Photojournalism

Content and Technique

Greg Lewis

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and
Technique

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This book is dedicated to my family, who put up with so much during its preparation; to my students, from whom I have learned so much; and to the memory of Earl Theisen. Some day I hope to be at least half the teacher he was.

Preface

This book is intended for first- and second-semester courses in photojournalism. It is organized into four sections, the first being an introduction to the medium. The introduction attempts a definition of photojournalism and explains the differences between pictures made for publication and those made for personal purposes.

Part II is for those who are learning the tools of photography: cameras, film, lenses, darkroom procedures, light, and color. Classes starting from ground zero will have the information they need right up front. For programs that require students to take a basic photo course elsewhere, this information can be a handy review.

For the beginner, I believe it is important to start shooting right away; therefore, I have presented cameras, film, and exposure before taking up the topic of lenses. Because darkroom time is at a premium in a beginning course, the new photographer can at least start shooting as early in the course as possible, saving the details of lenses for a few weeks. Instructors will note that I placed the all-important section on push processing in the Appendix. The purpose is to avoid confusing beginners with too many options at once. I strongly believe that conventional methods should be mastered before trying these techniques. Part II closes with an introduction to color, an element of increasing importance in photojournalism.

Second-semester courses will more than likely start at Part III, which begins with some thoughts on composition, a topic that is as important to the photographer as syntax is to the writer. These basics are followed by specific approaches used in the major areas of photojournalism: news, features, sports, studio, the photo story, and finally, editing the picture. The editing chapter, however, is intended to be only an introduction to a subject that could be an entire book in itself.

Finally, those elements of photojournalism that go beyond the details of making the photo are presented in Part IV: ethical and legal questions, education and careers, history, and a look to the electronic future.

One thing I learned from preparing this book is that it is impossible to create a work that will fit the structure of every course. It was my goal to make the chapters independent so an instructor could switch the order of reading to fit his or her program. Some instructors might prefer to mix the material from Part II ("Tools") with Part III ("Techniques"). Others believe, for example, that cameras and lenses should be studied together.

Most photojournalists will not go to exotic places and shoot unusual events; therefore, I have tried to balance contest-winning photos with the kinds of pictures and situations a photojournalist will deal with on a daily basis. I think that every photographer should strive to do the best job possible, and

sometimes the best job is a straightforward one. I agree with Rich Clarkson, who recently said: "[R]outine visual reporting is called for in some cases—every potential picture cannot and should not be a dramatic and graphic masterpiece. Simple reporting is sometimes the best solution to informing the reader." Where appropriate, case histories are used to illustrate the application of a concept.

Although this book contains considerable technical information, it is important for the student to remember that technique is only a means, not the end, of photojournalism. When photographers gather, they often talk about cameras and lenses, yet as photo editor Sandra Eisert says, you must know the reason why you are making pictures and what you are trying to say. This book does not pretend to be the last or most complete word on this subject, and as I have written in the chapter on education and careers, I encourage all students to broaden their knowledge by taking as many courses in the liberal arts as time and finances will allow.

I owe a great deal to the many generous photographers who have loaned photographs. Without their help, this book would have been impossible. I wish there was space here to name each one individually, but you will find their names adjacent to their work. Almost one-third of the photos are the work of students or recent graduates. Photos not credited are by the author.

A special thank you is due Robert Hanashiro for his help with the chapter on sports. I would also like to thank my contributors for the chapters on law, electronic imaging, and the history of photojournalism. I drove John Zelezny mad with my requests that the law chapter be as specific as possible in spite of his protestations that the law is never absolute. I thank him for an excellent chapter. Mike Morse had the difficult task of writing about electronic photography and image processing, a field that is changing so rapidly that some of his predictions are sure to become old news long before the life of this book expires. And Beverly Bethune faced the almost impossible task of compressing 150 years of history into so few pages. She agonized over what to cut in order to keep the chapter within our space limits. I think she did an exceptional job.

Finally, I want to apologize to my family for all they put up with during the preparation of this book. A textbook is the Mount Everest of the journalist's profession, and I thank them for waiting so patiently while I climbed it.

