

Photojournalism History

Writers and reporters have helped shape history,
but so have photojournalists

By Bradley Wilson

AT THE TIME OF THE CIVIL WAR, 1861-65, photography was a new process. In the mid-1800s, the average person was not used to seeing a photographic portrait much less images from the battlefield. Photojournalism got its start when people such as Mathew Brady documented the Civil War by lugging, on horseback, cameras that weighed many pounds.

A few years later, Jacob Riis made a difference in the lives of the citizens of New York City by publishing *How the Other Half Lives*. Soon photographic evidence became the rule for publications dealing with social problems.

It was not until the 1890s, however, that the halftone process, rather than an artist's wood etching, enabled the publication of realistic-looking photographs. That process inaugurated an era of photojournalism, and these "visual surrogates of reality" became an integral aspect of campaigns for social reform.

In the 100-plus years since, the technology has changed – we have moved from an era of chemical-based photography into the digital era – but the mission of photojournalists has not. As Robert Frank said, "There is one thing the photograph must contain, the humanity of the moment. This kind of photography is realism. But realism is not enough – there has to be vision and the two together can make a good photograph."

Pioneers who have led the way in photography include the following:

Mathew Brady

After learning the daguerreotype process, an early photographic process, Mathew Brady (1823-1896) built a portrait business with galleries in New York and Washington. At his galleries the public could view photographs of famous people of the day. When the Civil War broke out, Brady got official approval to docu-

ment the war. He hired other photographers, set up field units in several states and used large-format cameras and traveling darkrooms pulled by horse teams. Brady and his assistants took at least 3,500 photographs of the war, some of the earliest examples, not only of documentary and war photography specifically, but also of photojournalism.

Jacob Riis

A Danish immigrant, Jacob Riis (1849-1914) had a knack for reporting. He wrote about what he saw on the streets in the slums of New York City. His stories in *How the Other Half Lives* used 17 halftones and 19 hand drawings based on his photos. By portraying a part of the city few acknowledged existed, Riis opened people's eyes to the deplorable living conditions for many in the city. His writing and photographs helped change the city for the better.



Dorothea Lange's most famous photograph, "Migrant Mother," was part of a documentary of the Great Depression commissioned by the federal government.

Understanding the history of photography and photojournalism will increase students' appreciation for their ability to present visual stories. The summaries on these pages can be used as a basis for individualized research, especially on the Internet, or to help develop a unit for photography classes or introductory journalism classes.



Alfred Eisenstaedt

“My god, it’s unbelievable,” declared Alfred Eisenstaedt (1989-1995) of his life’s work. Called the father of photojournalism, Eisenstaedt was among the first to use a 35mm camera, which he used to take candid photographs under available light. “It’s more important to click with people than to click the shutter,” he said. Born in West Prussia, now Poland, he was one of the original four photographers for *Life*.

“I have found that the most important element in my equipment is not an expensive camera or a unique lens but patience, patience, patience,” Eisenstaedt said. “If you don’t know how to stand knee-deep in water for hours or sit broiling in the sunshine while mosquitoes buzz around your head, remaining absolutely motionless yet relaxed and alert, you are finished before you start. It is a question of temperament more than technique.”

Dorothea Lange

While best known for her work documenting the Great Depression for the Farm Securities Administration (FSA), Dorothea Lange (1895-1965) was an accomplished documentary photographer of many significant events. She documented Japanese internment camps during World War II. The true impact of Lange’s work was not felt until 1972 when the Whitney Museum incorpo-

rated 27 of her photographs into “Executive Order 9066,” an exhibit about the Japanese internment.

New York Times critic A.D. Coleman called Lange’s photographs “documents of such a high order that they convey the feelings of the victims as well as the facts of the crime.” Her best known work, “Migrant Mother,” is one of her most powerful images. It conveys a depth of emotion uncommon in most photographs. While working for the U.S. government, she documented the lives of everyday Americans. She also shot powerful portraits and documented the lives of everyday people in the Middle East and in the Far East.

Margaret Bourke-White

One of the world’s first and most famous photojournalists, Margaret Bourke-White (1904-1971) created the photo essay, which uses a series of pictures to tell a story. She documented the Great Depression and World War II. During World War II she was the only female photographer permitted in war zones by the Army. Her first published photographs, depicting campus scenes, appeared in the Cornell University newspaper. In India, she photographed Mohandas Gandhi and recorded the establishment of the Indian state and then the riots that preceded and followed the partition of Pakistan from India. Bourke-White was in India interviewing Gandhi a few hours before he was assassinated in 1948. She died of Parkinson’s disease.

