’s work gave the citizens of the United States access to visually was the South African Apartheid in her photos in 1949 and

⁶⁰ Snyder, Robert E. (1985, April). “Margaret Bourke-White and the Communist Witch Hunt,” *Journal of American Studies* (19(1), 5-25). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27554544>, (p. 12)

⁶¹ Ibid., (p. 13)

1950, spending time in this territory to explore the injustices and horrors of this era led by racial discrimination and division. John Edwin Mason covers this period of her work extensively in his work “Picturing the Beloved Country: Margaret Bourke-White, ‘Life’ Magazine, and South Africa, 1949-1950” (November 2012), noting that she made strides in getting this information out to the public and her audience through *Life* magazine, writing essays and taking photos capturing the abominations taking place against non-white persons at the time in South Africa.⁶² Mason quotes Bourke-White’s reflections on her time in South Africa, claiming she had a lot of resentment for white South Africans, stating ““it was hard for me to be even polite to people any more...I met many people whose instincts were pretty correct, and yet who deep down fell into the white supremacy habit of mind, and by their seeming liberalism did much more harm than good,” showing her firm stance against racial segregation and discrimination.⁶³ She captured many photos in South Africa showing the harsh and horrible conditions the black populations faced there under white rule and Apartheid, such as images of black families behind barbed wire fences looking distraught as pictured above. Bourke-White captured one noteworthy photo of two gold miners looking distressed and unhappy due to poor working and living conditions in South Africa, and as Catherine A. Welch notes, “Sadness and suffering were not part of Margaret’s childhood dream” to be a photographer, but there was a greater purpose in her work in including this, as these harsh realities “gave the world a chance to see and remember the truth” through her profound images.⁶⁴ All in all, it is clear that Margaret Bourke-White had an

⁶² Mason, John E. (2012, November). “Picturing the Beloved Country: Margaret Bourke-White, ‘Life’ Magazine, and South Africa, 1949-1950,” *Kronos* (38, 154-176). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41940665>

⁶³ Ibid., (p. 155)

⁶⁴ Welch, Catherine A. (1997). *Margaret Bourke-White*. Millbrook Press (Minneapolis), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=765b3fa9-a928-36af-911a-12561d6cd294>, (p. 54)

undeniable impact on photojournalism as a whole, and her work and pictures will live on forever and have significant impact and historical importance for the foreseeable future.

(2) Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908 – 2004)

A talent in the technicalities and components of photography, as well as an artist who is notable for his contributions to both spaces in visual media, is none other than Henri Cartier-Bresson. This renowned photojournalist is from Normandy, and he was most prized for his technical ability and achievements in photography, implementing expert skills in composition and framing to get a news story across accurately. When interviewed about his technique by John Berger, Cartier-Bresson notes that he does not aim blind in photography, as geometry is fundamental in photos, even stating “It’s like what mathematicians and physicists call elegance, when they’re discussing a theory. If an approach is elegant it may be getting near to what’s true.”⁶⁵ He is also known for how strong his convictions are as an artist and photojournalist, often objecting to social norms and paving his own path. Hofstadter notes that Cartier-Bresson “has a litany of objections to contemporary tastes and public policies,” including “the mutilation of the earth, to the vulgarity of consumer society, to the crushing of native cultures, [and] to the swamping of regional customs.”⁶⁶ In his life and work, he did what he could to express his distaste in these areas, standing up for what is right in preserving nature and native people, as well as being against pollution and manmade efforts to harm the environment and planet at a larger scale.

⁶⁵ Berger, John. (1995, Winter). “Henri Cartier-Bresson,” *Aperture* (138, 12-23).
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24471734>, (p. 15)

⁶⁶ Hofstadter, Dan. (1992). *Temperaments: Memoirs of Henri Cartier-Bresson and other artists*. Open Road Distribution (New York, NY), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=4b5b5cb2-003c-3f38-b577-584c6d24e9f5>, (p. 36)

