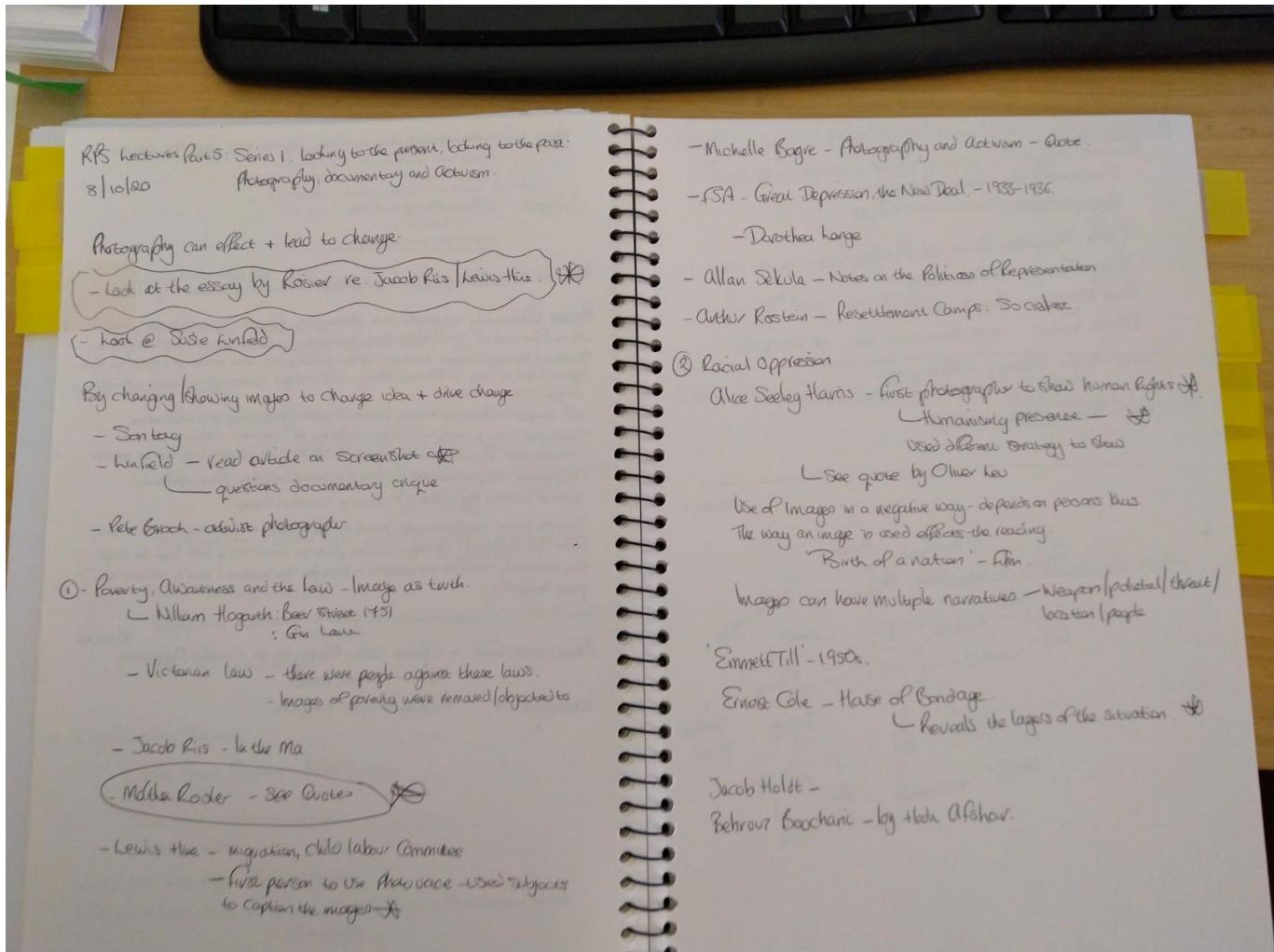


RPS Lecture 5: Photography, Documentary and Activism



Looking to the present, looking to the past

Series 1 – lecture 5: Photography, documentary and Activism

with Colin Pantall

Lecture 5

Photography and Activism



ASHIRAF & KAJJAN, Kenya, Uganda Where Love is Illegal

Susan Sontag: On Photography

Susan Sontag wrote that, 'the camera is a kind of passport that annihilates moral boundaries and social inhibitions, freeing the photographer from any responsibility toward the people photographed'.

Susie Linfield: The Cruel Radiance

‘In *The Cruel Radiance*, Susie Linfield challenges the idea that photographs of political violence exploit their subjects and pander to the voyeuristic tendencies of their viewers’

<http://bostonreview.net/susie-linfield-why-photography-critics-hate-photographs>

Pete Brook: Prison Photography

“I suspect images might have a very limited role to play in activism. My hope would be that readers of this article would employ more caution when it comes to referring to either themselves or others as activists.”

<https://witness.wordpressphoto.org/is-there-such-a-thing-as-an-activist-photographer-18f3798f4ad6>

- 1 Poverty, Awareness and the Law – Image as truth
- 2 Racial Oppression – Image counter narratives
- 3 Sexuality and Gender Divides – Making the political personal
- 4 National Identities – Uncovering Hidden Histories

1. Poverty, Awareness and the Law

Showing Poverty

Jacob Riis and the Status Quo

Lewis Hine and challenging the law

The FSA and changing opinion

BEER STREET.



William Hogarth: Beer Street 1751

GIN LANE.



William Hogarth: Gin Lane 1751

Some Victorian Laws passed in the UK

1871 Abolition of the purchase of Commissions

1872 The Ballot Act:

1875 The Public Health Act:

1882 The Married Women's Property Act

1891 The Fee Grant Act effectively made elementary education free of charge

Gustave Doré: *London: A Pilgrimage*, 80 engravings, published in 1872.

Commercially successful

Disliked by critics

Focussed on poverty

Accused of “inventing rather than copying”

The *Westminster Review* claimed that “Doré gives us sketches in which the commonest, the vulgarest external features are set down.”



Jacob Riis

- How the Other Half Lives examined the lives of poor migrants in New York
- Riis differentiated between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor
- He made the pictures to show wealthy people (so they don't have to go there)
- He staged pictures
- He used stereotypes



In The Making of an American, Jacob Riis wrote:

We used to go in the small hours of the morning to the worst tenements ... and the sights I saw there gripped my heart until I felt that I must tell of them, or burst, or turn anarchist, or something. ... I wrote, but it seemed to make no impression. One morning, scanning my newspaper at the breakfast table, I put it down with an outcry that startled my wife, sitting opposite.

