

1

Brief History of Photojournalism in the United States

The photograph was the ultimate response to a social and cultural appetite for a more accurate and real-looking representation of reality, a need that had its origins in the Renaissance. (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 15)

Although advances in photographic technologies enabled the creation of photography (and later, photographic reportage), the social, cultural, and political environment of the nineteenth century allowed photography to develop and expand rapidly. A burgeoning middle class supported photography as a new art form (Rosenblum, 1984) and embraced the idea that the photograph could “objectively” document life (Carlebach, 1992). The earliest photographs, however, suffered from the necessity of long exposures and were for the most part limited to subjects of landscape, architecture, and portraiture. “Nonetheless, reportage was understood to be one of the most significant potentials – and goals – of photography at the very beginning of its history. From the 1840s on, American photographers tested the available technologies against this goal and established important precedents for what has become one of the most significant applications of the medium” (Stapp, 1988, p. 2).

Photography was made a practical reality in 1839 by two fundamentally different and competing processes, the Daguerreotype, invented by Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre in France and the Calotype, created by William Henry Fox Talbot in England. Although the negative/positive process of the Calotype allowed

K2

virtually unlimited reproduction of the original, the majority of the public initially embraced the Daguerreotype (a positive process) primarily because it produced better-quality images.

The Daguerreotype, a monochromatic picture produced on a silver-plated sheet of copper appeared more precise and attractive than the early Calotypes made from paper negatives. Despite the long exposure times (from 5 to 60 minutes in 1839) that required the subject's head to be placed in a clamp, Daguerreotype portrait studios flourished across the US. Publications like *Frank Leslie's* and *Harper's Weekly* used Daguerreotype portraits translated into wood engravings for the press. Nevertheless Daguerreotype images could not be easily duplicated thereby limiting their usefulness.¹

Although the negative/positive process initially suffered from technical flaws, the soft image caused by the diffusion of light passing through the paper negative being the most glaring, the ability to easily duplicate the original image was decisive in the process' eventual acceptance over the Daguerreotype (Newhall, 1982).

The quality of photographic images improved rapidly during the 1840s and 1850s. Opticians developed non-distortion lenses, and glass negatives coated with egg whites or albumen replaced paper negatives. The albumen negatives produced better images than the paper negatives but still required long exposure times. A moist (or "wet") glass plate negative coated with a substance called collodian subsequently dramatically curtailed the exposure times. This helped to create sharper images and allowed a wider array of subjects. It also meant, however, that the photographer had to work from a portable darkroom in order to sensitize each plate before using it and to develop it immediately afterward.²

The invention of the albumen print in the 1850s occurred at approximately the same time as the development of the wet plate negative. And, like the wet plate negative, it significantly boosted the overall quality of the image by creating sharper definition and strong contrasts. In addition, the albumen print image lasted a much longer time than its predecessors.

Despite the improvements to the negative and printing processes, photographs as illustrations for publication still needed to be translated into engravings or included as original prints or lanternslides. It wasn't until the last decade of the nineteenth century that photographic images could be directly incorporated into the text through the halftone process.

Other technological barriers remained throughout most of the 1800s. Exposure times were still too long to freeze motion,³ and photographers continued to transport their darkrooms to the scenes of their photographs. Nevertheless, photographers from industrialized nations, particularly, England, France, and the United States traveled internationally to document life, architecture and nature. Of particular interest to photographers and their audiences were the "Holy Land," Egypt, the American West, and Japan. "Though under the impression that these documentations were 'objective' – that is, truthful records of what exists – those behind the cameras were guided in their selection and treatment of material both by a sense of being emissaries of a 'higher civilization,' as John Thomson called it, and by the desire for commercial success" (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 168).⁴

Regardless of the inability to photograph movement sharply since exposures were seconds long, the Crimean War (1850s) and the American Civil War (1860s) were photographed extensively using Collodion glass-plate negatives. In both England and America a combination of media desire for dramatic images, the public's appetite for information and governmental acceptance, even support of photographic documentation⁵ made both wars accessible to photographers such as Roger Fenton and Mathew Brady.⁶

Nevertheless, technology dictated both the subject matter and style of war photography during the mid-nineteenth century. Images of battle action were not possible since photographers had to transport their darkrooms and equipment in wagons, and the large-format cameras took time to set up. In addition, recording movement was sacrificed for clarity of image. Instead, photographers focused on portraits of officers (see Photo 1) and ordinary soldiers, camp life and supplies but also upon the



Photo 1. Six officers of the 17th New York Battery, Gettysburg, June 1863 Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

wounded and the dead – the aftermath of battle. These photographs, although subdued by today’s standards of graphic images, “had a profound effect on viewers used to artistic depictions of wartime heroics. . . . The absence of uplifting tone in camera documentations was especially shocking because the images were unhesitatingly accepted as real and truthful” (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 182).

President Abraham Lincoln’s assassination immediately following the American Civil War and the subsequent capture of the conspirators engaged the nation’s attention and created another kind of opportunity for photographic reportage, the photographic sequence. Photographer Alexander Gardner, who published the *Photographic Sketch Book of the War* containing photographs that he took during the Civil War, also photographed the hanging

of the four convicted conspirators of the Lincoln assassination. Gardner made seven images of the hangings that together created perhaps the first sequential documentation of an event although as Marianne Fulton observes, “Only three of the seven photographs Gardner took during the hangings were reproduced in the popular press (*Harper’s Weekly* used wood-engraved copies to illustrate its story on the executions), and the narrative element of the original sequence and the cumulative visual impact of the original images were thereby lost” (Fulton, 1988, p. 28).

Although photographers immediately following the Civil War period produced little in the way of news-event photographs, (Stapp, 1988) the American public provided a vast market for documentary photography (Foresta, 1996).⁷ Using large-format cameras and wet-plate negatives, photographers documented architecture, industrialization, historical landmarks, and perhaps more than anything else, the American West. The West, dominated by a sense of space, adventure, and beauty, piqued the imagination of those living in the East and provided photographers with fertile content. Photographic prints were sold to individuals, “and to the periodical press, which continued to use photographs as a source material for wood and steel engravings” (Carlebach, 1992, p. 102).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, photographers began to develop ideas about photographically covering the news. It was, however, the technological advances that were most instrumental in the development of the modern conception of photojournalism.