One of Cartier-Bresson's most famous and prolific works is the photo titled *Seville* (1933), which captures a scene in Seville, Spain with children playing in the rubble of a war-stricken area in Spain during their Civil War. As Holden Luntz so eloquently writes, this photograph shows how Cartier-Bresson "focuses on the joy and energy of children playing," and that he "highlights the optimism of the human spirit as it transcends the pessimism of war," which is a powerful juxtaposition.⁶⁷ The horrors of war and destruction can often lead to nihilistic thinking and hopelessness for greater mankind, but images and art from photographers such as Cartier-Bresson prove to be glimpses of positivity in a terribly negative situation. The power this photo has to capture this fighting spirit of humanity, doing our best to stay positive in spite of hardship and conflict, shows photojournalism, and photography in general, has a unique capability to translate emotions and carry weight in showing the perseverance of the human spirit despite all odds. Luntz notes that Cartier-Bresson had a talent for "capturing lasting images from a world in perpetual motion," leading him to be "a leading figure in professional photojournalism" and to be a renowned name amongst the photojournalism community for years to come, especially with his contributions to founding agencies such as Magnum.⁶⁸ Cartier-Bresson made strides in photojournalism, becoming a master of photo composition and having influence in his artistic styles, as well as being known for capturing some of the most moving and important images in modern history.

⁶⁷ Luntz, Holden. (2020, February). "Henri Cartier-Bresson's Seville," *Holden Luntz Gallery*, <https://www.holdenluntz.com/magazine/new-arrivals/henri-cartier-bressons-seville/>

⁶⁸ Ibid.

(3) Eddie Adams (1933 – 2004)

A renowned war photojournalist who was able to share with the world the horrors of the front lines of numerous foreign conflicts was Eddie Adams. Throughout his photography in capturing wars, thirteen of them in total, one of his most prominent photos taken during the Vietnam War was the image of the “Saigon Execution.” This photograph taken by Adams captures the moment a South Vietnamese police chief shoots a suspected Viet Cong member in the head, which was captured during the Tet Offensive as Natalia Mielczarek and David D. Perlmutter note.⁶⁹ While this image did correlate to a response from some members of the American public, sending 90 letters to NBC with mostly negative complaints about the poor taste of broadcasting such gruesome images on a network that was accessible to children and families, but Mielczarek and Perlmutter make the argument that this image did not elicit as powerful a response as one would think.⁷⁰

One study from an Indiana opinion research project concludes that the impacts and reactions to Adams’ photo may have been hyperbolized, and it is clear that since the majority of the American public cared for the safety and health of American troops involved in the conflict overseas, the death of this random civilian did not get them to budge much for the tragedy happening abroad.⁷¹ Natalia and David do made the point that this image that Adams captured “may indeed have had an effect on a demoralized president,” as then-president Lyndon B. Johnson supported the war despite anti-war sentiments growing back home due to

⁶⁹ Mielczarek, N. & Perlmutter, D. (2014, July). “Chapter 9 – Big pictures and visual propaganda: The lessons of research on the ‘effects’ of photojournalistic icons,” *Visual Propaganda and Extremism in the Online Environment* (215-232), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12132.12>, (p. 223)

⁷⁰ Ibid., (p. 224)

⁷¹ Ibid., (p. 224)

our involvement, which many in the U.S. public felt as unnecessary.⁷² Jung Joon Lee used Adams' work as an example of how his photos were excellent at conjuring memories of the tragedies of the Vietnam War for Americans, how in South Korea this was not the case where war photos were popular and iconic, thus making the Korean War's photo coverage play out differently.⁷³ While there is certainly debate over the impact of the "Saigon execution" image that Adams famously took, it is clear that this photo sparked conversation nonetheless and captured a moment in time where tragedy was rampant and human life was devalued at the cost of war.

(4) Kevin Carter (1960 – 1994)

One of the most fascinating and devastating stories that encapsulates the power photographs can have and how strongly they can bring about reactions, whether positive or negative, is the case of Kevin Carter. Carter was a photojournalist native to South Africa, as is most well-known for his infamous and controversial photo *The Vulture and the Little Girl*, which was published worldwide in 1994 and won Carter a Pulitzer Prize, the highest award in journalism, as Sean Thomas Dougherty recounts.⁷⁴ Not even a year later after he was awarded with this prestigious symbol of journalism and capturing something of value and significance, Carter committed suicide due to the mix of self-doubt in becoming notable off such a tragic depiction, as well as the widespread backlash received by *Times* from audience members worldwide.⁷⁵ The tragic loss of a photojournalist who was trying to evoke empathy

⁷² Ibid., (p. 224)

⁷³ Lee, Jung J. (2013, Fall). "No end to the image war: Photography and the contentious memories of the Korean War," *The Journal of Korean Studies* (18(2), 337-370). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44080508>, (p. 345)

⁷⁴ Dougherty, Sean T. (2006, Winter). "Killing the messenger," *Massachusetts Review* (47(4), 608-616). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25091130>, (p. 608)

⁷⁵ Ibid., (p. 609)

from consumers and show the harsh realities of the world after being blamed for not doing more to intervene with the situation shows how reactions to images can be polarizing, for better or worse.