There it was, the thing I had been looking for all those years. A four-line dispatch from somewhere in Germany, if I remember right, had it all. **A way had been discovered, it ran, to take pictures by flashlight.** The darkest corner might be photographed that way.







Jacob Riis – How the Other Half Lives 1890 (see A Photobook History and Photography: A Cultural History)

Also see Martha Rosler: In, Around and Afterthoughts on Documentary Photography (1981)

Martha Rosler

- Charity preserves the wealth of the upper classes
- Documentary Photography preserves the conscience
- Documentary is about moralising, not about acting
- Documentary carries information about the powerless to the powerful
- Poverty and misfortune are things that happen to people
- The Photographer becomes the main actor

‘Documentary photography has been much more comfortable in the company of moralism than wedded to a rhetoric or program of revolutionary politics.’

‘Documentary, as we know it, carries (old) information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful.’



http://web.pdx.edu/~vcc/Seminar/Rosler_photo.pdf



Lewis Hine

- he believed his photographs would encourage people to "exert the force to right wrongs"
- Disguised himself to get access to factories where children worked
- Hine's critics claimed that his pictures were not "shocking enough"
- "the work Hine did for this reform was more responsible than all other efforts in bringing the need to public attention." (said the Chairman of the National Child Labor Committee)
- Died in poverty on November 3rd 1940
- The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was declared constitutional in 1941



Lewis Hine: Child Labor in America 1908-1912



Faces of Lost Youth: Furman Owens, 12-years-old. Can't read. Doesn't know his A,B,C's. Said, "Yes I want to learn but can't when I work all the time." Been in the mills 4 years, 3 years in the Olympia Mill. Columbia, South Carolina.

<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor/>



One of the spinners in Whitnel Cotton Mill. She was 51 inches high. Has been in the mill one year. Sometimes works at night. Runs 4 sides - 48 cents a day. When asked how old she was, she hesitated, then said, "I don't remember," then added confidentially, "I'm not old enough to work, but do just the same." Out of 50 employees, there were ten children about her size.



Ora Fugate, 10 years old, worming tobacco, 1916



Manuel, the young shrimp picker, five years old, and a mountain of child-labor oyster shells behind him. 1911.

'the average person believes implicitly that the photograph cannot falsify. ... This unbounded faith in the integrity of the photograph is often rudely shaken, for, while photographs may not lie, liars may photograph. It becomes necessary then, in our revelation of the truth, to see to it that the camera we depend upon contracts no bad habits.'

Lewis Hine in Michelle Bogre – Photography and Activism

The Great Depression, the New Deal and the FSA

Roosevelt and the New Deal 1933 – 1936

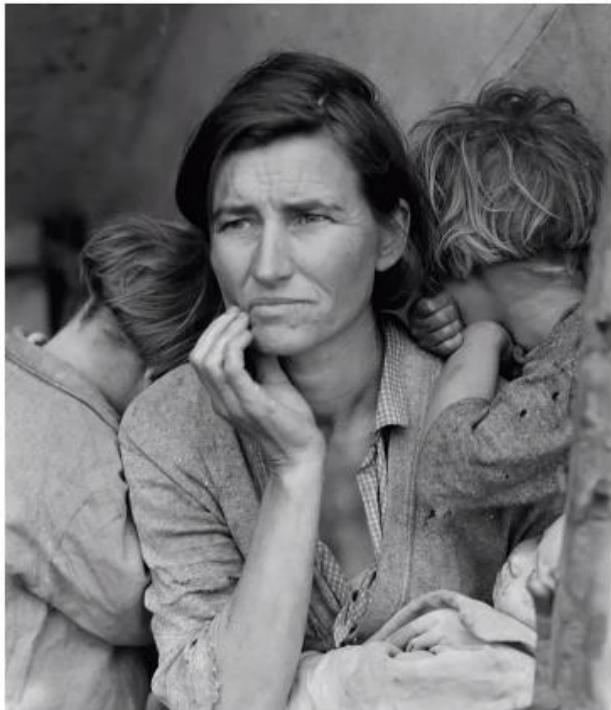
The Three Rs – relief, recovery and reform. Relief for the unemployed and poor; Recovery of the economy to normal levels; and Reform of the financial system to prevent a repeat depression.

1935 – FSA – rehabilitating agricultural workers from Dust Bowl areas on shared farmland – a kind of cooperative movement (incredibly socialist for the USA).

'The FSA, originally created as the Resettlement Administration (RA) in 1935, was formed as part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's efforts to fight the depression. Renamed the FSA in 1937, the RA's purpose was to help move farmers and other poor rural Americans, devastated by the economic and environmental realities of the 1930s, into more economically viable work. The visionary Roy Stryker headed one of the RA/FSA departments titled basically "Historical Section—Photographic."

Michelle Bogre – Photography and Activism

Dorothea Lange – Migrant Mother



Headlines and Captions

San Francisco Times, 1936 - 'What Does the "New Deal" Mean to This Mother and Her Child?'

Caption for FSA 10 x 8 press images - 'Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age thirty-two. Nipomo, California'

New York Times, 1936 - 'A worker in the "peach bowl."'

US Camera – 'Dorothea Lange: Camera – 4"×5" Graflex; Lens – Zeiss Tessar 7½"; Aperture – F.8; Exposure – 1/15 sec.; Film – S.S. Pan'

LA Times, 1978 - "Can't Get a Penny": Famed Photo's Subject Feels She's Exploited,"

<https://davidcampany.com/migrant-mother-1936-2/>

<https://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/316062>



Ted Benson. 1978

Allan Sekula

‘The subjective aspect of liberal aesthetics is compassion rather than collective struggle. Pity, mediated by an appreciation of great art, supplants political understanding.’

Allan Sekula, ‘Dismantling Modernism – Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)’, *Massachusetts Review*, 19/4: Photography (Winter 1978)

Arthur Rothstein

- Photographed resettlement camps (resettling farmers from Dustbowl to California)
- Unpopular with business because they reduced the pool of cheap migrant labour
- Seen as excessively socialist
- Resettlement stores in California took away business from other farm stores (they were far cheaper)



Arthur Rothstein, Farmer and sons walking in the face of a dust storm. Cimarron County, Oklahoma, 1936.