[Photojournalism] became possible only when photographic technology (both films and camera equipment), communication systems (the means for getting photographic images from where they were taken to where they would be used), and reproduction technologies (the means of disseminating the images) had all evolved to the point of conjunction where the photography of action, in the field, was possible and easy; where photographic images could be reproduced quickly and accurately, in quantity

and cheaply; and where the time lapse between the event and the publication of the images reporting it was minimal. (Stapp, 1988, p. 2)

Technological progress reached a tipping point during the final two decades of the nineteenth century. Dry plates replaced wet plates allowing photographers to use much shorter exposures due to the heightened sensitivity to light and, perhaps most importantly, the halftone plate⁸ was developed as a means to reproduce photographs onto the printed page, eliminating the need for engravers and creating an even greater sense of objectivity.

Other technological advances of the 1880s and 1890s enabled photojournalism to develop rapidly. The Eastman Kodak camera, introduced near the end of the nineteenth century, influenced the way in which professionals worked. Professional photographers using the hand-held cameras were able to produce more spontaneous and intimate photographs because they had greater mobility and drew less attention to themselves. And, the small and relatively easy-to-use cameras created a new market aimed at amateur photographers.⁹ The invention of transparent celluloid roll film in 1889 made the hand-held cameras even more practicable.

Photojournalism, however, did not develop solely from the conjunction of various technologies. "Photojournalism existed – and still exists – in a context that includes economics, politics, technology, the attitudes of the public, the ideologies of critics, and, ultimately, teachers and purveyors of knowledge and information" (Jussim, 1988, p. 38).

At the turn of the century the owners and editors of news publications sensed the public's appetite for illustrated journalism and realized that photographs could provide an important edge in the growing competition for readership. As a result, management began to think about how photographs could be used more effectively.

At first little imagination governed the way that pictures were incorporated into the text of articles, but soon after 1890

periodicals began to pay more attention to page layouts. The pictures were not simply spotted throughout the story; images of different sizes and shapes began to be deliberately arranged, sometimes in overlapping patterns and even occasionally crossing onto the adjacent page. Also, feature stories and articles consisting of just photographs and captions made an appearance. (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 461)

News consumers also became more sophisticated as the demographics changed to a more educated and urban readership. The National Geographic Society published the first issue of *National Geographic Magazine* in 1888 aimed at an audience interested in nature and distant cultures often portrayed as “primitive” or exotic. *National Geographic* became (and has remained) a pioneering leader in the use of photography. Among other innovations, it was the first magazine in the United States “to build its own black-and-white and color photography labs [and began to feature color photographs in the early 1900s]; the first to publish flash photographs of wild animals at night; the first to publish underwater photographs of fish in natural color” (Carlebach, 1997, p. 181).

A new breed of photographer emerged to provide the illustrated publications with photographs from a variety of subjects. These news photographers were largely self-taught and street savvy. They were part of the new profession of journalism and yet separate (and thought inferior)¹⁰ from the writers. The news photographers were (as today) either employed as staff photographers or worked as freelancers. The freelance photographers had little trouble selling their work as their photographs were in demand, and newly formed syndicates (analogous to today’s wire services and photo agencies) marketed the photographs nationwide (Carlebach, 1997).

The public demand for photographs, however, was a double-edged sword as editors and owners of news publications sought to give the public what it wanted rather than exercising editorial judgment about what was important. Staff photographers accepted their assignments, and freelance photographers made

photographs that they knew they could sell. In this regard, newspapers of the early 1900s were similar to many of today's news media that use surveys conducted among readers/audiences to help determine editorial content.

For more than a century, content decisions have been routinely made with advertisers in mind. Researcher, Estelle Jussim explains that during the final decades of the nineteenth century large department stores merged with and/or acquired smaller ones. They then used their increased wealth to purchase advertising space in newspapers. The size of the readership determined the price of the space, thus newspapers worked hard to give readers what they wanted.

Inevitably, the relationship between advertising and circulation led to several unfortunate outcomes, some of which are still with us.¹¹ First, there ensued a wild race among the dailies to capture ever-greater readership by whatever means. Sensationalism being tried and true, it was to ever-increasing sensationalism that the publishers turned. (Jussim, 1988, p. 47)

As is true today, stories with mass appeal attracted large numbers of photographers, and their photographs (sometimes faked) received ample space in the sensational press. Catastrophes, crime, violence, and the unusual were the preferred subjects for publication (McChesney, 2004).

Yet, Carlebach points out that much of the sensational press had a liberal bent and because of that also pursued stories that contained subtexts, exposés of abuse and corruption perpetrated by the elite.

On May 31, 1889, floodwater swept through Johnstown, Pennsylvania, a major steel-producing center not far from Pittsburgh. More than 2,200 people drowned, many of them the wives and children of immigrant steel workers. The story gripped the national press, and not merely because of the terrible toll in human lives. The flood occurred when the earthen dam that created a private trout-fishing preserve burst, sending an enormous wall of water, muck, and debris into the narrow streets of Johnstown, fourteen

miles downstream. The lake was owned and used exclusively by the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club, an elite group of Pittsburgh industrialists, bankers, and lawyers including Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick. Although forewarned of the dam's weakness, the club's directors did nothing, and heavy spring rains that year sealed Johnstown's fate. The popular press saw proof of meanness and criminal neglect among potentates who preside over America's burgeoning industrial empires. (Carlebach, 1997, p. 47)

Liberal newspaper owners such as Joseph Pulitzer also sponsored various public welfare endeavors. Social conscience, however, also made good business sense. "Pulitzer's marketing strategy was to juggle sensation with public crusades, themselves handily sensational. Pulitzer swiftly managed to achieve the highest newspaper circulation in the country" (Jussim, 1988, p. 47).

Still, the most successful marketing tool for visual reportage appears to be war. Author and critic, Susan Sontag, declares, "War was and still is the most irresistible – and – picturesque – news" (Sontag, 2003, p. 49). Moreover, technological developments after the American Civil War (particularly the advent of the hand-held camera and roll film) allowed photographers to document war visually as it happened and instilled in news consumers the belief that photographs offered proof of war's horrors.¹²

New York *Journal* publisher, William Randolph Hearst understood the power of the war image in the competition for readers. After being informed by artist Frederic Remington – who was on assignment in Cuba for the *Journal* – "Everything is quiet. . . . There will be no war. I wish to return," Hearst reportedly replied, "Please remain. You furnish the pictures. I'll furnish the war."

Collier's Weekly was likewise among the first publications to realize the ability of war photographs to generate readership. By sending English-born Jimmy Hare, perhaps the most famous photographer of the Spanish-American War and certainly one of the pioneers in war photography, to Cuba, *Collier's* "increase[d] both circulation and advertising, which in turn prompted other

magazines to use photographs more generously” (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 463).

