

Photography as a Tool for Social Change



Becky Field, Photographer

Why Photography?

“A picture is worth a thousand words”

Photos communicate

Photography remains one of the most effective ways to communicate across the barriers of culture, language, time and experience.

Photos reveal

A picture can make one person's experience visible, even accessible, to others.

Photos have impact

Photographs have more than documentary value, for they bear witness to something that exceeds words.

Photography Goes Public

- 1826: First preserved camera photograph
- 1839: The daguerreotype
- 1840s: Negative-positive process developed
- Early 1900s: first commercial color photos
- 1949-1961: Popular Brownie Hawkeye
- 1997: First cell phone photo

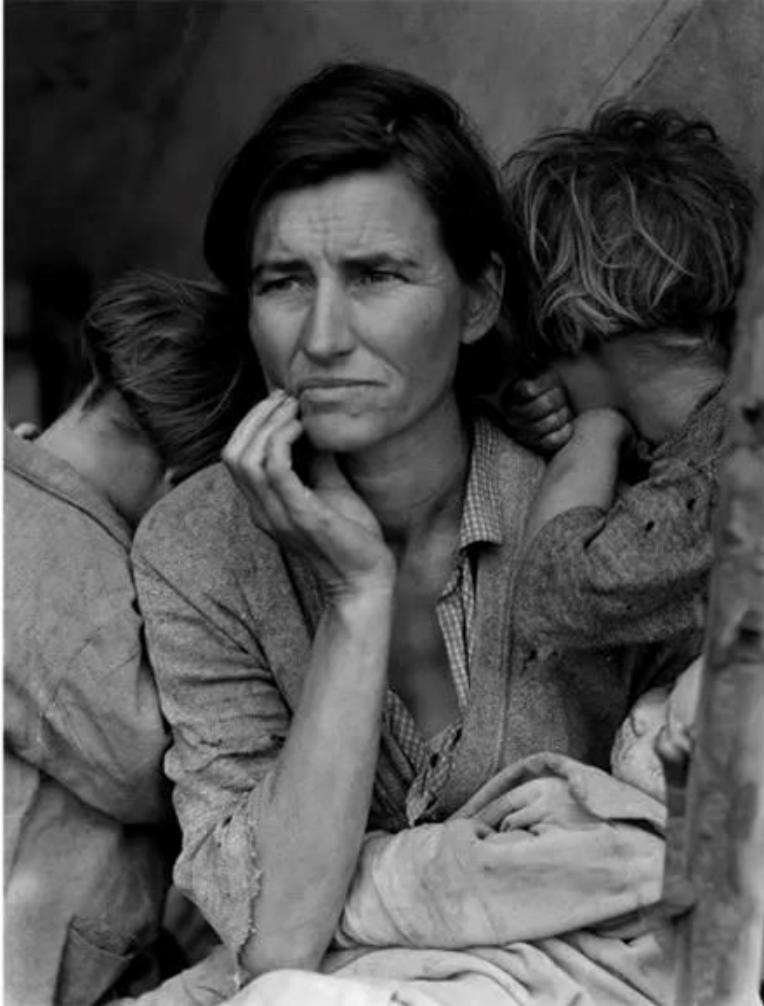


Louis Daguerre, 1839, *First photo to include a person*



Brownie Hawkeye

Photos Impact History



- Slavery
- War
- Social Movements
- Public Awareness

[Dorothea Lange](#), 1936, *Migrant Mother*

A Lens on Slavery

Slavery shaped photos; photos shaped slavery

Support for slavery

- The “happy” enslaved person
- Slaveholders policed their humanity, racial divide
- Owners as “humane”
- Justified exploitation



A Lens on Slavery

Commercially accessible portraiture

Enslaved use photos

- Frederick Douglass
 - Freed in 1838
 - Most photographed man
 - Photos to show respect, dignity
 - Challenged racist social norms
- Blacks and Whites, men and women together
- Visual personhood
- Maintained distant bonds