Arthur Rothstein – Migratory Labor Camp in California for refugees from Arkansas and Oklahoma



<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fachap06.html>

2 Racial Oppression

Alice Seeley Harris and the lantern slide

Anti-Lynching Activism – picture/no-picture

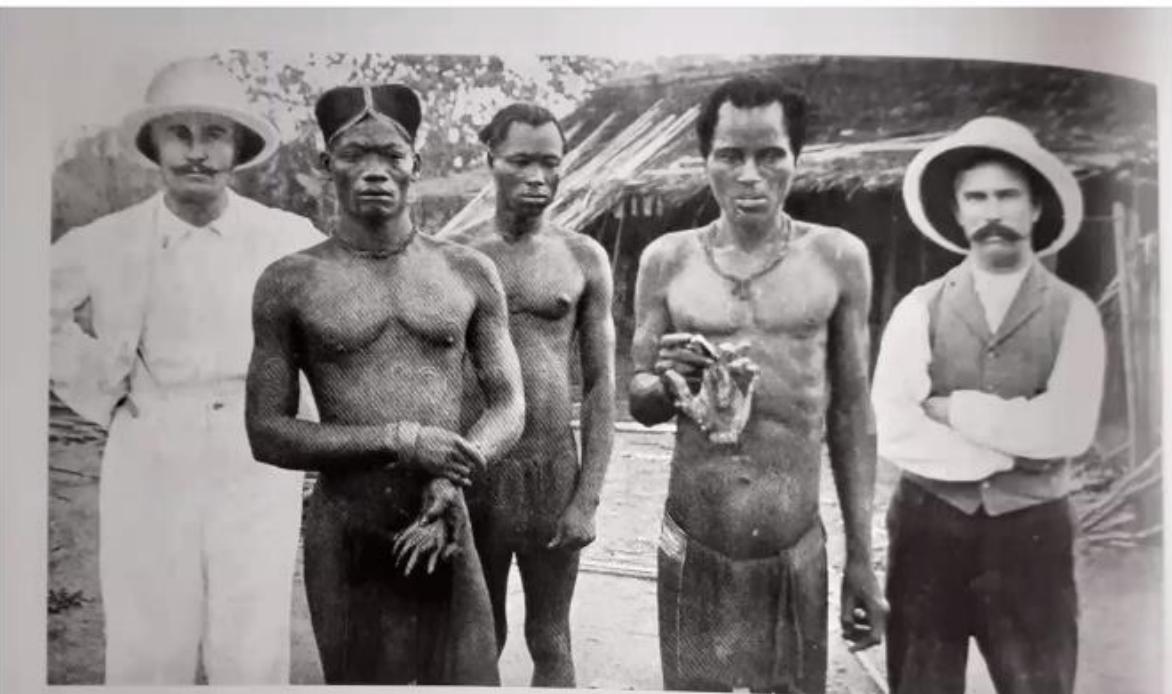
Ernest Cole and Apartheid

Jacob Holdt and the lecture tour

Alice Seeley Harris

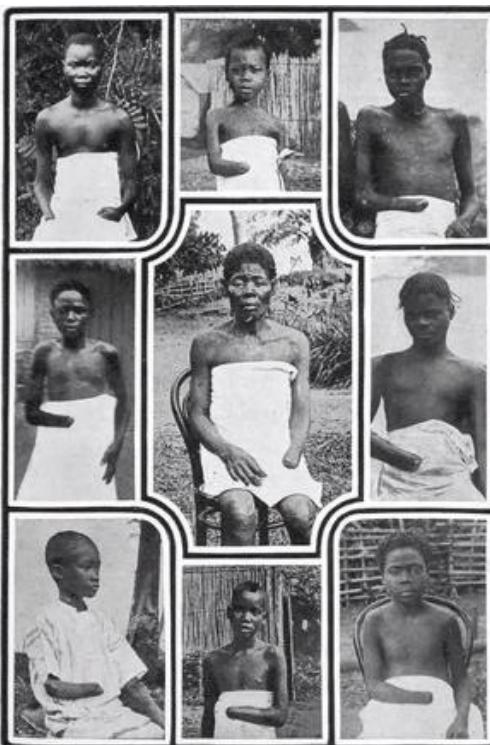
A very early example of human rights abuses
Pleaded that the African was 'human'
Images shown by lantern slide (see Jacob Holdt
later) as the 'Congo Atrocities'
Authenticating presence of 'whiteness'
Humanising presence of the father of Nsala





carry the remains of others rather than bearing the scars of trauma on their own bodies. The text which accompanied the lantern slide makes the presence of the missionaries in this photograph even more important, when it explains that in order to prove that their relatives

From left to right: Edgar Stannard, Bompenju, unnamed person, Lofiko, John Harris, with the hands of Linnama and Bolango



FROM PHOTOGRAPHS, CONGO STATE

¹⁴ The pictures get sneaked around everywhere.¹⁵ — *Page 40.*

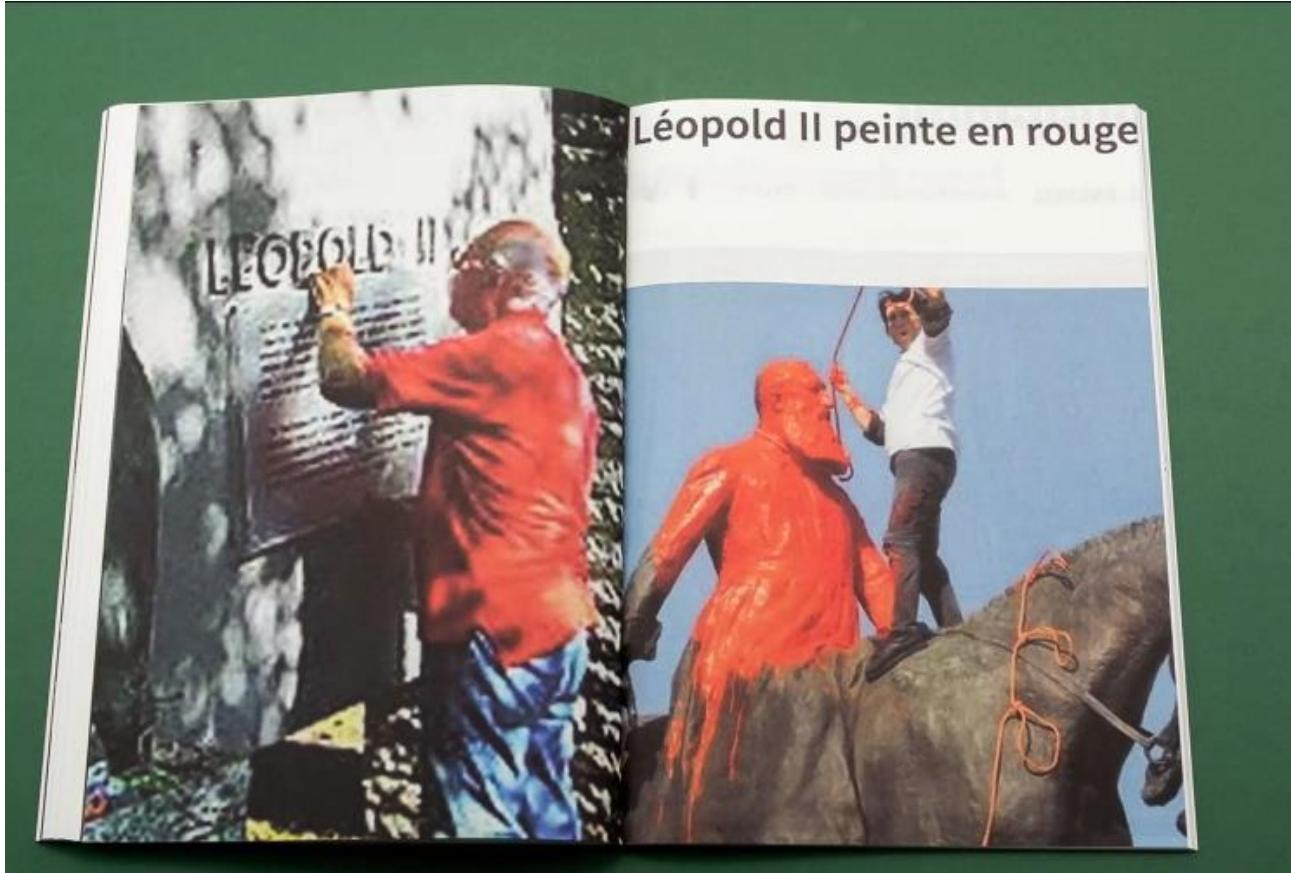
Anti-Slavery International: Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photographs of Congolese persons mutilated by rubber sentries, by Alice Harris and W. D. Armstrong, c.