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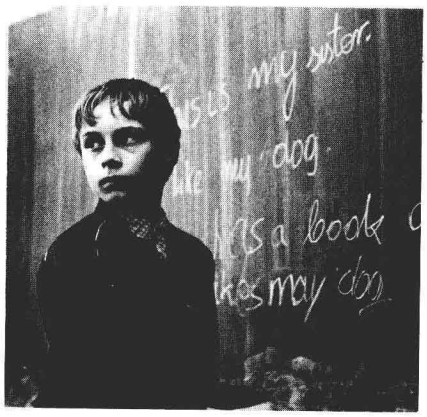

Photojournalism

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Part I
Introduction

Opening the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, December 22, 1989. *(Stephen J. Pringle)*

Chapter 1

Photojournalism: A Visual Mass Medium

"There were two things I wanted to do. I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected. I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated."

—Lewis Hine

"The art of photography is a dynamic process of giving form to ideas and explaining man to men."

—Edward Steichen

Outline

Figure 1–1 In 1908 Lewis Hine made this photo as part of an extensive study of child labor abuses. His pictures contributed to the passage of child labor laws. *(Lewis Hine, from the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House.)*

The Nature of Photojournalism

Although neither Lewis Hine nor Edward Steichen, quoted on the previous page, were photojournalists as we use the term today, their ideas, when combined, lead us toward a definition of photojournalism. Hine began his career as a social reformer who used the camera to expose child labor abuses just after the turn of the century. And Steichen, whose achievements in photography are many, presided over the creation of the Family of Man exhibit in the mid-1950s. It was quite possibly the most successful photo exhibit in history.

Hine used photography as an instrument of social change, and his comments imply an advocacy role for photojournalism.* But more often, the medium tries to be objective—as Steichen said, it tries to explain and clarify, and to give us another look at ourselves.

Both men would probably agree that photojournalism is a medium of communication that uses a universal visual language to convey facts and information.

That photographs are a medium of communication should need no proof. Hine's photos convinced many people of the need for child labor laws. An example from an earlier era is William Henry Jackson's photographs of the Yellowstone region of Montana. Those pictures, when displayed to Congress, were instrumental in creating the nation's first national park. On a more commercial level, you can see countless advertisements that are loaded with visual information. The images might be of the product, but they might also convey feelings the advertisers want you to associate with the product—happiness, success, satisfaction, and social acceptance.

In fact, so much of our information comes from visual sources that images are an integral part of society. What do we, each of us individually, know of the world because of photographs? How many of us have been to

*Hine's quote implies using the camera for a social agenda, which is what he did. But this does not mean using the camera to distort the truth, which he did not. I believe pure objectivity is impossible, as you'll learn by the time you finish this book, but honesty is a different thing, certainly attainable, and the goal that I hope you'll set for yourself in all your journalistic endeavors.