The military’s *laissez faire* policy toward the press during wartime ended rapidly. Governments and military leaders realized the negative effect that reporting (particularly photographic) could have on civilian support. And, by the early twentieth century words and images were being filtered through military censors. In addition, the army created its own group of photographers who were given access to people, places and events that were off limits to civilian photographers.

Assignments were doled out with great care; subjects deemed potentially problematic were simply not covered. By restricting access on the one hand, and providing its own carefully controlled coverage on the other, the army finally was able to manage and direct the visual representation of war. In order to accommodate the pictorial needs of both the press and the military, the army even established its own school in San Antonio for training still and motion-picture photographers. (Carlebach, 1997, p. 82)

The military attempted to justify its control of the press by claiming that civilian news reports could put soldiers’ lives at risk. Other factors may have also contributed to the military course of action. Carlebach says that, “Military officials were unwilling to assume responsibility for the transportation, care, feeding, and protection of journalists, some of whom were probably critical of the armed forces anyway” (Carlebach, 1997, p. 84). He points out that despite the high losses among correspondents covering wars at the turn of the century, it was the military and not the correspondents or their publications that tried to curtail civilian reporting from the front.¹³

Despite governmental and military restrictions regarding photographers, publishers nevertheless tried to increase circulation during World War I through the promise of photographic documentation. The *New York Times*, for example, rushed into print with the following advertisement as early as November 5, 1914:

START A COLLECTION OF WAR PICTURES. Start now to collect these magnificent illustrations of current history, the camera's story of churches in ruins, soldiers in trenches, sacked villages, fleeing refugees, armies on the march, faithfully portraying, week after week, the progress of the war. They will be treasured in years to come as no other souvenir of the conflict. (Jussim, 1988, p. 63)

Promises such as these created an atmosphere in which journalists (particularly photographers) were tempted, even compelled to cheat. Lacking access to the front lines, they created photographs that sometimes had a link to real events and sometimes didn't. Nevertheless, news consumers generally trusted photographs as being proof of an event and provided an enthusiastic audience for visual reporting.

Ironically, it was the military that gave history its best visual accounting of the war – even though these photographs, for the most part, were not available to news outlets during the war:

Hundreds of ordinary soldiers were also snapping pictures at the fronts, illegally, but although hundreds of thousands of these often anonymous photographs exist in international archives, very few, if any, appeared in wartime publications. It was these images, however, culled from the archives and reproduced in books about the war many years later, that give us an intimate view of daily life in the trenches. (Jussim, 1988, p. 64)

Government leaders and military commanders managed information during World War I more tightly than in almost any other conflict. There were more than nine million deaths, yet civilian journalists fabricated stories and photographs because they were denied access to the front. This was a seminal event in the history of war photography. It set the stage for a continuing struggle between governments and the news media to determine restrictions against civilian journalists during a time of war.

Politics was another area in which news photography was testing the limits of access during the early twentieth century. The Democratic presidential candidate in 1904, Judge Alton

Brooks Parker, declared that he would not allow any candid photographs of himself. He was fearful (as many candidates are today) that he would be caught on film during an embarrassing moment. Unfortunately for Parker, his opponent was Theodore Roosevelt, who embraced the camera and realized its potential for shaping a positive image (Carlebach, 1997).

The extent of media access to political candidates remains contested. Contenders for office, like military generals, continue in their attempts to control the media to their own advantage.¹⁴ News conferences and photo ops appear to dominate today's political coverage, but the struggle between journalists and politicians began more than a century ago.

Not all of the questions that emerged in covering the news at the end of the nineteenth century were related to the news subjects. Some issues were internal. Newsrooms were – and still are – male dominated. The competition between newspapers at the end of the nineteenth century, however, created opportunities for women wanting to work as journalists. Despite resistance from (male) editors who thought that proper women didn't belong in newsrooms or mingling with questionable subjects, women were hired as writers and photographers¹⁵ and eventually received assignments that previously had been deemed too difficult for women.¹⁶ This initiated a long history of struggle for women journalists.

Opportunities to work for mainstream publications came much later and have been more difficult for minority photographers. Stories about minority individuals, communities and events were traditionally written and photographed by white journalists. "There were numerous black photographers at the turn of the century . . . but their work was confined to the segregated districts in which the vast majority of them lived" and to the black press (Carlebach, 1997, p. 51). Gordon Parks was arguably the first African-American to have his work published by the "white press" but that wasn't until more than four decades after the turn of the century.¹⁷

While minorities and members of lower socio-economic status have traditionally been excluded from telling their own stories in

mainstream media, these groups are frequently the subjects of photographers. In 1845 Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson photographed Scottish fishermen in a straight-forward style with the intention of collecting money to improve the working conditions of their subjects. The distribution of these photographs was limited since the invention of the halftone process was several decades away. Nevertheless, the work by Hill and Adamson initiated an evolution towards what would eventually become known as the documentary style – the subjects were photographed in a direct manner, yet the photographs were taken in such a way as to communicate a social, even moralistic, theme.

The documentary style continued to evolve as English photographers of the nineteenth century photographed London's destitute. The work of Henry Mayhew (*London Labor and London Poor*) and John Thomson (*Street Life in London*) was intended to not only draw attention to the poor living conditions of London's impoverished but also to act as agents for change.¹⁸ Thomson's photographs, reproduced through Woodburytypes for *Street Life in London*, resulted in "the building of an embankment to prevent the Thames River from periodically flooding the homes of the London poor" (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 358).

At about the same time that Thomson was photographing London's impoverished, Native Americans were being photographed by photographers such as Jack Hillers, William Henry Jackson, and Timothy O'Sullivan. The straightforward approach in the portrayals of their subjects established a precedent for the photographic style of subsequent American documentary photographers.

It's somewhat difficult to make distinctions between the documentary style and early photojournalism. Both the social documentary and photojournalism came of age with the development of the halftone process which allowed the work to be broadly distributed, and both became popular with the masses during the period of competition among the "yellow" press. Liberal newspapers in particular used illustrated stories to draw attention to what they saw as unjust social conditions. The ultimate purpose of the work and the intention of the photographer, however,

differentiated (and still do today) documentary style from photo reportage. The documentary photographer advocates social change.¹⁹

Jacob Riis' profession as a journalist for the *New York Herald* lasted 40 years and bridged the period of illustrating works using artists' renditions of photographs to the age of the halftone process – his most significant work, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the tenements of New York* (1890), included examples of engravings and halftone reproductions. He dedicated his career to documenting the lives of New York's impoverished. This group of mostly-recent European immigrants lived in desperate circumstances with little hope of assistance from the city or other organizations. Riis used words and photographs with the intention of bringing about social change, and his work is cited as an important factor in efforts to improve the living conditions of New York's most destitute.