Leopold's Legacy by Oliver Leu

Bambi Ceuppens - 'What moves us are images, memories, music, objects, songs, sounds and statements that individualise victims and in doing so, allow us to identify with them.'

https://johnedwinmason.typepad.com/john_edwin_mason_photogra/2012/03/african-stereotypes-part-1.html





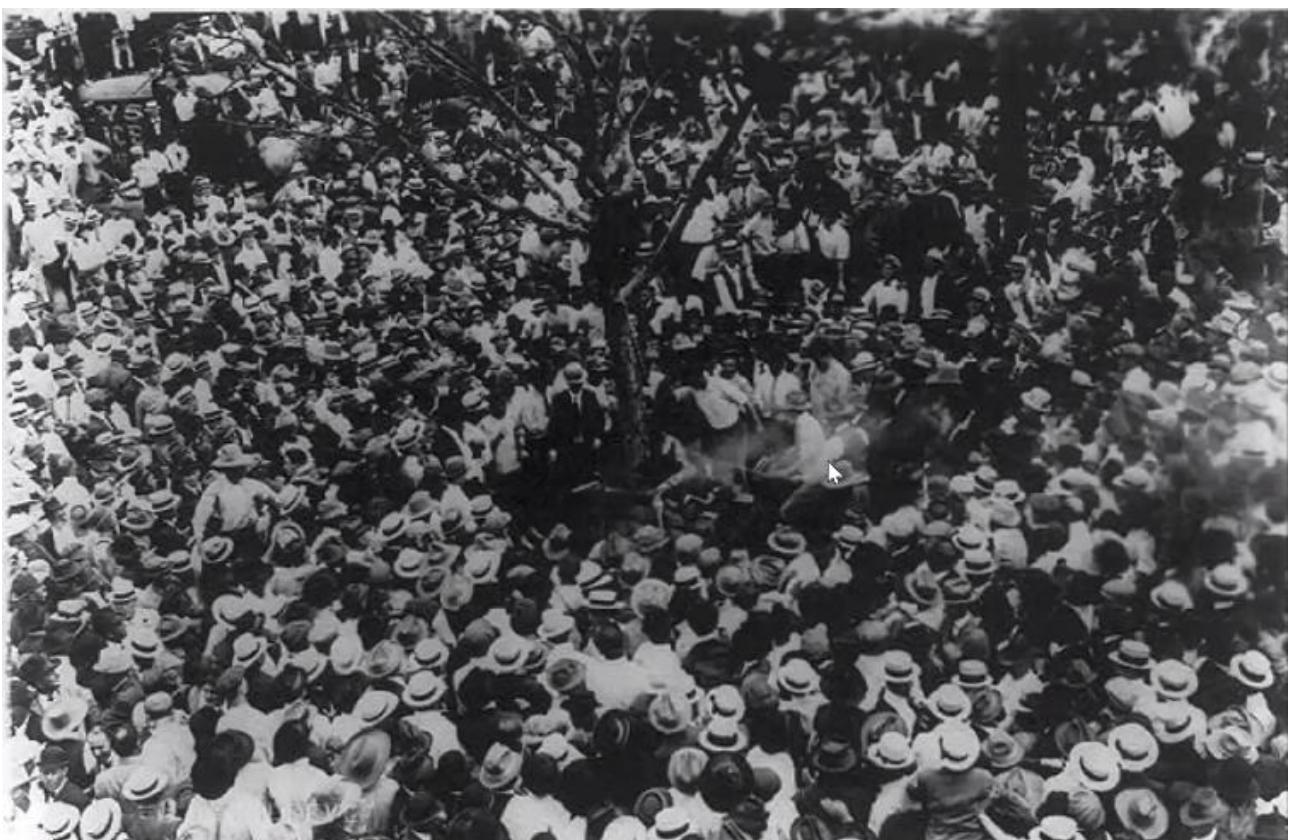
The day Colston met the People
Rob Mitchell on empty plinth
Shawn Sobers
7 June 2020

