Images and the Media

What can an image tell us about the values and beliefs of the society in and for which they were created?

How do media images construct national and international narratives of significant events?

The narrative power of images has been harnessed to disseminate stories, information, and ideas since before the invention of photography. This Portfolio Guide featuring illustrations, paintings, and photographs offers a small sampling of works from the Addison’s collection providing various perspectives and discussion points on the ways in which images have been used by journalists and social documentarians over time. Educators are encouraged to use this Guide and the expanded Portfolio Image List as a starting point, a place from which to dig deeper, ask questions, and make new connections for class plans and projects.

For online use, click the images in this guide to access digital images in the Addison’s online database.

Selected Thematic Approaches

Technology and Media – What stories do different image formats and mediums tell?
Images in Series – How does the narrative impact of a series differ from that of an individual photograph, illustration, or painting?
Comparing Perspectives – How do the intentions of photographers, editors, and publishers influence the reading of an image?
Iconography of Violence – What are the origins and mechanisms of the visual language of violence?
The Ethics of Images – How have the ethical codes of photojournalists and social documentarians evolved over time?
Media and Society – What do images tell us about a society’s values and beliefs?
Technology and the Media

What stories do images in different formats and mediums tell? What are the advantages of each?

As photographic, printing, and now digital technologies advance, how do media narratives evolve?

The United States Civil War was one of the first military conflicts to be documented through photography, although the technology to reproduce photographs was not yet practical for mass distribution. Winslow Homer created illustrations to be engraved for print in newspapers such as Harper’s Weekly, while photographers such as Mathew Brady and Alexander Gardner (see page 3) had to navigate the limitations of capturing motion by documenting posed and still scenes rather than battles. Reverting to an earlier medium, Edward Lamson Henry composed his historical painting after the war to emphasize the bustling transportation network as a new basis for national identity during Reconstruction.

In 1890, when social reformer Jacob Riis published a book exposing New York City’s tenement conditions, technology required that his photographs be printed as illustrations, which were edited and composed to elicit sympathy from his middle class audience. In Riis’s second book in 1902, his poignant photographs were able to be printed in halftone, illuminating the contrast of the mediums and their narratives.
Images in Series

How does the narrative of a series differ from that of an individual photograph or painting?

What can we learn about the power of an image through composition, framing, timing, and editing?

After the Civil War, Alexander Gardner compiled one hundred of the photographs made by his photographic team into Gardner’s Photographic Sketch Book of the War. The two bound albums contain his carefully selected and sequenced images and descriptive texts of military camps, officers, and notable sites. As a comprehensive photographic series, these albums have influenced how viewers - then and in subsequent generations - have come to visualize and understand this defining national event.

Working during the Great Depression with the Resettlement Administration and later the Farm Security Administration and as a LIFE magazine photographer, Dorothea Lange created powerful images of human strength amid great suffering. The internationally recognized Migrant Mother photograph (lower right and as originally published on page 7) offers an extraordinary study in composition, timing, and editing. When viewing alongside the unpublished images of Florence Thompson and her family in a migrant worker camp (including the version in the Addison’s collection, upper left), we can see how Lange’s astute eye and her editors’s decision-making created this now iconic image.
Comparing Perspectives

*How do the intentions of photographers, editors, and publishers impact the narrative of a national story?*

*How can the power of images to sway public opinion be harnessed by a social or political movement?*

Photographer James Karales was sent by *Look* magazine to illustrate an article on the Selma-to-Montgomery March for Voting Rights during the Civil Rights Movement in 1965. His now iconic photograph of marchers crossing barren land under a stormy sky captured the spirit and determination of those dangerous times.

Recognizing the potential impact of media coverage, march organizers had also enlisted and trained photographers, such as Danny Lyon whose documentation of the Clarksdale, Mississippi police reacting to a march to the local church, reveals a perspective not seen in mainstream media sources. The public and private moments in the Black Panther Party captured by photographer Stephen Shames between 1968 and 1973 (twenty-eight of which are in the Addison collection) illuminate the contrast between the party’s declared political goals and the characterization of them by the national media.
Iconography of Violence

How is the visual language of violence constructed?