Figure 4.2: Kevin Carter’s controversial photo that won a Pulitzer Prize, showing a starving Sudan child facing horrible conditions as a predator lurks nearby (*Corbis Sygma Photograph*)

While Carter’s intentions with this photo were not malicious, and were designed to showcase the horrors of poverty that nations such as Sudan were facing, the reactions elicited in audiences were not so forgiving or understanding. Viewers demanded that Carter answer to what he did to remedy this situation or support the starving child other than photographing her for what they perceived to be solely for his own personal gain, which led Carter to a deep depression. These audience reactions are not totally unwarranted though, as the picture is horrific and shows someone in such a dire situation that the viewer cannot help but wonder if something was done about this to save the child. In Ibrahim’s work *Technologies of Trauma*, the author cites that “The iconic image by Kevin Carter in which a dying Black child is watched by a vulture raised the problem of aestheticization of the abject,” or trying to make

something devastating and extremely awful into a picturesque art piece.⁷⁶ None of these critiques are unfounded or wrong, but they did ultimately contribute to the self-inflicted passing of Carter, who may have felt immense guilt for taking the photo and not intervening or doing all that he could to save the child.

Doughtery makes the excellent point that Carter's infamous photo "is a perfect persuasive frame that challenges the viewer to empathize with the child and ask why she suffers," serving as a call to action for the audience, but because the photo worked in evoking this sense of action as "People felt...horror, empathy, [and] anger," the state of the world created an inability for true, widespread action unfortunately, and "without the political apparatus to do *something*, so many turned, as in ancient Greece, and attacked the messenger."⁷⁷ It is devastating that this image led to Carter's suicide and mental breakdown, and it is unfair that all of the blame got directed on him, as he did not allow for this situation to occur, but was more so capturing the atrocities of the world around him to spread awareness of the dire situation in Sudan. The tragedy of this photo certainly did translate to audiences, disturbing them and shocking them in showcasing the horrific realities of the lack of resources and higher rates of mortalities in areas without funding and help such as the one Carter depicted in his photograph. But all of the rage this photo rightly produced in the audience not being able to directly help resolve this type of dire situation got directed right back onto the photojournalist, leading to him ending his life tragically. Some writers such as Wilfred argue that "Suffering has become a matter of statistics, codification, media commercialization, and photography," citing Carter's notorious photo as a prime example of suffering being devalued

⁷⁶ Ibrahim, Yasmin. (2022). *Technologies of trauma: Cultural formations over time*. Emerald Publishing Limited (Bingley, UK), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=e2d06b5d-74fe-3ba8-8afe-7ca955a47aa9>, (p. 69)

⁷⁷ Ibid., (p. 610)

and profited on, and noting the question of what Carter did to help the starving child's situation to save her, he cites this as the thought that drove Carter to kill himself tragically.⁷⁸ Despite the debates surrounding the photograph of *The Vulture and the Little Girl*, and the ethics of cases like this and questions that arise from situations like this (i.e. "Should this photo even be taken and published?", "Should the photojournalist have more responsibility to try and intervene?", etc.), it is undeniable that this photo had a profound impact and is a wonderful example of how polarizing photographs can be.

