An Analysis of the Iconic Images
from the Black Lives Matter Movement

Caroline Brehman

Communication Design
Elon University

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Abstract

In the midst of the national conversation surrounding the injustices faced by the black community, a wave of imagery documenting the Black Lives Matter movement has populated the media. This research sought to discover what elements raise a photograph to iconic status through the exploration of the images that have emerged from the Black Lives Matter movement. A qualitative two-part content analysis was used to examine the rhetorical power of a sample of five iconic images from the movement. It was found that the photographs in this sample were iconic because they served as more than mere documentation. Rather, they reshaped society's collective memories to construct a new narrative about American policies, society, and identity.

I. Introduction

A child's lifeless body washes up on the shores of a Turkish beach. A naked Vietnamese girl runs in terror after being splashed with napalm. Police dogs in Birmingham attack a black teenager. Social movements are often remembered through their icons. A single photographic icon has the profound impact to redefine narratives and shape humanity's collective consciousness. Hariman & Lucaites (2007) wrote that iconic photographs "have more than documentary value, for they bear witness to something that exceeds words" (p. 1). Icons place the visual at the forefront of cultural construction, thus acting as powerful tools for social change.

In 2013, after the shooting of 17-year-old African American Trayvon Martin, an online platform emerged with the objective of campaigning against the brutality and systematic racism aimed toward black people. It was built behind the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Throughout 2013 and 2014, activists used #BlackLivesMatter to organize groups and individuals throughout the country to amplify conversations about the injustices faced by the black community. Immediately following the shooting of Michael Brown Jr. in August 2014, protests and riots broke out in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri. This event sparked nationwide outrage and, soon after, the #BlackLivesMatter project transformed into a social movement (Khan-Cullors, 2016).

Thousands of images circulated the internet from these protests and continue to populate it to this day. The most successful of the images that emerged out of the countless others have become icons for the

movement. Through the exploration of the images that have emerged from the Black Lives Matter movement, this research seeks to discover the conditions that led some photographs to be elevated to the level of an icon. The author considered not just the formal techniques of the image's construction but also the civic performance of the photograph.

II. Literature Review

The power of the photographic image has been well documented for decades. Yet not all images achieve an equal level of influence. Perlmutter (2004) suggests that the photographs that achieve an "elevated level of fame" and "recognition in our media-saturated world" create the standard elements of a photojournalistic icon. Hariman & Lucaites (2007) define photojournalistic icons as those that are widely recognized and remembered, understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional responses, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics. Iconic photographs go beyond mere documentation, they present powerful social realities within the interaction rituals of everyday life (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007).

Iconic photographs produced during the Civil Rights movement were at the core of shifting attitudes and policies. Spratt (2008) found that the images played a vital role in igniting emotions and fueling debates surrounding the issue of race. Additionally, the repetition of these iconic images within mainstream media added to the images' influential power. These icons epitomize American racial brutality and provide easily recognizable symbols that act as "frames" in constructing narratives about American politics, society, and identity (Spratt, 2008).

The photograph, specifically the iconic image, has a unique relationship with the viewer because it is unmatched by text or other communication visuals. Images convey information to viewers much faster than written or spoken word as well as carry more information than other forms (Wakeland, 2013). Schill (2012) noted that empirical studies have found that people believe what they see more than what they read or hear. When visual and verbal messages are in conflict, viewers have difficulty remembering the verbal information. In addition, visual messages override other messages when processed simultaneously. In regard to social change, studies have found that images trigger emotional responses almost instantly, even before a logical response can be created (Wakeland, 2013).

While researchers and political and news elites alike have asserted the influential value of visual images, the actual influence of visual images was not often systematically investigated. Domke, Perlmutter, and Spratt (2002) attempted to gain insight into how people process visual images within the context of news coverage through an experiment in which news coverage was systematically altered. They found that images have a powerful ability to trigger the information processes within a person's mental system. The findings revealed that the influence of visual news images on the public could only be understood after considering viewers' predispositions and values. This builds on the social psychology theory of priming, which refers to unconscious effect of preceding stimulus or event on how people react to some subsequent stimulus (Bryant, Zillmann, & Oliver, 2002). Domke et al. (2002) showed that priming could be applied to how people react to visual images. The new images we encounter are not isolated stimuli but relate to previous images or ideas and are likely to be evaluated in relation to pre-existing beliefs and experiences.

Other studies have demonstrated that media priming offers the audience a prior frame of context that affects an audience's later judgment and behavior. Iyengar and Simon (1993) investigated priming in relation to the first Persian Gulf Crisis in 1990. The findings revealed that the increasing prevalence of media coverage on the Gulf Crisis significantly altered Americans' political concerns. Further, the study revealed George Bush's popularity became more dependent upon foreign policy due to the media's priming effect. More recently, Johnson, Olivo, Gibson, Reed, and Ashburn-Nardo (2009) conducted two experiments that tested the influence of media priming of black stereotypes on support for government policy that assisted black versus white persons in need. Experiment 1 revealed that priming the "black criminal" stereotype to white participants through exposure to photographs of black people looting after Hurricane Katrina reduced policy support for black victims, but did not influence support toward white victims. Experiment 2 revealed that priming the "promiscuous black female" stereotype to white participants through exposure to sexual rap music reduced policy support for a black pregnant woman in need, but did not influence support toward a white pregnant woman in need. The results demonstrated that empathetic responding is significantly influenced by

the mere exposure of negative media depictions of stereotypical groups (Johnson et al., 2009).