Henri Cartier-Bresson

An aspiring painter and student of literature, Henri Cartier-Bresson (1904-) realized early in his life how the new, small and light 35mm cameras made it possible to capture motion and still have a well-composed image. He was influenced by the contemporary movement known as surrealism, which encouraged artists and writers to explore the meaning that lay hidden below the surface of everyday life.

Using his camera to identify what has come to be called the “decisive

moment,” Cartier-Bresson is known for his ability to find these occasions and preserve them. Each of his images is a complete composition within a single frame of film, and it cannot be cropped or altered without destroying the whole. In 1947, Lincoln Kirstein compared his method to “the preoccupied intensity of a fisherman playing to land a big catch or a boxer landing a knockout.” He was one of the founders of the Magnum group.

Robert Capa

Known for his war photography, Robert Capa’s (1913-1954) most famous photos are those of the Spanish civil war. Firm in his belief that “if your pictures aren’t good enough, you aren’t close enough,” Capa put himself in the middle of the action. He documented the first wave of D-Day invasion forces in France and jumped with paratroopers into Germany during World War II. He was killed in Vietnam by a land mine. “He was one of the founders of the Magnum group.

David Douglas Duncan

Born in Kansas City, David Douglas Duncan (1916-) first got a taste of spot news while attending the University of Arizona. He heard on the radio that Tucson’s largest hotel was on fire. He rushed downtown with his 39 cent Bakelite camera and snapped his first photograph of a frantic man retrieving a suitcase from the burning hotel. The next day he read in the newspaper that the man he had photographed was John Dillenger whose suitcase had been filled with guns and stolen money.

While roaming as a free-lance photographer after graduating from college, Duncan photographed every stage of a fishing exhibition for giant turtles. His pictures appeared in *National Geographic* magazine. He joined the Marines and earned honors such as the Legion of Merit, a Purple Heart, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, six Battle Stars and three Air Medals.

After retiring from the military, he covered the conflict between the

Wounded Union soldiers get medical attention after a battle at Savage’s Station, Va., during the American Civil War on July 3, 1862. Gen. George McClellan’s forces made a stand after Confederate troops followed them in at close pursuit. (AP Photo/Mathew B. Brady)

Arabs and the Jews in Palestine. He covered the Korean war and depicted the horror and heroism of combat as seen through the eyes of the Marines from the First Division. During his visit to Moscow, Duncan obtained permission from Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev to photograph the art treasures of the Kremlin. His work resulted in the first full-color photographs ever made of the interior of the Kremlin. His photographs are in the collection at the University of Texas at Austin.



Sebastião Salgado's exhibit, "Migrations: Humanity in Transition," of which this photo is a part, is the culmination of a six-year documentary.

W. Eugene Smith

Born in Wichita, Kan., W. Eugene Smith (1918-1978) was respected for his compassionate images and uncompromising positions concerning craftsmanship and the social responsibilities of the photographer. From his early work as a combat photographer to his photo essay on mercury poisoning of the fishing village of Minamata, Japan, in the early 1970s, Smith advocated the photographer's right to direct editorial control over the layout of images, captions and text for publication and exhibition.

He studied the people he photographed in detail before taking any pictures. "I am constantly torn between the attitude of the conscientious journalist, who is a recorder and interpreter of the facts, and of the creative artist, who often is necessarily at poetic odds with the literal facts," he said.

Sebastião Salgado

After completing his coursework for a doctorate in economics, Salgado (1944-) began his work as a photo reporter in the early 1970s. His

images are gorgeous and beautiful, but they often express human suffering. "What I want in my pictures is not that they'll look like art objects," he said. "They are journalistic pictures. All my pictures. No exceptions."

Salgado rose to international fame with his photographs of famine in the Sahel (1984-85). Then he made an indelible impression on the international mind with *Workers* (1986-92), a documentation of manual labor around the world. And he continues to expand his scope even further with the six-year project, "Migrations: Humanity in Transition."

James Nachtwey

Images from the Vietnam War and the American Civil Rights movement had a powerful effect and influenced James Nachtwey's (1948-) decision to become a photographer. In 1976, he started work as a newspaper photographer in New Mexico. In 1980, he moved to New York to begin a career as a magazine photographer.