Lewis Hine was the other great reform-minded photographer at the turn of the century. Born into a working-class family, Hine was drawn to the plight of laborers, particularly new members of the workforce coming from Eastern and Southern Europe. Hine photographed immigrants arriving at Ellis Island from 1904 to 1909, creating an impressive body of work that highlighted their uncertain futures.

Hine's other major body of work photographically documented the lives of child laborers and their terrible living and working environments (see Photo 2). These photographs were instrumental in prompting subsequent child-labor laws. Hine, like Riis, used the flashgun (made from magnesium powder – the flash bulb was invented in Germany in 1929) regularly to provide light for his photographs and is also remarkable for his dedication to aesthetics as a photographic tool.

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



Photo 2. Manuel the young shrimp picker, 5 years old and a mountain of child labor oyster shells behind him. He worked last year. Understands not a word of English. Biloxi, Miss., February 20, 1911. Photograph by Lewis Hine. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

of photographs to the point where Frances Benjamin Johnston could describe herself as “making a business of photographic illustration and the writing of descriptive articles for magazines, illustrated weeklies and newspapers.” (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 361)

But, by 1915 people in the United States were more concerned with the war in Europe than with tackling social issues at home. The photographic documentary diminished in importance until being revitalized by the political directives of the Farm Security Administration almost 20 years later.

Jussim concludes that the era between 1880 and 1920 was one of public naiveté about photography. She says that people were so impressed with the ability to reproduce images on a page that they were less concerned with what those images actually said,

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especially when paired with words. The images were accepted as providing proof to a condition or an event. "It was an era deluged by the products of the press and manipulated by warring publishers who displayed few ethical concerns. Photojournalist images would be perceived as visual fact, but were actually more often propaganda and pure sensationalism" (Jussim, 1988, p. 38).

The Farm Security Administration (FSA), originally called the Resettlement Administration, defined photography in 1930s America. There is little argument that the work of the FSA photographers was political, but it was also meant as an educational tool and as documentary reportage. In other words, the images were direct, honest and truthful portrayals that were also created from a particular perspective and with a particular mission to evoke sentiment (see Photo 3).²⁰ This seeming dichotomy of definitions began with the work of the nineteenth-century documentary photographers but matured through the work of the FSA photographers.²¹ The Farm Security Administration body of work was a response by the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration to document the disrupted lives of farm families and to extol the proactive governmental policies during the Great Depression (Stott, 1973).

Farm Security Administration photographs were used in government publications and supplied freely to the press, which made good use of them. Interestingly, the photographs also became art objects as they were exhibited through the Museum of Modern Art. Before the FSA project, documentary and art photography were considered separate and irreconcilable, but the FSA work combined documentation with aesthetics and emotive intent.²² Whatever criticism was leveled at the Farm Security Administration's documentary work for being propagandistic, the images affected the lives of both the subjects and viewers of the photographs. In addition, the body of work became the prominent historical record of the era (Rosenblum, 1984).

Several technological developments of the 1920s generated a new approach to photography and spawned the next evolutionary stage of the illustrated magazine. The German-made Leica 35 mm

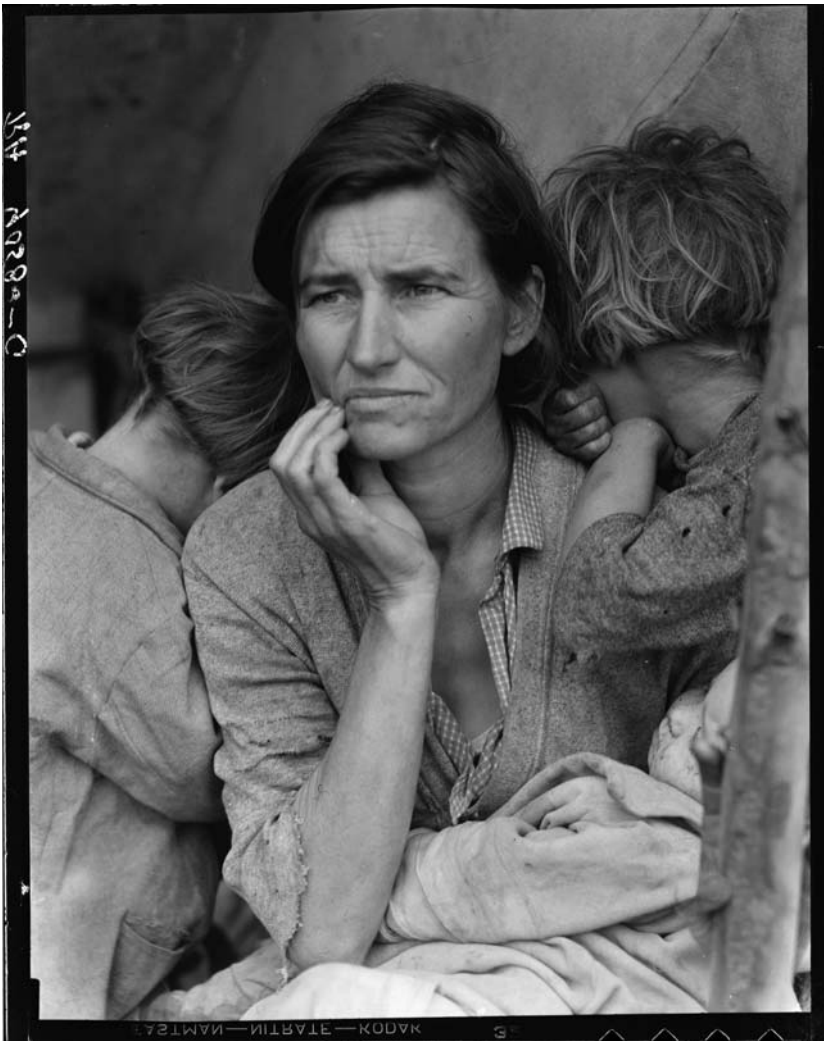


Photo 3. Migrant Mother, Florence Thompson, Nipomo, California, 1936. Photograph by Dorothea Lange. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

camera became available in 1925 (the twin-lens Rolleiflex in 1930). The size of the camera along with the precision and speed of the lenses revolutionized photography, making it much more spontaneous and edgy. Images no longer needed to be perfectly

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sharp, and photographers were free to capture “moments” or slices of life.