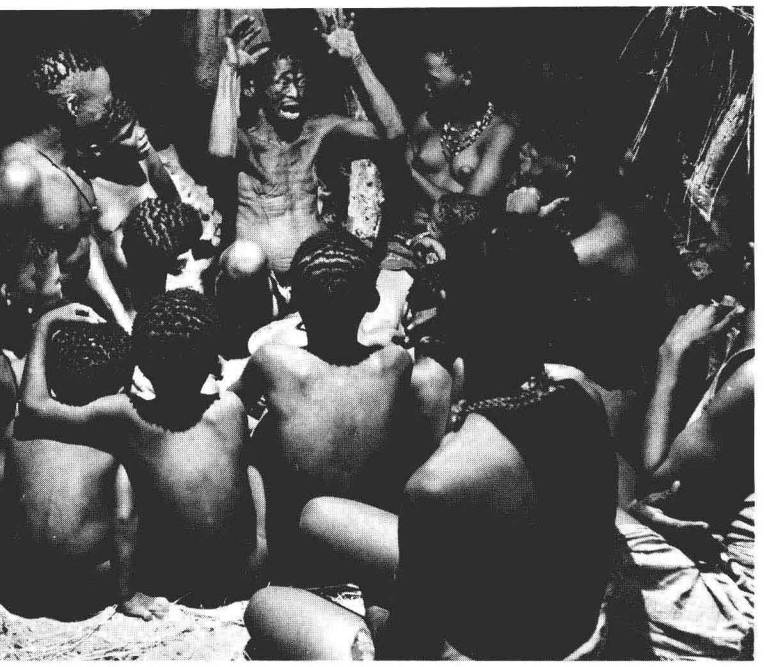

Figure 1–2 In this image from the Family of Man exhibit, we see symbols of humanity that cross cultures and time. It is the way photography captures these symbols that makes it a universal language. *(N. R. Farbman, Life Magazine © Time Inc.)*

the Egyptian pyramids, the Antarctic, or the surface of the moon? Most of us, however, are familiar with these places and could describe them reasonably well because of our visits to them via photographs.

But the communication of facts is not the only function of the photograph. I'm sure you can recall an instance when your emotions were triggered by a photo, whether it was a warm feeling elicited by an image of happiness or a feeling of horror caused by a picture of tragedy. Maybe a photo of a loved one calls up the feelings between the two of you, or an image in your scrapbook may bring back romantic memories of times past.

The stimulation of these feelings is evidence that photography is a language, an emotional language that speaks to us through our eyes, and in a way that often can't be translated into words. When you see that photo of your loved one, can you describe the feelings completely and accurately?

Photography Is a Universal Language

When humans first started painting on cave walls, they used a visual language. The marks left behind probably were not representations of verbal expression, but images that directly resembled the reality of the time. And the earliest records of organized civilization are picture-symbols that represent ideas—the hieroglyphs and pictographs of the Egyptians, Aztecs, and others. These symbols suggest that visual communication is fundamental to our species.

If visual language reaches to our core, then photography is a universal tool of that language. The medium is one of the few methods of communication that transcends cultural barriers. The Family of Man exhibit, for example, was shown throughout the world to record crowds, and its universal message was understood regardless of the verbal language of the viewers. More recently, the *Day in the Life* series of books has taken us to places such as Australia, Canada, and Russia, and given us a good look at ourselves as well. Photographs of a mother and baby or a smiling child contain messages that do not need translation. Unlike words, there is no problem of shared meaning, because the meaning and the language are the same for everyone.

The Word Photojournalism

It is important when defining this visual language that the term is photojournalism and not news photography, publications photography, or a hyphenated version of photo and journalism. "Photojournalism" is a compound word coined in 1942 by Frank Luther Mott, dean of the journalism school at the University of Missouri.[1] In the previous decades, news photography was a stepchild to the written word. *Life* magazine and others were some notable exceptions, but the bulk of news photographs were made just to show that the newspaper had someone on the scene. Artistic quality had little value, and the intense competition among newspapers meant that the goal was to get a picture and get it into the paper to beat the cross-town rival.[2]

But Mott's creation meant a change in the importance and respectability of the news photograph. The medium had started to become recognized as more than a craft, and its practitioners could specialize in its study at the university level. Publications began to treat the photograph as more than a space filler or graphic device. Although some of those archaic ideas persist today, publications everywhere are showing their commitment to visual communication by adding management-level positions to deal solely with the visual development and production of the product.

Photojournalism and Personal Photos

There is more to a thorough definition of photojournalism than delineating what it is not. First there is the picture itself. What is a journalistic photo? Just as a pen can be put to many uses, from writing poetry to writing a technical dissertation, so can the camera be put to many uses.

A journalistic photo informs and motivates. It is a nonfiction work that, as much as possible, does not include the inner reaches of the photographer's personality. It is an image that is created in reality, keeps a strong connection with it, and reveals facts and information on the first look.