(5) Anastasia Taylor-Lind (1981–)

A modern photojournalist who is worth noting a has a career worth following is Anastasia Taylor-Lind, an English and Swedish photojournalist known for her leadership in editorial publications and for making strides in focusing on issues regarding women, population, and war. She is known for both her photography and poetry, and actively to this day does work to tell stories of trauma and hardship through a delicate, compassionate lens to create more authentic and true-to-life stories.⁷⁹ Considering the subjects of your stories and how you can share their stories and their lives without solely using them for your own personal gain or a viral story, it is crucial to approach journalism with consideration. Taylor-Lind does exactly this, stating that "It's impossible to define ethics, but for me,...[the] one rule for myself, it is do no harm. To the best of my ability, don't hurt anyone with my reporting."⁸⁰ This quote showcases how much Taylor-Lind cares about what she does and that she does justice in

⁷⁸ Wilfred, Felix. (2014). "Listening to the world: Prophetic anger and sapiential compassion," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (34, 63-66). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24801353>, (p. 1)

⁷⁹ Photography Ethics Centre. (2025). "Anastasia Taylor-Lind: On being slow, kind, and gentle,"

Photography Ethics Centre, <https://www.photoethics.org/podcast/anastasia-taylor-lind>

⁸⁰ Ibid.

capturing the situations of her subjects that she reports on, and has done a noble job at keeping this at the core of her work.

Arguably, one of Taylor-Lind's most profound images was taken during the Armenian and Azerbaijan War in 2020, with her taking one photo *Untitled* (2020), with this image having a lot to say about the conflict facing that nation in war as well as through the COVID-19 pandemic that was ravaging through the world at the time.⁸¹ The photo depicts a man exhausted and stressed by his surroundings, with a bloody gurney next to him, inferring he is near a hospital or place of care, and Taylor-Lind reflects that she "felt deeply for this man as he was overwhelmed by everything going on around him," being in the middle of a pandemic and nearing the end, but still in, a devastating war.⁸² In her writing and in the way she portrays subjects in danger and hard situations, it is abundantly clear that Taylor-Lind's compassion is behind all of her work, revealing to the world desperate situations and events in a goal to promote understanding and empathy of these suffering people. Capturing such tragic circumstances can be hard, but sharing them to the world is an important and noble task, which she takes up actively to this day.

(6) Dorothea Lange (1895 – 1965)

A female photojournalist who often goes under the radar in mainstream media conversations, but is worth discussing for her magnificent work and impact through her photographs through wars, economic depressions, and other horrific events to raise awareness of these tragedies is Dorothea Lange. In her work "Dorothea Lange: The

⁸¹ Zalcman, D. & Ickow, S. (2023). *Women photograph – What we see: Women and nonbinary perspectives through the lens*. White Lion Publishing (London, UK), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=16ad69b9-f669-3a10-9df0-d41a6c84d271>, (p. 163)

⁸² Ibid., (p. 163)

Photographer as Agricultural Sociologist,” Linda Gordon notes how much weight the photos that Lange took carried, specifically during the Great Depression Era in 1930s America.

Gordon writes that “To a startling degree, popular understanding of the Great Depression of the 1930s derives from visual images, and among them,...Lange’s are the most influential,” and also noted her contributions to the Popular Front movement in bringing attention to injustices through artistic expression.⁸³ Lange’s photos captured the heavy emotions and desperation that many felt during the Great Depression, with one of her most iconic photographs being *Migrant Mother*, depicting a mother worried about how she will provide for herself and her children through the horrible economic situation facing the nation.

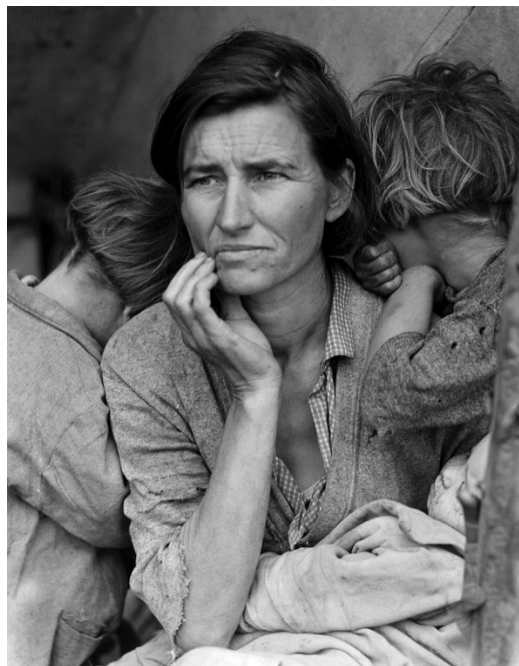


Figure 4.3: Renowned photo taken by photojournalist Dorothea Lange, depicting a migrant mother’s stress during the Great Depression with a family to support as well as herself, showing the tragedy of this era in American history (FSA)

