



About to Die: How News Images Move the Public

Barbie Zelizer

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Due to its ability to freeze a moment in time, the photo is a uniquely powerful device for ordering and understanding the world. But when an image depicts complex, ambiguous, or controversial events--terrorist attacks, wars, political assassinations--its ability to influence perception can prove deeply unsettling. Are we really seeing the world "as it is" or is the image a fabrication or projection? How do a photo's content and form shape a viewer's impressions? What do such images contribute to historical memory? About to Die focuses on one emotionally charged category of news photograph--depictions of individuals who are facing imminent death--as a prism for addressing such vital questions. Tracking events as wide-ranging as the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and 9/11, Barbie Zelizer demonstrates that modes of journalistic depiction and the power of the image are immense cultural forces that are still far from understood. Through a survey of a century of photojournalism, including close analysis of over sixty photos, About to Die provides a framework and vocabulary for understanding the news imagery that so profoundly shapes our view of the world.



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