The 35 mm roll-film camera not only changed the way in which photographers worked in the field but also altered their post-photographic workflow. Processing labs accounted for an ever-increasing amount of film developing and printing, and photo editors took on more of the responsibilities of film selection for publication (Rosenblum, 1984). This allowed photographers more time to actually photograph, and it allowed publications to more rigidly set deadlines.²³

Another invention that changed the way in which photographers worked and extended the limitations of photography was the flashbulb. The first flashbulbs were produced in Germany in 1929 and brought to the United States a year later by General Electric. Flashbulbs replaced the dangerous and unreliable flash powder that had been used by Riis and Hine and made night and indoor photography a practical reality.²⁴

These technological improvements facilitated the advance of the illustrated magazine during the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in Germany and later the United States. Illustrated magazines also thrived during this period because of “the continuing development of a truly mass audience, mainly in the urban middle class but augmented increasingly by a literate lower class” (Osman & Phillips, 1988, p. 76). And, the troubling state of affairs in Europe and Asia increasingly attracted world attention. “One writer was moved to say, ‘All hell broke loose in the ’30’s and photography has never been the same since’” (Fulton, 1988, p. 107).

Hitler’s ascendancy to power in Germany during the 1930s had consequences beyond creating an international audience for photographic reportage. Many of the photographers and photo editors who had put German illustrated magazines at the forefront of the photographic revolution left Germany for the more stable environment of the United States. They took with them the talent and ideas that would make the illustrated magazines such as *Life* and *Look* fixtures in American life.

These magazines not only printed photographs that were fundamentally different from the static, large-format images that had

been previously published but also used them in ways that were totally new to readers.²⁵ Picture editors became an important element in the creative process. They increasingly became responsible for selecting which photographs would be used and how they would be used. Audiences, meanwhile, became more sophisticated in their appreciation and understanding of photographic reportage.

Newspapers and newspaper photographers of the 1930s and 1940s were not nearly as well regarded as their magazine counterparts. Tabloids, in particular, gave newspaper photography a bad reputation (this remains the popular perception today). Tabloid photographs were (and are) known for their lurid presentation and fascination with sex and violence. “[But] the real problem was with pictures that elbowed words right off the page, relegating them to a minor role as caption or brief explanation. Even worse, some tabloid publishers, eager to increase circulation and profits, encouraged the use of highly manipulated and ‘re-created’ images” (Carlebach, 1997, p. 152).

Largely because they traditionally had little formal education and were known for their “pushy” ways as well as intrusive manner, newspaper photographers of this era received little respect from their colleagues on the word side or from the public. The creation of the National Press Photographers Association in 1946 as well as increased educational opportunities in photojournalism programs such as at the University of Missouri School of Journalism helped ameliorate these conditions, but some vestiges of newsroom hierarchy have remained into the twenty-first century. Despite the poor reputation for newspaper photography during this era, photographers were routinely given a variety of assignments such as immediate or “spot” news, planned or “general” news, sports, entertainment, and features. These diverse genres were later formalized into categories, and today almost every newsroom photographer must ably photograph a wide range of topics.²⁶

The way in which photographs could be distributed was revolutionized in 1935 when the Associated Press (AP) made its first transmission of a photograph. The AP, established in 1848 by five

Northeastern US newspapers for the purpose of reporting the war with Mexico via the telegraph, made it possible for member newspapers to send and receive photographs by means of telephone wires. The introduction of this service enhanced the AP's value and helped to provide new sources of photographs to a readership clamoring for more information about the world around them.

Another source for news photographs were the agencies that developed in the 1920s and 1930s from the syndicate-concept of the nineteenth century. The photographic agencies of the twentieth century, however, did more than collect and distribute photographs from freelance photographers. "Agencies now concerned themselves with generating story ideas, making assignments, and collecting fees in addition to maintaining files of pictures from which editors might choose suitable illustrations" (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 465).

All of the advances made in photojournalism during the 1920s and 1930s were put to use as world war became inevitable. And, the circulations of picture magazines like *Life* and *Look* increased dramatically while readers followed World War II's destruction, heroism, and tragedy through the magazines' photographs. The 35 mm cameras allowed for a spontaneity and sense of immediacy that had not been present in war photography before this time.

Heightened expectations by editors and the public accompanied the advanced technology. Photographs were expected to arrive from the warfront to the publication in a timely manner. Military censorship²⁷ could delay the arrival of photographs for months unless the photographer was accredited by the military. And, in a kind of "Catch 22" arrangement, the only journalists who could receive accreditation were those associated with major news organizations.

Despite these and other obstacles to photographic reportage during the War, photographers, such as W. Eugene Smith, Robert Capa, and Joe Rosenthal, followed the troops into battle and recorded the daily lives and emotions of those under fire while putting themselves at risk. Their work has served as a blueprint

for those war photographers who have covered subsequent wars.

Perhaps no other World War II photograph is more remembered than Joe Rosenthal's image of the US Marines raising the American flag on Mount Suribachi. While working as an AP photographer, Rosenthal was, in today's terminology, embedded with the Marines. "Old Glory goes up on Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima" illustrates the power of the photographic image to go beyond the literal and the two-dimensional to symbolize something much grander and universal. Although the image remained controversial for several decades because an original smaller flag was replaced by the larger one captured in the photograph, and there were suspicions that Rosenthal had requested the change in flags, "people believed in the spirit it conveyed and were cheered by its sense of victory over adversity. It had an immediate, overwhelming impact on the nation" (Fulton, 1988, p. 161).

Rosenthal, who died in 2006, insisted that the situation was not manipulated and that he recorded a real moment. *Life* magazine, which had initially declined to use the photograph for fear that it had been posed, published it three weeks later. The magazine reasoned that, whatever the circumstances under which it was taken, it had become to the nation, and to the marines, a symbol of their heroism. "Old Glory" was accorded iconic value because people believed in its truthfulness. Believing came first. In 1945, Rosenthal was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for the photograph (Fulton, 1988, p. 161).

The United States emerged as the preeminent world power at the end of World War II. Its power was based not only on its military and technological advances but also upon its economy and cultural exports. An American cultural empire began to expand worldwide through a variety of mediums such as radio, film, and printed publications. In the United States the picture magazines, like *Life* and *Look*, reigned over all others. Because the picture magazines demanded countless numbers of photographs, photographers, especially magazine photographers, gained in stature, became better compensated and were able to exercise more control over the stories and photographs that they pursued.²⁸ The

honeymoon between magazine photographers and the publications was short-lived.