⁸³ Gordon, Linda. (2006, December). “Dorothea Lange: The photographer as agricultural sociologist,” *The Journal of American History* 93(3), 698-727). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4486410>, (p. 698)

While she is most known for this photo pictured above, with a perfect composition and subjects that were incredible in conveying the tragedy of the time, her work was not exclusively dedicated to the Great Depression. Gordon, in another work challenging assumptions about Lange, notes her work in capturing Japanese-American internment camps during WWII was highly significant, as well as her coverage of poor farmers in Oregon and the hardships they faced when she was sent there by the FSA.⁸⁴ Lange did an incredible job in capturing the harshest and most tragic conditions facing the nation at that time, and was able to convey emotion and suffering in her work to reveal to the audience how desperate these situations were and to raise awareness of them. She met her husband, Paul Taylor, in a trip to California, documenting the farmer families and the poverty that had stricken this area, with Taylor and Lange working together towards a common goal of recording these harsh conditions and reporting on them for the world to see.⁸⁵ Many families devastated by poverty had to live in camps at the time, and Taylor and Lange found this appropriate for an immediate response, but not sufficient for a long-term goal, as they needed “permanent homes on plots of land where families could build and grow into communities.”⁸⁶ Overall, Lange’s historic work of capturing poverty, war, and suffering while being able to spread awareness of these hardships and to give the subject and their story a platform, which is any good journalist’s goal in their career work.

⁸⁴ Gordon, Linda. (2009, Winter). “Dorothea Lange’s Oregon photography: Assumptions challenged,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* (110(4), 570-597). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20616013>, (p. 570-574)

⁸⁵ Goggans, Jan. (2010). *California on the breadlines: Dorothea Lange, Paul Taylor, and the making of a new deal narrative*. University of California Press (Berkeley, CA), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=4b40b8f8-2a35-3326-aec9-d3c50b8c332f>, (p. 153)

⁸⁶ Ibid., (p. 154-155)

(7) Sebastião Salgado (1944–)

As a recipient of the American Sociological Association (ASA) Award for Excellence in Reporting on Social Issues,⁸⁷ Sebastião Salgado is a recognized and renowned photojournalist that has left an imprint with his work on the world every place he has traveled to. Salgado started off as an economist, but transitioned to become a professional photographer in 1973, documenting important eras such as the end of large-scale industrial manual labor, the movement of countryside dwellers to the cities, and much more.⁸⁸ His work has done wonders in contributing to the understanding of society and all of its facets, exploring areas of history or groups of people who are often underrepresented. A photojournalist's goal should be to allow the audience to understand the world around them better and in a deeper way, and Salgado's exploration of workers whose manual labor often went unrecognized and in families who went from rural to urban areas allowed his audience to see different sides of the world. Not only in capturing people and labor projects was Salgado able to capture the world around him to show other people, but also in focusing on nature untouched and undamaged by mankind, specifically in his *Genesis* work.

Arguably his most important and groundbreaking work in his photojournalism and reporting career was *Genesis*, a project he launched in 2004 which Rudel quotes him as stating the project “‘is about our planet earth...and what remains of it today despite the manifold destruction caused by human activity.’”⁸⁹ Salgado takes a strong stance against human actions affecting the environment substantially negatively, as well as making the

⁸⁷ Gold, Steven J. (2011, June). “Sebastião Salgado and visual sociology,” *Sociological Forum* (26(2), 418-423). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23027326>, (p. 418)

⁸⁸ Ibid., (p. 419)

⁸⁹ Rudel, Thomas K. (2011, June). “Images, ideology, and praxis in the environmental movement: Sebastião Salgado's *Genesis* project,” *Sociological Forum* (26(2), 431-437). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23027328>, (p. 432)

commendable effort to capture the beauty of our planet in areas with little to no human interruption, modification, or disturbance. There are some humans included in this project such as those attempting to adapt to the ecological balance around them, such as hunters and gatherers in deserts, but for the majority of his work in this project, he did his best to find areas that preserved the natural beauty of our planet without humans ruining or excavating the land for their own benefit. In all of his work, Rudel states that “Salgado tries to convey the dignity of his subjects,” and that “He does so, in part, by taking photographs in which people and animals look at the camera,” creating a moment of interaction between the subject and viewer of the image.⁹⁰ Throughout his career work, Salgado contributed lots of important photos and projects to the world, preserving these eras, movements, and landscapes that he was able to experience in his life permanently through his pictures.