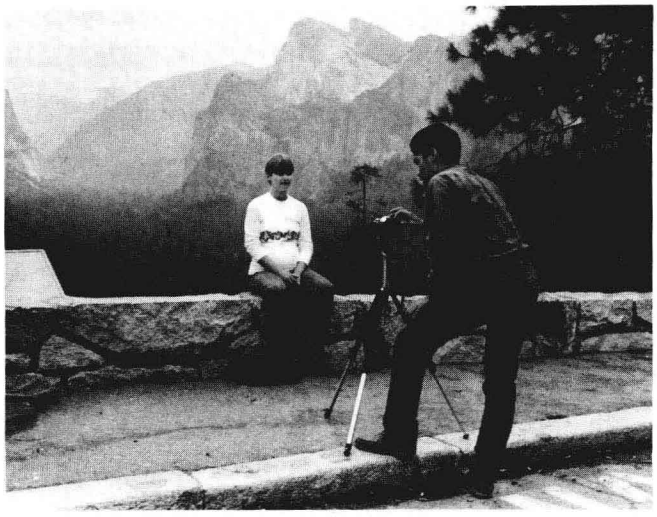

Figure 1–3 Many personal photos have meaning only for the people involved; the photo triggers their memories of the event. But a good journalistic photo includes story-telling elements that anyone can understand.

But what about so many other types of photos that meet these criteria? You probably have many pictures in your scrapbook that, if we ended our definition here, would qualify. Yet those scrapbook pictures are not photos that would be printed in a news publication for everyone to see. They are personal images, and there is an important difference between these and the ones classified as photojournalism. Personal photos are the ones you take at parties, on vacations, and during family events. They are your records of the occasion. These kinds of photos are visual notes that serve as memory triggers. When you see the photo, you remember what happened at the event, even though those memories may not be represented by something in the photo itself.

Frequently, such pictures mean nothing to anyone else. Perhaps you have had the experience of enduring a friend's vacation slides. I'll bet I can tell you what happened. You sat on an uncomfortable couch for several hours while photos came and went on the screen. You were taken to London one minute, Rome the next and then bounced back to England, which was upside down. And more than likely, each photo included your aunt (or whomever) looking at the camera while standing in front of some grotesque monument. And, of course, each picture required a five-minute explanation. While you were bored out of your wits, the photographer was excitedly reliving the trip.

Now, don't misunderstand. There is nothing wrong with making personal images, as long as you recognize them as such and don't expect them to have the same meaning for others as they have for you.

The Interpretive Statement

Although vacation photos and the like serve more as private visual notes for the photographer, there is another type of personal photo, one intended to communicate. It is an image that represents the maker's inner thoughts or feelings, but it is a private interpretation that the photographer intends to share. Sometimes these photos make obvious statements; sometimes they present us with a mystery or riddle. Perhaps an analogy could be made between these kinds of images and certain forms of literature that explore the depths of the author's mind or personal point of view. These photos, which can be eloquent statements and insightful uses of the medium, are often seen in galleries and museums and represent the application of photography as fine art.

But the images made for others, the ones we label photojournalism, must contain strong story-telling features. They need a main object and a focal point, and should show us something we couldn't ordinarily see for ourselves. These photos reveal new information at first look, and more information on the second. They answer some of the classic questions of journalism: who, what, when, why, where, and how. They go right to the point, without ambiguity. They are not photographs that represent the photographer's inner thoughts, but images of what happened before the lens. They are most frequently, as others have said, pictures of people doing things. And I would add that the things being done should be of interest to others.

But how can you be sure that a photo will be interesting to others? One test is to apply the classic news values that are used to describe the qualities of a newsworthy event: consequence, an event that will affect many people; conflict, a clash between people or institutions; prominence, an event involving the well known; proximity, a happening close to those addressed; timeliness, a current situation; and finally, the bizarre, the unusual, the curious, or the amusing. Not all values need be present in every situation, but if just one is there, chances are good that the event would be of interest to many people.

Pictures and Words Together

But photojournalism is not pictures alone. Photos tell only part of the story. Words must complete the message. Wilson Hicks, executive editor of *Life* magazine almost forty years ago, made clear the connection between these two methods of communication. In his book, ***Words and Pictures,*** he explained how pictures and words each have a separate, yet important job, and that to reach their potential, they must work together.[3]

Hicks said that pictures deal with what happened at the moment of exposure and can only suggest connections with the past and future. They cannot directly express hidden feelings, the sounds or smells and the details of fact that escape the lens.