One of the few photographers still to shoot for himself and then to get work published or displayed, Nachtwey has received numerous awards, including being named magazine photographer of the year six times.

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TIMELINE

- 1839 Optical and chemical principles combined to allow the creation of camera obscura, the first "camera" (actually the result of inventions that go back as far as the fifth century B.C.).
- 1871 *Canadian Illustrated News* prints first halftone in a magazine.
- 1877 First illustrated daily newspaper, *The Daily Graphic*.
- 1880 *The Daily Graphic* publishes first halftone in American daily newspaper.
- 1900 Frances Benjamin Johnston and Jessie Tarbox Beals, who followed shortly after Johnston, become first female photojournalists.
- 1903 Graflex camera introduced in U.S.; a single-lens reflex camera; it used roll film; *National Geographic* magazine, started in 1888, runs first halftone.
- 1910 Speed Graphic introduced; a 4x5 camera, it had interchangeable lenses and two shutters.
- 1923 First photograph transmitted by wire.
- 1924 "Composograph," first staged and faked news photo, born by combining elements from different photos; first Leica cameras using 35mm motion picture film and extremely fast (f/1.8 or so) lenses.
- 1925 Flashbulb invented in Germany.
- 1929 Speed Graphic replaces Graflex as primary camera of U.S. newspapers.
- 1935 Associated Press establishes wire photo network.
- 1936 United Press establishes wire photo network.
- 1936 *Life* magazine publishes first issue.
- 1937 Kodachrome color film becomes available for 35mm still camera; revolutionizes color photography.
- 1941 Portable electronic flash becomes practical.
- 1942 Kodacolor color negative film introduced.
- 1947 Polaroid camera invented.
- 1954 Tri-X black-and-white film marketed by Kodak.
- 1960 35mm cameras becoming standard for photojournalists.
- 1978 AP introduces electronic darkroom.
- 1982 Digital still camera becomes available.
- 1987 Auto and self-focusing cameras standard.
- 1988 Kodak introduces ISO 3200 film.
- 1995 Color negative film the standard for newspapers.
- 1999 Digital still cameras widespread; high-resolution cameras (5 megapixels) retail for about \$5,000.

The power of photographs

DIRECTIONS

Below are several of the most famous photos in world history along with basic caption information. Pick one of these photographs. Research the photographer and the events surrounding the photograph and write a two-page paper about why the photograph made such an impact on society.

U.S. President Harry S. Truman holds up an election day edition of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, which, based on early results, mistakenly announced "Dewey Defeats Truman" on Nov. 4, 1948. The president told well-wishers at St. Louis' Union Station, "That is one for the books!" (AP Photo/Byron Rollins)



Released prisoner of war Lt. Col. Robert L. Stirm is greeted by his family at Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, Calif., as he returns home from the Vietnam War, March 17, 1973. In the lead is Stirm's daughter Lori, 15, followed by son Robert, 14; daughter Cynthia, 11; wife Loretta and son Roger, 12. (AP Photo/Sal Veder)



Astronaut Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, the second man to walk on the moon, poses for fellow astronaut Neil Armstrong, who shot this photo during their moon walk July 20, 1969. Armstrong and the Apollo 11 lunar module are reflected in Aldrin's visor. (AP/Neil Armstrong, NASA)



Oklahoma City firefighter Chris Fields carries a fatally wounded infant after an explosion at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building that happened minutes after 9 a.m. on April 19, 1995. The explosion killed 168 people, making it the deadliest mass murder on U.S. soil at the time. A federal jury in June 1997 convicted Timothy J. McVeigh on all counts connected with the bombing and sentenced him to death. (Photo by and © Charles H. Porter IV-Syigma)



South Vietnamese National Police Chief Brig Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan executes a Viet Cong officer with a single pistol shot in the head in Saigon, Vietnam on Feb. 1, 1968. Carrying a pistol and wearing civilian clothes, the Viet Cong guerrilla was captured near Quang Pagoda, identified as an officer and taken to the police chief. Vietnam was divided into the communist-ruled North and the South, which was supported by the U.S. after Ho Chi Minh ended French colonial rule in 1954. The Vietnam War ended with Paris peace talks on Jan. 23, 1973. South Vietnam declared unconditional surrender to the Viet Cong on April 30, 1975. The surrender ended 30 years of war. (AP Photo/Eddie Adams)

The history of photojournalism

SHORT ANSWER DIRECTIONS

Below are 10 multiple-choice questions. Research each question to determine the right answer. Then circle your choices for the correct answer.