Figure 4.4: A portrait from the *Genesis* collection published by Sebastião Salgado, showing an Artic landscape untouched by humans, preserving nature’s beauty in the face of severe climate change due to man-made factors such as pollution (*Taschen*)

⁹⁰ Ibid., (p. 433)

(8) Lynsey Addario (1973–)

Empowering underrepresented people through your work as a photojournalist is a noble and lofty goal, and Lynsey Addario, in her work focusing on human rights issues and the role of women in traditional societies, she has done a wonderful job on this front! One aspect that is appreciated in her work is her ability to capture and represent those who are often left out of news stories, particularly in war zones in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Pro Edu notes that “Addario’s work goes beyond mere documentation, focusing on the human elements of conflict and giving voice to those often overlooked in times of war, particularly women and children.”⁹¹ One notable photo of Addario’s was captured during the war between Russia and Ukraine, showing Ukrainian civilians being shot dead near Kyiv by Russian soldiers, which was published by *The New York Times* and showed the severity of the injustices Russia was committing in an attempt to invade Ukraine.⁹² Addario also writes about her experiences in capturing photos of war, noting how hard it is to capture the dead or those who are going to die, but critiques how America hides this fact about war typically.⁹³ She writes that America has been at war for years, but “we see only a handful of photographs of dead American soldiers,” and “Death is the highest price we pay for war yet we rarely show it.”⁹⁴ She also ponders if this is more for denial of the realities of war, or to respect

⁹¹ Pro Edu. (2024, December). “Lynsey Addario: Documenting war and women’s rights across the globe – Pulitzer winner’s 25-year journey,” *Pro Edu*, <https://proedu.com/blogs/photographer-spotlight/lynsey-addario-documenting-war-and-womens-rights-across-the-globe-pulitzer-winners-25-year-journey>

⁹² Gabowitsch, M. & Homanyuk, M. (2025). *Monuments and territory: War memorials in Russian-occupied Ukraine*. Central European University Press (Budapest), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=fd5ed88a-207a-35a8-a933-d693e879f0ef>, (p. 144)

⁹³ Addario, L. & other authors/photojournalists. (2011, Fall). “The anxiety of images,” *Aperture* (204, 50-73). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24473667>, (p. 63)

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, (p. 63)

those who died, but in either case, her work has documented the horrors of war and has been able to capture the underlying humanity and suffering behind these conflicts.

(9) Don McCullin (1935–)

A British war photojournalist who has been renowned for his ability to produce empathy in the audience to his photographs, allowing for a unique lens into disaster and warfare to bring awareness to the realities of these terrible situations, is none other than Don McCullin. McCullin is aware that his photography is riddled with atrocities and horrors, noting he thought of his images “‘as atrocity pictures,’” but that these are not done in a manner that gets pleasure out of disaster and death, but his “‘photography of suffering has been kind of a *service*’ to its audience,” allowing them to witness the despair in our world and history in real-time.⁹⁵ One of his works that got him the most recognition was done in Cyprus in 1964, in the morning in the middle of an orange grove, a perfect backdrop for a devastating tragedy that he was able to capture.⁹⁶ In this grove, women went searching for their dead husbands after a battle between the Greeks and Turks, and this work was published in *The Observer* and it “won him an international reputation and the World Press Photographer Award – an uneasy prize in the circumstances,” as Mark Holborn writes.⁹⁷ In reflecting on his work in Cyprus in his autobiography, Alex Danchev notes how McCullin “is riveted by the scene, as much for the tableau as the tragedy,” but remains that McCullin is through-and-through an

⁹⁵ Campbell, David. (2003, December). “Cultural governance and pictorial resistance: Reflections on the imaging of war,” *Review of International Studies* (29, 57-73). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20097885>, (p. 68)

⁹⁶ McCullin, D. & Holborn, M. (1982). “Is anyone taking notice?” *Aperture* (86, 8-31). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24471875>, (p. 10)

⁹⁷ Danchev, Alex. (2009). *On art and war and terror*. Edinburgh University Press (Edinburgh), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=4cf59985-faaa-3580-a414-38ee8ef93a83>, (p. 37-38)

ethical professional throughout his work. McCullin has contributed lots of images that have made an impact around the world, through his artistic vision and vulnerability in capturing harsh realities of life, and has been rewarded for his numerous achievements, and is sure to be remembered in the history of photojournalism for many years to come.