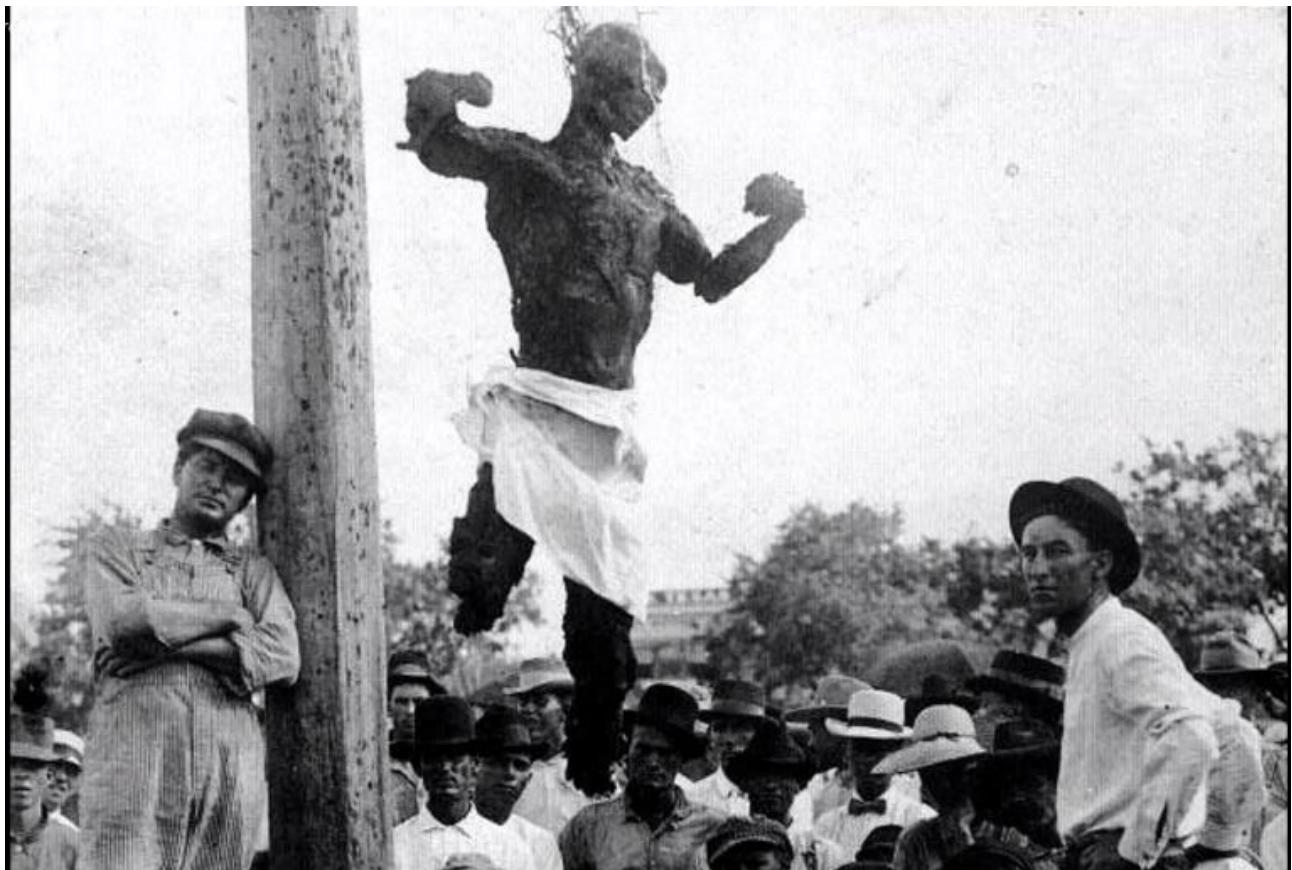
<http://www.shawnsobers.com/the-day-colston-met-the-people/>

Anti-Lynching Activism

‘Just over two months after The Birth of a Nation played in Waco, an estimated 10,000 people watched as a mob mutilated, strangled, and burned Washington to death on the grounds of the city hall.’

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/project/details/>



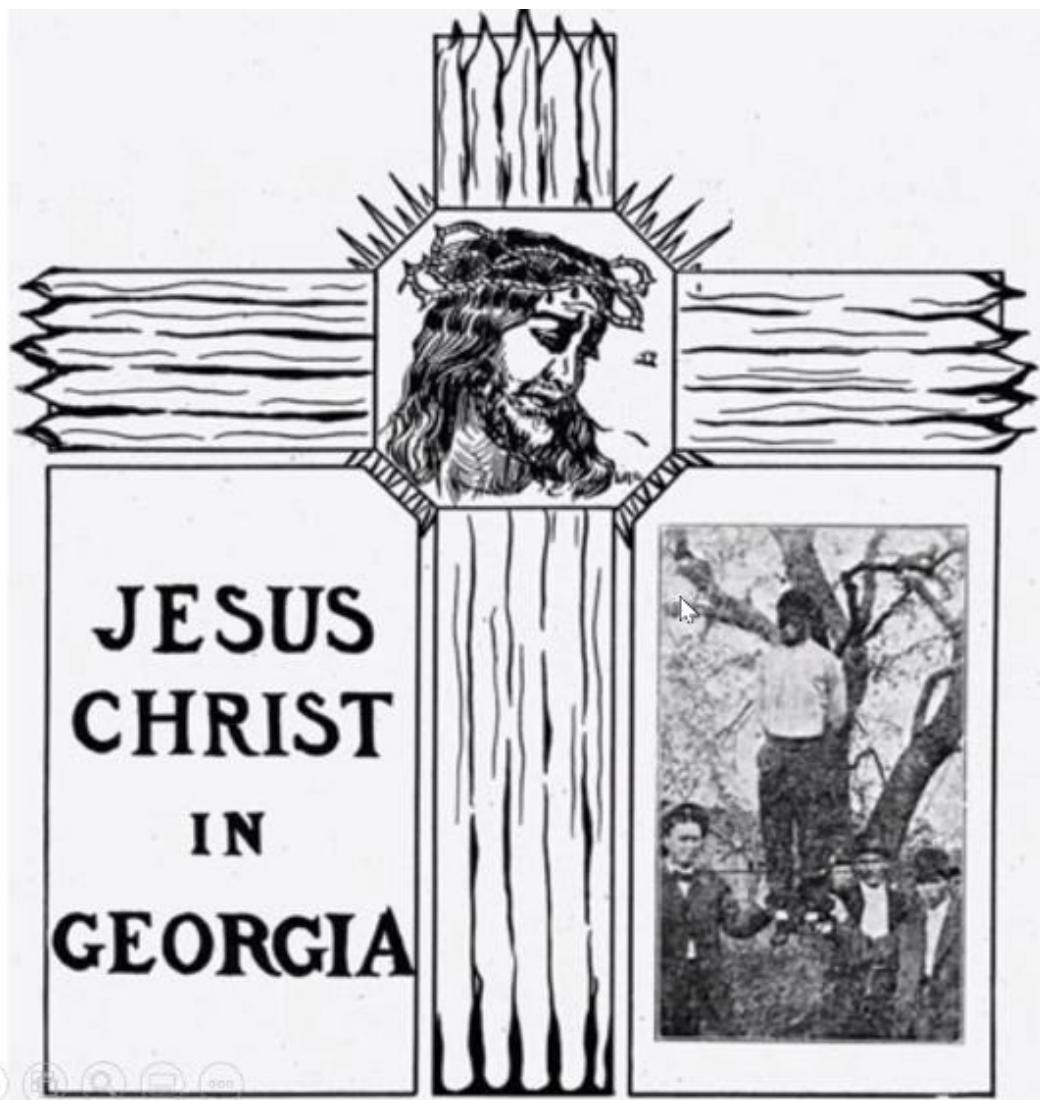


‘Fred Gildersleeve, who had been notified that Washington would be lynched, captured the events on film from a window in city hall. Afterward, his images were sold on the streets of the city along with body parts and other grisly remnants from the day’s events’