How is this iconography used in the media to publicize events and political positions?

Winslow Homer’s illustration for a New York-based weekly of a Union sharpshooter during the Civil War documents new military technology with a mix of horror at the brutality it makes possible and a bit of Northern pride. Army photographer Dick Durrance, however, zooms in for an angled close up on the face of a United States soldier training for Vietnam and his facial expression captures the humanity of both this twentieth-century soldier and that of his potential victims.

Civil War images such as photographer Timothy O’Sullivan’s A Harvest of Death prompted reflection on the virtues of the advancements in war technology and the resulting suffering on both sides of a military conflict. One hundred years later, utilizing an iconography of uniformed forces, armed attacks, and the wounded, media images during the Civil Rights Movement likened the violence to that of war. Bob Adelman’s documentation of fire hoses turned against demonstrators in Birmingham in 1963 and Jack Thornell’s Pulitzer Prize–winning photograph of James Meredith shot by a sniper during his 1966 March Against Fear illuminated the violent reality of this struggle for rights in the nation.
The Ethics of Images

What is “truth” in photojournalism? And, who decides – the photographer, editor, publisher, or consumer?

Why and how have the ethical codes of photojournalists and social documentarians evolved over time?

While composing photographs by rearranging bodies on battlefields and in trenches to create more powerful images was common during the Civil War, especially given the weather and technological conditions, today people question the veracity of images such as *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter*, knowing retrospectively that the body and gun were staged for dramatic impact. Robert Capa’s iconic photograph of a Spanish Civil War soldier falling from a direct hit similarly remains a poignant but debated image of military combat – effectively communicating the event yet questioned for its authenticity.

During the Great Depression, Arthur Rothstein and other FSA photographers (see Dorothea Lange, pages 3 and 7) spent hours photographing their subjects to capture an image that illustrated the intended story; in contrast, Stanley Forman’s photograph of an anti-desegregation rally in Boston in 1976 was completely spontaneous when taken yet published to be intentionally inflammatory. Although it appears that a white man is holding a suited African American man to be stabbed by a younger white man wielding an American flag, the known reality shows the man on the right trying to pull the target out of harm’s way.
Media and Society

How does the reproduction of images perpetuate society’s values, beliefs, fears, and aspirations?

What and whose images are lacking from the media?

Although Stanley Forman’s Soiling of Old Glory (facing page) does not tell the entire story of what happened that day at Boston City Hall, it instantaneously came to represent and further inflame the continued racial strife after the Civil Rights Movement. The power of images to perpetuate the racial divide is also palpable in Lawrence H. Beitler’s now iconic photograph of a 1930 lynching in Marion, Indiana. The dissemination of postcard reproductions of the casual white audience entertained by the violence reinforces the desensitization of humanity while it allays fears of any threat to white privilege and safety. In contrast, this same image inspired the moving poem and song Strange Fruit by Abel Meeropol which was performed around the world by Billie Holiday.

The strategic sizing and placement of photographs in media outlets to sway public opinion and affirm or negate the relevance of an individual or group is noted by conceptual artist Sarah Charlesworth. By removing the text from the front page of every Herald Tribune from September, 1977, she examines who is - and is not - pictured in front page news to highlight the values perpetuated by media editors.
Curriculum Connections and Resources

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

History/Social Studies
- The Civil War
- The Progressive Movement
- The Great Depression
- The Civil Rights Movement
- The Vietnam War
- social documentation
- propaganda

English
- *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
- *The Red Badge of Courage*

Art
- Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman
- *The Grapes of Wrath*
- *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
- Freedom Riders
- *The Things They Carried*
- artistic expression
- representation
- framing and editing

Science
- war technology
- photographic technology and chemical reactions
- media technology

CONNECTIONS TO ADDITIONAL THEMATIC PORTFOLIOS

The American Civil War
Progressivism
The Great Depression
The Civil Rights Movement
The Vietnam War
Documentation and Art
Representation and Reality
Photographic Technologies

TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCES


Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog, [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/) Rich resource for digital images, often downloadable for free, including those from the Civil War and the Great Depression and many other time periods and events.