The attempts by magazine photographers during the late 1940s to have increased input concerning what stories to cover as well as photographic selection and captioning, sequencing and cropping of their photographs began a struggle between photographers and editors that continues today.²⁹ The strain between photographers and editors over these issues contributed to some photographers leaving the magazine world and finding other outlets for their work. W. Eugene Smith was perhaps the strongest proponent of photographers exercising control over their own photographs. Having made some of the most famous and elegant photographic essays for *Life* magazine, Smith repeatedly fought with editors and in 1954 resigned in anger (Rosenblum, 1984). He believed that the press's proclivity for "giving the public what it wants," was undermining the integrity and potential of photography. He subsequently pursued projects that he felt were worthy of serious photographic reportage.³⁰

David Douglas Duncan was another photographer who worked for *Life* magazine, covering the war in Korea during the early 1950s. Although he followed the same path as the World War II photographers by assuming the perspective of the common soldier, his photographs pushed the aesthetic limits by filling the frames with the faces of his subjects. The compositional tension mirrored the emotional tension of the Marines. "Pushed to the edge of their endurance, the men display utter exhaustion and the gamut of emotions" (Fulton, 1988, p. 168).

Newspaper photography had become more professional as a result of the founding of the National Press Photographers' Association in 1946, but frequently fell prey to managed news events, hokey features and a prodigious use of wire-service photographs. The news consumers' seemingly unquenchable desire for all kinds of photographs may have lessened the overall impact and quality of the everyday newspaper work.

Thus perhaps it was unavoidable, and even necessary, that the most influential figure in news photography in subsequent decades

was a man who essentially spurned the medium, creating what might be called anti-photojournalism. Swiss-born Robert Frank said of his own work that he wanted to produce images that would make “all explanations unnecessary.” In other words, abolish the necessity for text.

At the same time that Frank was working to undermine the notion of the event, and even the individual, as a focus for news, photojournalism continued to expand its frontiers. In the blandness of the postwar [Korea], photographers turned their vision on the corporation and the suburb. (Russell, 1995, p. 127)

The proliferation of television posed dramatic challenges to photography in the 1960s. Advertisers moved marketing dollars from magazines such as *Life* and *Look* to television, and the mass audience went to television for day-to-day news about one of the major stories of the 1960s – the war in Vietnam. At the same time a group of committed photojournalists provided readers with hard-hitting and emotional images from the war that had “staying power.” The images did not vanish on the screen but were viewed again and again by a public that increasingly turned against the war.

The photographers who covered the Vietnam War included men and women who came from varied backgrounds and encompassed the full range of previous experience as photographers. Women such as Catherine Leroy (the Overseas Press Club) won international awards for their work, and others like Dickey Chapelle were killed while on assignment. Associated Press photographer Eddie Adams had been a Marine during the Korean War while Philip Jones Griffiths had to beg Magnum to give him assignments so that he could maintain his credentials as a journalist and remain in Vietnam. Every photographer had his or her own story about why and how they were in Vietnam, but the small cadre of photographers that provided the overwhelming majority of images were deeply committed to their profession.³¹ They visually and emotionally documented the brutal destruction and tragedy of war for combatants and civilians alike.

The lasting impact of these images – such as Huynh Cong (Nick) Ut’s photograph of the Vietnamese girl after a napalm

attack and Larry Burrows' photograph of a helicopter crew member's death – gives testament to the photographers and to the power of the medium. This did not go unnoticed by the government or the military.

During the Vietnam era, war photography became, normatively, a criticism of war. This was bound to have consequences: mainstream media are not in the business of making people feel queasy about the struggles for which they are being mobilized, much less of disseminating propaganda against waging war.

Since then, censorship – the most extensive kind, self-censorship, as well as censorship imposed by the military – has found a large and influential number of apologists. (Sontag, 2003, p. 65)

The other great story of the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement, had its origins in the 1940s, but was scarcely covered by the mainstream press (although it was reported in the black press) during the early years of protest. The issue was so politically and socially divisive that many hoped that it would just go away, but the movement for social justice pressed on and eventually could not be ignored.

Flip Schulke was one of the few photographers who began documenting the Civil Rights movement during the 1950s. Since the movement received little attention from the mainstream press, Schulke relied upon *Ebony*, a picture magazine directed toward an African-American audience, for his assignments. *Ebony* used Schulke, a white photographer, because black photographers were harassed and/or arrested when trying to photograph in the South (see Photo 4) (Fulton, 1988).

By the 1960s black photographers had been at least partially empowered through the insistence of Civil Rights leaders. Chapnick explains,

In the United States, there is an ethnically and a racially based press, each of which has its own constituency. Moneeta Sleet, Jr., who graduated from a black Kentucky college, Kentucky State, and received a master's degree in journalism from New York University, opted for a career with black publications. . . . In 1969, he



Photo 4. A protester against integration in Birmingham; Alabama; 1963. Photograph by Flip Schulke. © Flip Schulke, All Rights Reserved.

received the Pulitzer Prize for his photograph of Coretta King and her daughter, Bernice, at Martin Luther King's funeral in 1968. It was the first time that the Pulitzer Prize was given in feature photography . . .

It was decided that there would be restricted coverage, and Sleet was designated as a "pool" photographer . . . Originally all the photographers were white, but because Andrew Young and Coretta King interceded and insisted that a black photographer be included in the pool, Sleet was able to be inside the church during the service. Mrs. King decided that either a black would be included, or there would be none at all. (Chapnick, 1994, pp. 104, 105)

The importance of women and minority photojournalists cannot be overstated. As W. Eugene Smith said, "There is nothing objective about journalism." A diverse group of (photo)journalists is necessary to address those perspectives that are often missing in

the mainstream press. The independence and diversity of photographers during the Civil Rights movement and again during the Vietnam War provided the public with views that ran counter to those supported by institutions of authority and played a role in the social and political change of the 1960s. Furthermore, the photographic reportage from these events inspired the next generation of “concerned photographers” such as Eugene Richards, Eli Reed, and Mary Ellen Mark.

The final two decades of the twentieth century brought many technological changes to photojournalism. In the 1980s newspapers began to use color regularly.³² This initially changed the way in which photographers had to work as the color film demanded that special care be taken with light. Photographers found themselves using flash more regularly than was necessary with the black-and-white films. As color negative film became more flexible and the Photoshop software was developed photographers were once again able to work more often with available light.