The aftershocks of Washington's lynching did not bring an immediate end to lynching—it was not the last lynching even in Waco—but the reaction to it epitomized a significant shift in the history of lynching, when the most visible excesses of mob violence, so vital to the construction and persistence of white supremacy, came into the service of antilynching activism.



"This is the way we do them down here....Will put you on our regular mailing list. Expect one a month on the average." (This postcard, figure 6.1, suggests that white southerners were paying attention to the actions of lynching opponents in the North.)



By removing the photographs from the context of their white southern localities and by bringing them into national consciousness in far broader and more lasting ways than postcards and lynching pamphlets had done, activists undermined their power to substantiate white supremacy and to act as yet another weapon against black autonomy. They bestowed on them an entirely different kind of authority.

Emmett Till

“Let the people see what I’ve seen.”



Ernest Cole – House of Bondage

- Made in 1967
- "Three-hundred years of white supremacy in South Africa has placed us in bondage, stripped us of our dignity, robbed us of our self-esteem and surrounded us with hate."
- Reveals the layers of apartheid – work, housing, transport, travel, crime
- Was reclassified as 'coloured' to get access

The people who ran the Classification Board of The Bureau of Census and Statistics had a number of tests to check on if you were really 'black' or really 'coloured'; one was the 'pencil test' - "If a man is black, according to the theory, his hair will be so wiry that it will be impossible to run a pencil through it. If he is merely brown, the pencil will pass."

The final challenge was the height question. Joseph Lelyveld tells the story here:

""How tall were you," he asked, "when you were eight?"

A Colored asked this question does what any Westerner would do - that is, stretches out his hand to the appropriate level, palm down. Africans indicate height with their palms up. The examiner assumed that this esoteric piece of information was known only to the Classification Board. But Ernest had been waiting for just that question. "I took all the time in the world to answer," he says when he tells the story. "I stood up so I could really do it properly." From that moment until he left South Africa, Ernest Cole was a Colored, palms down."







Ernest Cole on Boysmeat

"Employers must feed their servants and of course they try to get away as cheaply as possible..."

Boysmeat is the name given to the cheapest, least edible meat the butcher can find, cuts that no white person would dream of buying for himself. Boysmeat may be the neck of a cow, a pig's nose, the hoof of a goat, or some equally unappetising part. The butcher is free to use his discretion. When the lady of the house phones in her weekly meat order she simply says, "send so many pounds of steak, so many pounds of roast beef and, oh, yes, throw in a few pounds of boysmeat."

Jacob Holdt -

- Holdt first arrived in America in 1970 with US \$40 in his pocket
- His parents gave him a camera and he began photographing his travels.

- “When I had finished a roll, I sent it off to a mail order company to be developed. The prints were sent to a girlfriend in Washington who stored them for me. Over 5 years, I made 15,000 pictures. I didn’t know what was on them and when I saw them, I didn’t think they were anything special.”
-
- “Then I went back to Denmark and did my first slide show at my father’s church in Denmark. People were so shocked at what they saw. Soon I had 3,000 people queuing down the street to see the show. And it’s still basically the same show that I’ve been running for the last 30 years at American universities.”







- “I photographed during the most hopeful times after the Civil Rights movement and before Reagan. Basically I feel what has changed are the hairstyles and the cars. I go back to see those people all the time and everything is the same but with more crime. Then 10% of black people went to prison, now it’s 40%. And now there’s no handpicked cotton, but apart from that, nothing’s changed.”

Behrouz Boochani by Hoda Afshar



Avoiding the banal

“I sent this portrait to Behrouz after I returned from Manus in April 2018, and called him’ says Afshar in the image caption. ‘I said, ‘This is you, Behrouz, with your passion, your fire, and your writer’s hands. It symbolises your resistance.’ He heard this, and paused. ‘You are right,’ he said. ‘But I do not see myself in this picture. I only see a refugee. Someone whose identity has been taken from him. A bare life, standing there beyond the borders of Australia, waiting and staring.’ He fell silent, then said, ‘This image scares me.’”

3 Gender Divides

Artemesia Gentileschi
The Feminist Avant Garde

Artemisia Gentileschi



Susanna and the Elders

‘The idea is also exemplified by another Gentileschi painting, this time of Judith Beheading Holofernes. But here Gentileschi portrays herself as the Judith figure on the right and Holofernes is Agostino Tassi, an artist who was convicted of raping Gentileschi’
(see *The Story of Women and Art*)

Also see: Christiansen, K. (2004) ‘Becoming Artemisia: Afterthoughts on the Gentileschi Exhibition’ *Metropolitan Museum Journal* Vol. 39 (2004), pp. 10, 101-126

Following version by Caravaggio



The Proposition by Judith Leyster



Jackson Pollock: Action Painting



Shigeko Kubota – Vagina Painting 1965



Carole Schneeman (see also
Tracey Warr/Amelia Jones)



Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975, the renowned performance in which the artist slowly extracted a paper scroll from her vagina while reading from it the words: "I thought of the vagina in many ways--physically, conceptually: as a sculptural form, an architectural referent, the sources of sacred knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation..."

Judy Chicago: The Dinner Party



Ana Mendieta: Rape Scene, 1973



49-55. *Rape Scene*, apartamento de Ana Mendieta, Iowa, 1973. [cat. 7]



I VALIE EXPORT, Aktionshose: Genitalpanik (Action Pants: Genital Panic, 1969), photo serial, self-staging. Photograph by Peter Hassmann. Courtesy of VALIE EXPORT and Bildrecht, Vienna, 2016.

Donna Ferrato

When I first saw Garth hit Lisa, I couldn't believe my eyes. Instinctively I took a picture. But when he went to hit her again, I grabbed his arm and pleaded with him to stop. He hardly noticed my presence, nor did he seem to care that anyone was watching. This surprised me at the time. Now I know that when a man is determined to beat his wife, he will

do it in front of the children, the neighbors, even the police. Garth's response to my plea was, "I know my own strength and I'm not going to hurt her—I'm only going to teach her a lesson."