- Who was the photojournalist known for bringing to light how millions of immigrants had to live in overcrowded slums and eke out pitiful wages at enslaving jobs in the early 1990s?
 - Jacob Riis
 - Ansel Adams
 - Lewis W. Hine
 - Alfred Stieglitz
- Who was the photographer who mass marketed photography for amateurs?
 - George Eastman
 - Stanley Kodak
 - Mathew Brady
 - Ansel Adams
- Who was one of the photographers hired by the Farm Security Administration to record the Depression of the 1930s on film?
 - Dorothea Lange
 - Mathew Brady
 - Ansel Adams
 - John Eastman
- What magazine started publication in 1936 and began an era of "picture magazines"? The photo on the cover of the first issue was taken by Margaret Bourke-White.
 - Look*
 - Click*
 - See*
 - Life*
- What camera, used widely at the beginning of the 20th century, began an age of photojournalism? Fitted with a 40-inch telephoto lens, the camera weighed 70 pounds. The large and bulky camera used 4-inch-by-5-inch (or similar) glass plates.
 - Speed Graphic
 - Leica
 - Contax
 - Graflex
- While the earliest miniaturized camera was the Ermanox, which included an f/1.8 lens, it used glass plates. Which camera replaced it and used roll film with as many as 40 frames per roll?
 - Speed Graphic
 - Leica
 - Polaroid
 - Canon 1D
- Using a pattern of dots chemically transferred onto a printing plate, what revolution, first used in a Canadian magazine, enabled the publication of photographs, not artist's renderings of those photographs?
 - wood cut
 - high-speed film
 - halftone
 - panchromatic film
- When was the first photograph transmitted electronically?
 - 1898
 - 1923
 - 1935
 - 1978
- The earliest documented examples of combining pieces of individual photographs into a new image started in the 1920s when newspapers such as the *Evening Graphic* wanted to show court proceedings. What were these early staged and faked photos called?
 - photo illustration
 - composograph
 - halftone
 - tabloid
- What did Harold Edgerton of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology invent in the early 1930s to help in his research? Later the invention gained widespread use in news photography to help photographers take pictures in low-light situations.
 - electric power
 - high-speed film
 - flash powder
 - electronic flash

INDEPENDENT QUEST

Consider the question below. Select a thoughtful answer after reviewing the history of photojournalism. Create a convincing presentation combining words and visuals to prove your choice. Be imaginative as you consider what photography contributes to communication.

When photojournalism got its start in the 1800s, photographers had to carry large, bulky cameras that used low-speed plates requiring long exposures – sometimes several minutes. Now we have digital cameras that do not use film and have shutter speeds of 1/8000th of a second or faster. Which development during the last 150 years is the most important development in the history of photojournalism and why?

Scholastic Journalism Week

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READERS' OATH

*(Written by Debra Angstead,
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I promise to read
Each day and each night.
I know it's the key
To growing up right.

I'll read to myself,
I'll read to a crowd.
It makes no difference
If silent or loud.

I'll read at my desk,
At home and at school,
On my bean bag or bed,
By the fire or pool.

Each book that I read
Puts smarts in my head,
'Cause brains grow more thoughts
The more they are fed.

So I take this oath
To make reading my way
Of feeding my brain
What it needs every day.



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NEA, JEA partner to support literacy

The National Education Association's Read Across America not only celebrates the joys of reading but also honors Dr. Seuss, whose birthday falls on March 2. Although the official celebration will be on Monday, March 3, JEA encourages members to celebrate during Scholastic Journalism Week, the last full week of February.

NEA's Read Across America is the biggest one-day literacy celebration in the U.S., if not the world. On March 2, 2002, there were reading events in all 50 states (as well as several foreign countries) that attracted nearly 40 million readers of all ages.

"All the research shows that when children read outside of school, they do better in school," JEA President H.L. Hall said. "We're trying to find ways to rekindle our students' passion for reading."

▶ VISIT [HTTP://WWW.NEA.ORG/READACROSS/](http://WWW.NEA.ORG/READACROSS/)

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