USA Today, founded in 1982, led the way in the newspaper industry’s conversion to color photographs. Published by the Gannett Company, the nationally distributed newspaper used the front page to display a variety of stories accompanied by bold and colorful visual elements. Newspaper publishers across the country reacted by redesigning (some would argue “over-designing”) their own newspapers and instituting color photography. At many newspapers photographers and editors were forced to consider packaging over content.

Digital cameras began to replace film cameras in many newsrooms in the early 1990s. As a result the routines for photographers changed in several ways. Photographic images are now stored electronically in cameras and in computers. Photographers are able to download their images from the camera to a laptop computer while working in the field and then transmit the edited and cropped images via satellite to almost anywhere else in the world. This technology has also resulted in a number of ethical transgressions and has altered the expectations of some editors.³³

Despite the technological advances in photography, the goal of photographic reportage remains the same:

Photojournalists . . . are more than spectators in an historical grandstand. Being there is important, being an eyewitness is significant, but the crux of the matter is bearing witness. To bear witness is to make known, to confirm, to give testimony to others. The distribution and publication of the pictures make visible the unseen, the unknown, and the forgotten. (Fulton, 1988, p. 107)

Photojournalists have historically exposed themselves to danger, endured substandard conditions and worked incredibly long hours to excel at their profession but also to give a voice to those who otherwise would not be heard (or seen). This is the real strength of photojournalism.

Notes

- 1 Despite the necessity of long exposures and the difficulty of making duplicate images, the Daguerreotype was (rarely) used as a means of visual documentation. "The photographers who took the images apparently had no intention or interest in distributing them beyond their immediate local audiences, who had themselves been witnesses to the actual events . . .
Perhaps the most significant and most historically important example of this phenomenon is the large group of daguerreotypes – about sixty plates are now known – taken in Mexico during the Mexican War by an as-yet-unidentified photographer who spent some time with the American troops" (Stapp, 1988, p. 8).
- 2 This often caused hardship as photographers working in extreme climates such as Egypt and the Middle East were forced to coat and process their film in enclosed tents where temperatures were well over 100 degrees with "the collodion fizzing – boiling up over the glass" (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 116).
- 3 Rosenblum points out that during the mid-nineteenth century "in order to present occurrences in which there was continuous, if not very rapid, action, it was necessary to restage the scene" (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 167). Present-day technology makes "restaging the

scene” to freeze the action unnecessary. Photographers have been known, however, to restage the scene for other reasons – composition, capturing a stronger moment, improving the light. Doing so has become an ethical taboo, as news publications need news consumers to believe that photographers are recording rather than creating the news.

- 4 Yeshayahu Nir examines the way in which cultural, national and religious predispositions affected the choice of subject and visual perspectives of nineteenth-century photographers documenting the “Holy Land.” His research indicates that (Protestant) British photographers were generally interested in landscape while (Catholic) French photographers were generally interested in art and architecture (Nir, 1985).
- 5 The idea to “imbed” photographers with military units may be as old as war photography itself. Rosenblum says, “Civil War reportage owed its successes also to the readiness of the military to accept photography as a new visual tool, hiring photographers other than ‘Brady’s Men’ to work with various units” (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 185).
- 6 Marianne Fulton declares, “In retrospect, that war [the Civil War] broke out at just that critical juncture in the history of American photography when advances in technology made reportage with the camera feasible, and a perceived demand for news-related images provided an economic incentive” (Fulton, 1988, p. 15).
- 7 Stapp says that there were no staff photographers or even freelance news photographers until late in the nineteenth century. He says, however, that the illustrated journals would publish “photographs of subjects that captured their readers’ interest – usually the aftermaths of catastrophes. These photographs were often otherwise available on the market, usually as stereographs. It can be argued that stereographs provide the link between the pioneer journalistic photographers of the Civil War and the first professional photojournalists, who began to appear in the 1890s” (Stapp, 1988, p. 31).

Stereographs are instruments that hold two nearly identical images beside each other. The images are simultaneously viewed through an optical device that magnifies the images and makes them appear three-dimensional.

- 8 The halftone process relies on a screen that translates the photograph into small dots. “This involves coating a plate with a light-sensitive emulsion, exposing it to a negative through one of a variety of fine-or-course screens and processing the plates to make the

resultant 'dots' acid resistant. After etching the plate to remove the metal from around the 'dots,' its raised surfaces are inked with a roller . . . and the image is transferred under pressure to paper. . . . The development of the process halftone plate [patented in 1881] also inaugurated an era of photojournalism of a broader nature" (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 451).

An argument could be made that the halftone process accomplished for photography what Guttenberg's press had achieved for the printed word.

- 9 Carlebach says: "This market was catered to by George Eastman, an inventor and entrepreneur from Rochester, New York, with a keen sense of the profit potential in photography and a single-minded determination to dominate the field" (Carlebach, 1997, p. 16).

The popularization of the small digital and cell phone cameras of today might be akin to that of the hand-held cameras that were first sold at the end of the nineteenth century. In both cases it became easier for the general populace to visually document everyday life.

- 10 At the same time, the great number of photographs made available to news consumers by the halftone process may have also elevated the news photographer's professional standing among the public (Rhode & McCall, 1961).
- 11 Jussim says that another result of this relationship was (and is) that newspapers often failed to pursue stories that were potentially harmful to their advertisers since advertising provided a substantial portion of newspaper revenue.
- 12 Rosenblum says that photographer Jimmy Hare "regularly achieved the sense of real-life immediacy" covering the war in Cuba while using a handheld camera (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 463).

Two decades later Hare was sent to Europe by *Collier's* to cover the fighting in France, but by then military authorities had restricted civilian photographers to the point that Hare "complained that, 'to so much as make a snapshot without official permission in writing means arrest'" (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 463).

- 13 "According to one observer, during the British army's bloody operations against the Boers in South Africa in 1899, a remarkable 'thirty-three percent of the correspondents have been killed or wounded, or have died of disease incurred in the line of duty'" (Carlebach, 1997, p. 84).
- 14 Writing about the 1992 presidential campaign between Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush, art and photography critic, Charles Hagen,

says, “In the mix of actions, ideas, and pageantry that makes up a Presidential race, two parallel campaigns vie for voters’ attention. One is the explicit campaign of issues, while the other, equally important, deals with images and symbols” (Hagen, 1992).