That moment was pivotal for Ferrato, who spent the next 15 years photographing domestic violence. “Even though we have to pay our bills, [activists don’t] want to jump to a new story when an assignment is over,” says Ferrato. “We want to be effective in deeper ways, and I don’t see a problem with that. Why shouldn’t we want to understand the issues we plunge ourselves into? We’re seeing it all; and the deeper we go, the smarter we get; so we don’t want to get diluted. We want to think about how to use our pictures in a new way, for the benefit of the people we photograph.”

Ferrato’s activism didn’t end with the photographs. She committed herself to raising awareness about this previously hidden subject by forming a nonprofit organization, Domestic Abuse Awareness, Inc. (DAA), and using her images to raise money for women’s shelters. “I had lived in so many domestic violence shelters that I knew how depressing some of them were,” she explains. “I wanted to help them raise money so they could continue to do their good work and so people would understand why the shelters are so important if we are ever going to solve this problem.”



Ernie is only eight years old, but he has already started hitting his sister, so he's become just like his father who is in prison for trying to kill his mother. Hitting women is the only way that Ernie knows how to behave as a male. His sister, Brianna, already lived in fear of her brother because she never knew when his temper would be raining down on her. She didn't like to go crying to her mother. She would just take it, because that's what she saw her mother do when she was being

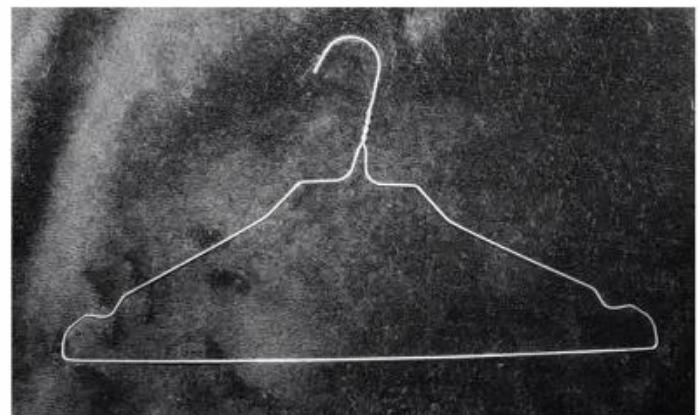
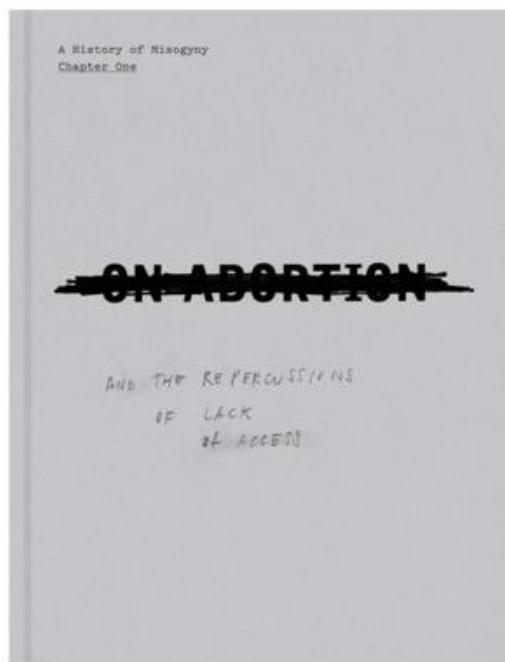
Photographer Portfolio 56 Photography as Activism

beaten up. In this one picture, Ernie is tending to a fire in the backyard, waving a stick around, which could seem normal, but Brianna was afraid, so she was standing behind him with her hands folded, submissive, like a perfect little Geisha girl. For me, this says it all. This one picture shows what is in store for this boy and girl as they grow up. A photographer has to be thinking all the time what a scene means to the story and how to use the photographic frame to best represent those moments.

Laia Abril – A History of Misogyny

Chapter 1: On Abortion - Every year, 47,000 women around the world die due to botched abortions.

Chapter 2: On Rape - On Rape aims to call out institutional rape culture prevalent in societies around the world”



Yellow Wallpaper – Ioana Marinca



After seeing the horror on my colleagues' faces, and at the advice of the 111 call handler a first aider was speaking with, I decided to investigate the source of pain yet again. I had nearly passed out from period pain, was taken to the first aid room, and three colleagues watched me writhe in

pain waiting for the fourth ibuprofen to kick in. It was approximately 8:30am, February 2019.

A couple of weeks later, I was in the Portland Hospital. The doctor I saw a few days beforehand asked for blood tests and a scan to be performed.

“Look, it lights up like a Christmas Tree!”

This was my first transvaginal scan, and I didn't know what to expect. Seeing the instrument scared me, but the attendant assured me it would not be uncomfortable. A few seconds later she pointed to the screen and said “Look, it lights up like a Christmas tree”.

Reviewing the results, the specialist diagnosed adenomyosis and dismissed endometriosis - a blood test had returned negative for the “endometriosis marker”.

Six months later, in my local GP surgery I was told such a test doesn't exist. On seeing the test results, the doctor said “Oh that's a test for ovarian cancer, not endometriosis”.



Glen remembers having blisters on her stomach from the hot the water bottle, in her attempt to make the period pain go away.

“I do remember dad saying once when I was in terrible pain: ‘your mother puts up with this, so should you’. I loved my father dearly, but that's the way society was.”

Glen Franklin



What is endometriosis, can you describe the pain?

An invasion, making me feel trapped. Four weeks isn't enough to recover.

Sam Colyer

Like someone held a knife to my ovaries. Or sandpaper against my insides.

Ash Bristow

Loss of freedom, loss of choices, loss of control. It's more about what it takes away than what it brings.

Abi Childs

A thousand knives & nailbombs...

Marissa Charles

As a teenager, I would first start to lose the feeling in my legs, then became extremely bloated. I would curl up in a ball for days. It was as if someone had put a rope around me and was pulling it really tight, and downwards.

As if a vice with sharp teeth grips around my insides.

Marjolein Dutry

A thumping pain; it feels like someone is using a hammer, thumping my insides. They're punching and twisting my insides, like when you drain a sponge by twisting it.

Punita Pankhania

I can almost hear the pain as I think about it. It would curl me up in a tight ball, everything is pulsating but extremely tight. I'm rigid and can't move.