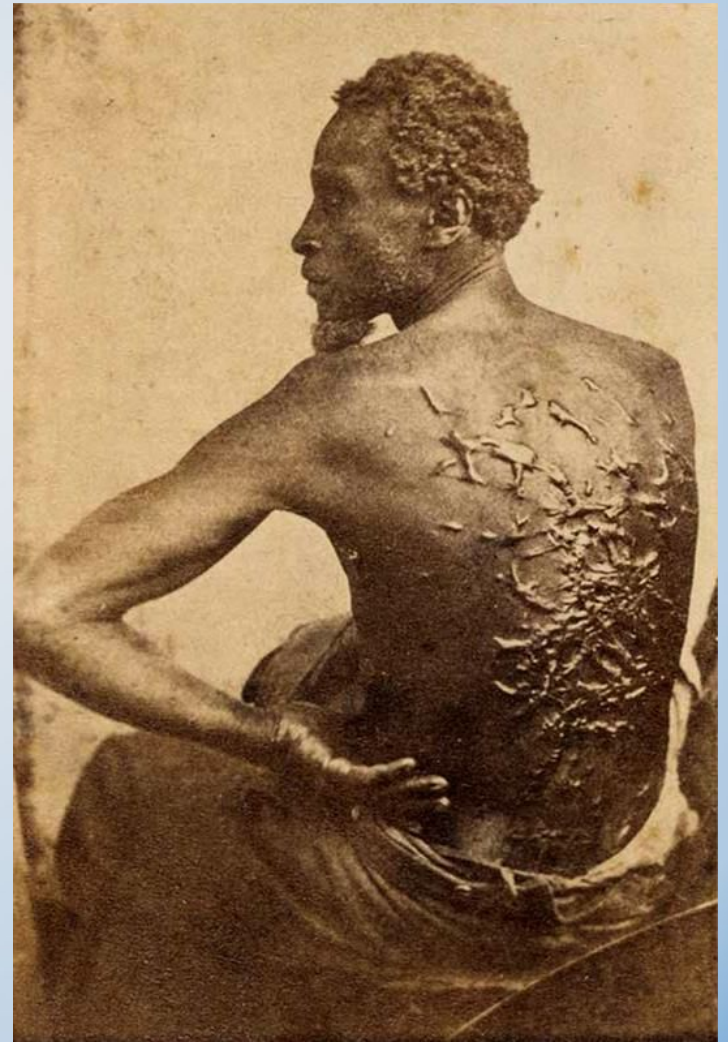
Frederick Douglass, his wife, her sister, 1884

A Lens on Slavery

Reproducible images fueled social injustice

Support abolition

- Initiated “atrocities” photography
- Served as a social witness
- Visibility of social conditions, exploitation
- Tool for movement building



“Whipped Peter,” 1863, Library of Congress,

Exposing War

War brought photos to center of modern communication

Civil War

- A slow process - no action
- First photos of dead soldiers
- Horrors of war came home
- Injuries, diseases - advances in medicine



Alexander Gardner, 1862, *Antietam*

Exposing War

An image can stop wars

Vietnam

- Kent State: National Guard killed 4 students
- 4M students shut down colleges and universities
- 100,000 people protested at Capital
- Turning point in public opposition



John Filo, 1970

Exposing War

Now and in the Future?

Middle East ...



Samar Abu Elouf, 2023, The New York Times

Picturing Social Movements

A weapon against the evil of child labor

Lewis Hine

- Children in workplaces;
Amoskeag Mills
- Dangerous, disguises
- Inspired moral outrage
- 1938: [Fair Labor Standards Act](#)



Sadie Pfeiffer, Spinner in Cotton Mill, NC

Picturing Social Movements

Power of photos to make public aware of discrimination

Gordon Parks (1912-2006)

- Sparked activism against racial segregation
- Documented racial divide

“The camera could be a weapon against poverty, against racism, against all sorts of social wrongs.”

- Gordon Parks



Gordon Parks, 1942, *American Gothic*

Picturing Social Movements

Photography has power to influence and impact

Civil Rights

- Documented acts of racial discrimination against African Americans and nonviolent response of the movement
- Valuable part of the fight for equality and justice
- Pictures brought sympathy, financial support, legislation



Bill Hudson, 1963

Picturing Social Movements

Icons of pain and suffering from police brutality

Black Lives Matter

- Awareness of growing movement
- Reconstructed new narrative about policies, society, and identity
- Visual narrative of protest and struggle that's relevant today



R. Perry, 2014 *Mourning: Michael Brown Sr. cries over son's casket*

Focus on Public Awareness

“In diversity there is beauty and there is strength”

- Maya
Angelou

New Hampshire’s cultural diversity

- Bring awareness to NH’s diversity
- Honor new Americans
- Stimulate discussions
- Illustrate impacts of detention

Bhutan,
Concord



NH's Cultural Diversity

Ubuntu - "I am because you are"

- Bantu
saying

- Families
- Working
- Traditions
- Asylum Seekers



Somalia,
Manchester

Families



Afghanistan,
Concord



Burma/Myanmar,
Nashua



Bhutan,
Concord

Working



Syria,
Dover



Bhutan,
Concord



Canada,
Berlin



Rwanda,
Canterbury

Traditions



Liberia,
Concord



Bosnia, Manchester



India,
Nashua



Bhutan, Concord

Detention of an Asylum Seeker



Truth of Photos?

- Are photographs objective?
 - Can be “faked” - staged; software
- Desensitization?
 - “In these last decades, ‘concerned’ photography had done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it.” *Sontag (1977)*
- A power to be wielded with care and consideration. Then photos can be ***a tool to change the world!***



Dem Rep of Congo,
Concord



Somalia,
Concord

Books:

Different Roots, Common Dreams: New Hampshire's Cultural Diversity (2015)

Finding Home: Portraits and Memories of Immigrants (2020)

Exhibit:

“Crying in the Wilderness: An Immigrant’s Journey in Detention”

UNH Dimond Library, thru Jan 27, 2024

Archive:

Different Roots, Common Dreams, New Hampshire's Cultural Diversity

UNH Digital Collections,

https://scholars.unh.edu/becky_field_photography/

Questions?

Becky Field

fieldworkphotos@gmail.com

www.differentrootsNH.com