- 15 “The number of women employed by major American newspapers averaged about five,” wrote Anne O’Hagan in 1898, though on “some conservative sheets there are but two or three, reserved for such dainty uses as the reporting of women’s club meetings and writing weekly fashion and complexion advices.” It was different at the yellow papers. O’Hagan noted that on progressive newspapers as many as eight or ten women could be seen [covering a variety of stories]” (Carlebach, 1997, pp. 48–49). Even through the 1960s women reporters were mostly confined to covering “soft” news and “women’s” pages.
- 16 One editor from 1901 says, “I would rather see my daughters starve than that they should have ever heard or seen what women on my staff have been compelled to hear and see” (Carlebach, 1997, p. 49). Remarkably similar attitudes may still be expressed – although rarely. Chapnick refers to a story told by photographer Judy Griesedieck. Griesedieck, who confronted an editor over the types of assignments she was receiving, was told, “If I sent you to a bad part of town, and something happened to you, I’d feel really terrible. It would be like sending my daughter, and I don’t think I could live with it” (Chapnick, 1994, p. 92).
- 17 Gordon Parks contributed to the Farm Security Administration (FSA) project during the early 1940s and later became a staff photographer for *Life* magazine from 1948 to 1961, photographing several highly acclaimed essays.
- 18 “Fully aware of the purpose to be served, the photographer selected appropriate vantage points and ways to frame the subject, at times transcending the limitation implied in the title – that of an outsider looking at slum life from across the deep chasm separating middle-from lower-class life. While he may not have entered very deeply into the space occupied by the ‘other,’ his was not a casual view” (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 361).
- 19 “With their focus mainly on people and social conditions, images in the documentary style combine lucid pictorial organization with an often passionate commitment to humanistic values – to ideals of dignity, the right to decent conditions of living and work, to truthfulness” (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 359).

- 20 Although the intent of the photographer is a factor in the way in which photographs are read or interpreted, it's not the only factor. Each viewer brings his or her own background and perspective into the equation as will be discussed in Chapter 3 under the "construction of reality."
- 21 The Farm Security Administration documentary project provided an opportunity for some of the twentieth-century's most talented women (Dorothea Lange and Margaret Bourke-White) and minority (Gordon Parks) photographers to produce a large body of work that received national attention.
- 22 Carlebach says, "Consensus on the need to produce images of things as they are breaks down when considering the other major function of the documentary photographer: interpretation. Here, the objectivity of the lens gives way to opinion, and the raw visual data collected on film is molded into argument and narrative" (Carlebach, 1997). And, Howard Chapnick says, "The Farm Security Administration photographers walked in the footsteps of Riis and Hine during the dark days of the Great Depression, using documentary photography not just to record the urban and rural upheaval caused by adverse economic conditions, but also as an advocacy propaganda tool for forcing social change" (Chapnick, 1994, p. 16).
- 23 This phenomenon is sometimes being repeated with, in my opinion, disastrous results due to the replacement of film cameras by digital cameras. In 2000 as director of photography for Copley Chicago Newspapers I attended a meeting for the senior editors of the Copley chain in Illinois. During this meeting, the managing editor of a newspaper in southern Illinois announced that the average number of daily assignments per photographer was being raised from three or four to six or seven. He explained that the digital camera allowed the photographer to transmit her images to editors rather than having to physically return to the newspaper to process the film. Although there is probably some justification for increased expectations, the mindset of calculating expectations into a pre-determined number of additional assignments does not account for a photographer's most precious resource – time – time to establish relationships with subjects, time to capture the strongest moments, time to create the most aesthetically pleasing images and time to get thorough and accurate caption information.
- 24 The Autochrome color process was invented at the beginning of the twentieth century and was commercially introduced by the

Lumiere brothers in France by 1907. Color wasn't used regularly in photographic reportage, however, until several decades later. *National Geographic* magazine first published several photographs using the Autochrome process in April 1916.

- 25 "For its concept, *Life*, a publication of Henry Luce, drew upon many sources. In addition to the example of the European picture weeklies, it took into account the popularity of cinema newsreels, in particular 'The March of Time' with which the Luce publishing enterprise was associated. The successes of Luce's other publications . . . also were factors in the decision to launch a serious picture weekly that proposed to humanize through photography the complex political and social issues of the time for a mass audience" (Rosenblum, 1984, p. 476). *Life* magazine, as well as the other illustrated magazines of the mid-twentieth century, worked with the premise that readers wanted to be informed and entertained. Each issue contained a variety of elements such as serious news, social commentary, entertainment, sports and "slices of life."
- 26 The categories for almost every major photojournalism contest today mirror the types of assignments that were given to newspaper photographers in the 1930s.
- 27 "With the declaration of war on December 8 [1941], censorship became a mandatory part of the routine editing process" (Fulton, 1988, p. 143).
- 28 "The majority of news photographers remained the employees of countless newspapers and major press organizations, but the 1947 founding of the photographers' cooperative, Magnum, established the revolutionary principle that picture takers should own the rights to their work" (Russell, 1995, p. 125).
- 29 Photographers sometimes believe that their subjects or their photographs or both are not given sufficient respect or consideration by an editor. Some photographers think that they know better than the editors which photographs should be published and in what order. And, at times the photographer worries that someone, who has not witnessed the event, person, etc. firsthand, making the editorial decisions will compromise the basic integrity of the story.
- 30 *Minamata*, a book detailing the effects of industrial mercury poisoning on a fishing community in Japan, is perhaps W. Eugene Smith's most famous work. Smith says of *Minamata*, "This is not an objective book. The first word I would remove from the folklore

of journalism is the word 'objective.' That would be a giant step toward truth in the free press. And, perhaps, 'free' should be the second word removed. Freed of these two distortions, the journalist and photographer could get to his real responsibilities. . . . My first responsibility is to my readers" (Smith & Smith, 1975, prologue).

- 31 The ability to document the disastrous effects of war so closely and so broadly was partially due to the fact that press credentials were so easily obtained. AP photographer Eddie Adams said, "Anybody could get accredited. I don't care who you were. You could just type your own little letter saying so-and-so is a so-and-so – it didn't have to be on a letterhead. It was a joke. You typed it up and then you were accredited" (Moeller, 1989, p. 360).
- 32 During the 1950s several magazines began using color photographs (although rarely for news stories since the film speeds were still slow), and a handful of newspapers ran color on the front and/or back pages of the A sections. This practice encouraged (as it did in the 1980s) photographers to set up photographs and to rely heavily on artificial lighting.
- 33 The significance of these changes for good and ill is addressed in Chapters 4 ("Newsroom Culture and Routine"), 6 ("Ethics") and 8, ("The Iraq War").

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