Hannah Maule Ffinch

Unknown pain, it always felt like a bad pain, causing damage rather than being pain from damage. Always felt like unnatural pain.

Heidi Coppock Beard

The pain builds up from a faint awareness to a feeling of being stabbed in my ovaries.

Vanessa Combier

Right: Illustration by Vanessa Combier.

Bottom: Vanessa post laparoscopy, after being injected with Zoladex. June 2020.





Robin Hammond: Where Love is Illegal

- <https://whereloveisillegal.com/ashiraf-kajjan/>



<http://wearetheyouth.org/>

Zeam, 17, Minneapolis, MN

- Last year, I was dealing with my depression and my eating stuff. I used to cut every day and had an addiction from cutting. One day I had lost a lot of blood the night before, and having to remember what bathroom to go to was so overwhelming. I just broke down and cried. I went to a teacher that identifies as genderqueer, and said, "I'm just so tired."

4. National Questions

Alan Kurdi

Li Zhenheng

The Sichuan Earthquake
Prison Photography



THE TIMES

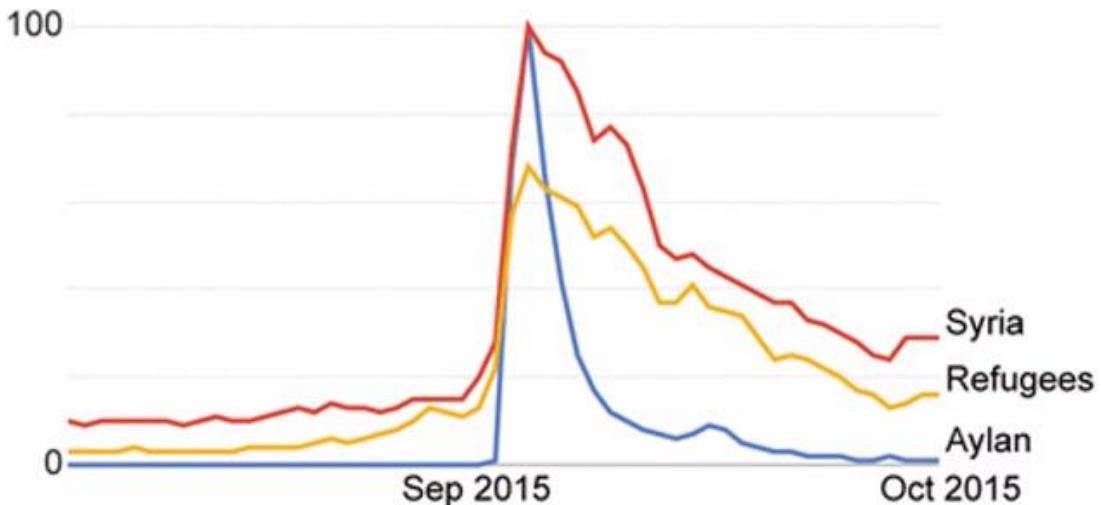
Europe divided



THE Sun

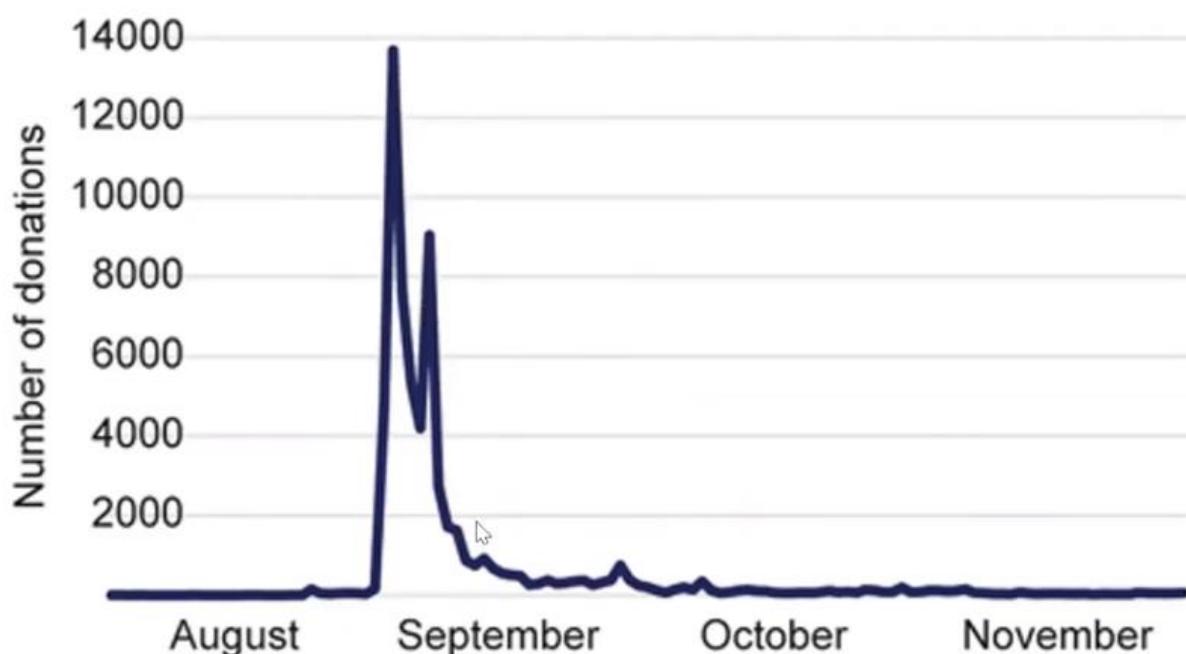


The INDEPENDENT



Google Trend data on the relative popularity of search terms "Syria," "refugees," and "Aylan," August–September 2015. Note that Google Trends does not provide numbers of search requests; rather, the maximum number in the figure is scaled to 100, and the other values are proportional to that.

- In his essay, *Painful Photographs* (published in *Beautiful Suffering*), Mark Reinhardt said that ‘...commentators on contemporary visual culture sometimes seem so preoccupied with the specific styles or instances — or even the very act, as such — of picturing pain, that they are in danger of forgetting that the most important problem is the suffering of those pictured.’



Number of daily donations to a Swedish Red Cross campaign designated specifically for aiding Syrian refugees in Sweden (2015).

According to Paul Slovic, who conducted research into the impact of the Alan Kurdi photograph, we remember these pictures because emotional reactions create empathy. If we can identify with the people in the picture, through concepts such as the Identifiable victim affect, then we can be moved to action. And nothing moves us so much as an emotional story.

<https://witness.wordpressphoto.org/empathy-charity-emotional-narratives-and-cash-a0e68880cef9>