(10) Stephanie Sinclair (1973–)

Exposing tragic conditions and devastating circumstances is an important and necessary part of journalism, and Stephanie Sinclair is a female photojournalist who is still actively working that dedicates a lot of her work to bringing these heartbreaking situations to light. Sinclair is renowned for “her ability to gain access to even the most remote stories as well as her sensitive, yet unflinching, examination of particularly painful topics,” focusing on areas concerning the plight of women in oppressed societies mostly.⁹⁸ She has covered controversial areas in her photography such as arranged child marriages and self-immolation as a form of protest, both with notable examples from her time spent in Afghanistan. Sinclair is both an author and a photojournalist, and as much weight and depth as her pictures carry alone, her reflections on her work provide an added insight to these depictions of awful scenarios. In her work *Innocence Forfeited*, Sinclair recounts her trip to Afghanistan to interview women who had survived suicide attempts via self-immolation, wondering “What could be so horrific in these women’s lives that they would rather withstand the agony of being burned alive than continue living?”⁹⁹ She went on to find out the horrors of the

⁹⁸ Gross, Edie. (2013, January/February). “Refusing to be intimidated: Photographs by Stephanie Sinclair,” *The Women’s Review of Books*, (30(1), 16-17). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24430412>, (p. 16)

⁹⁹ Sinclair, Stephanie. (2012, Summer). “Innocence forfeited,” *Aperture* (207, 54-61). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24473731>, (p. 57)

violence thrust upon the women in these areas, being sold off to pay family debts and even being forced into marriages and pregnancies they did not want.¹⁰⁰ Sinclair's findings in this region were horrific, but had an impact on audiences who saw these images of young, saddened women forced into terrible situations, capturing their plight and pleads for help.

Capturing the sentiment of protest within a culture and society also plays a huge role in what photojournalists want to capture and have a permanent record of, documenting historic actions and statements against the oppression people face based on unlivable circumstances. A perfect example of this shows up in Sinclair's work, most notably in photos such as her work in *Self Immolation: A Cry for Help*, documenting the acts of protest taken by hundreds of women in Afghanistan in the early to mid 2000s, with them committing self-immolation, or igniting themselves on fire to make a political statement. As mentioned in her reasoning for travelling to Afghanistan to interview women who survived self-immolation, then going on to capture child marriage evidence and photos, she was able to share images that "mark an exchange of trust and compassion," as with these women who survived suicide attempts consenting to be seen in pictures in their most vulnerable state, "the women in these images demonstrate a rare bravery."¹⁰¹ Capturing these women in desperate and heart-breaking situations, and being able to share their stories around the world, was a powerful action Sinclair took in her work in Afghanistan, forever documenting these abhorrent injustices towards the women of that country.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., (p. 57)

¹⁰¹ Whitney Museum of American Art. (2025). "Stephanie Sinclair," *Whitney Museum of American Art*, <https://whitney.org/exhibitions/2010-biennial/stephanie-sinclair>

The aforementioned photojournalists are only a select ten out of thousands and thousands of photojournalists throughout history, and are a mere snapshot of all the important and groundbreaking work photojournalists have contributed to the world, but these are all great representatives of the profession, each contributing something crucial and insightful to the world through the visual media they produce. From photojournalists who risked their safety to capture the horrors of war to share with the public, such as Adams, McCullin, Addario, to photojournalists focusing on human rights concerns such as Sinclair, Bourke-White, and Taylor-Lind, every photojournalist is important, bringing their own unique perspective through their work and lens to provide perspective on events for the audience. The institution of photojournalism is kept alive in the professionalism that journalists such as the ten thoroughly examined here exhibit in their work, and what they capture and allow the world to see through their photos is truly groundbreaking. Photojournalists are a crucial part of our modern day news reporting, and preserve moments in history, whether beautiful or tragic, to ensure that the world never forgets the message they were trying to get across through their work.

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