In our modern media-saturated world, worries about visual overload leading to desensitization have become a growing concern. Sontag (1977) argued, "In these last decades, 'concerned' photography had done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it" (p.21), thus, linking photography with the theory of compassion fatigue. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, compassion fatigue is the "apathy or indifference towards the suffering of others or to charitable causes acting on their behalf, typically attributed to numbingly frequent appeals for assistance, esp. donations; (hence) a diminishing public response to frequent charitable appeals" (quoted in Campbell, 2012, p.7). Campbell (2012) contests the compassion fatigue thesis by pointing to the identifiable victim effect, referring to the tendency to offer greater help to an identifiable victim than to large numbers of anonymous people (Lee & Feeley, 2016). Slovic, Västfjäll, Erlandsson, and Gregory (2017) demonstrate the identifiable victim effect by showing that in the case of the iconic image of Aylan Kurdi, the 3-year-old Syrian child whose lifeless body washed up on a Turkish beach, had more impact on the world than statistical reports of the hundreds of thousands of deaths in the ongoing refugee crisis. The researchers gathered behavioral information consisting of Google trend data on searches worldwide and data on monetary donations to the Swedish Red Cross for funds designated to aid Syrian refugees. They found a dramatic increase in public interest after Kurdi's photo was published. Social psychologists further contest the compassion fatigue theory through the idea of emotional contagion. Small and Verrochi (2009) theorized that emotional facial expression in pictures of victims is likely to cause contagion in viewers, thus altering viewers' emotional states automatically and unconsciously. The victim's negative emotional state converges with the viewer's emotional state, resulting in greater sympathy and pro-social behavior. As with the identifiable victim effect, sad pictures generated greater sympathy and increased charitable giving.

The issue remains that the influence of iconic photographs is notoriously difficult to demonstrate. In recent years there has been a growing interest in the visual rhetoric of iconic photographs. Hairman and Lucaites (2007) suggest, "Easily referenced and, due to the proliferation of digital technologies, easily reproduced and altered" the iconic image possesses the ability to transmit meaning that can be widely circulated (p.12). Visual social semiotics, then, offers a means to analyze these rhetorical structures to extract meaning from images. Although visual social semiotics is not the only theoretical framework for visual analysis, it uniquely emphasizes that an image "is not the result of a singular, isolated, creative activity" but is "itself a social process" (Harrison, 2003, 47). Semiotics is the study of signs and their meanings. Visual social semiotics involves what can be said and realized with images and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted, which in terms of the photograph would be its point of view (Harrison, 2003). Writer and critic Umberto Eco (quoted in Hairman & Lucaites), a leader in semiotics, asserts that an iconic photo presents a set of transcriptions, meaning that the "larger operation of shifting between visual semiotics" and shifts in meaning that occur as the viewer reacts to "specific narratives or interpretive terms" both "in and extending beyond the composition" (p. 34).

This research sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What visual qualities help the photographs related to Black Lives Matter achieve an iconic status?

RQ2: What features and patterns are shared by the iconic photographs from the Black Lives Matter movement?

RQ3: What social narratives do these photographs transmit?

III. Methods

A qualitative two-part content analysis was conducted to examine the rhetorical power of selected iconic images from the Black Lives Matter movement. A visual social semiotic approach based on the work of Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) method of visual analysis provided a framework for the analysis of the photographs' distinctive forms of appeal. An interpretive approach provided further analysis of the images as a mode of civic performance (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). For the purposes of this research, the researcher has simplified the analytical processes detailed in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and Hariman and Lucaites (2007) to best fit the research questions.

Sample

A sample of images was chosen from a curated gallery published by ABC News ("Black Lives Matter", 2017) of the Black Lives Matter movement. This gallery captured some of the most widely used and recognized images seen and shared in news media reports and social media. For the purposes of this study, a sample of five images was chosen from the overall 37 images published in the gallery. To maintain a stylistically diverse sample of images, no two images were chosen from the same photographer. Additionally, images were chosen that varied in subject matter and style to better represent the various narratives captured in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Procedure

Three categories of meaning were adapted from the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). They were used as a semiotic framework of analysis for each photograph from the sample. Specific characteristics were outlined for each category of meaning. This study operationalized these categories and their subsequent characteristics as follows:

1. Representational meaning: the visual content of the image; this includes (a) subject matter, (b) symbols, (c) setting, (d) action/reactional processes, and (e) people.

2. Interpersonal meaning: the relationship between the viewer, the image, and the people represented in the image. This includes (a) social distance (how close the subjects in the image appear to the viewer), (b) perspective, and (c) demand characterized by the visual gaze of the subject(s) in the image.

3. Compositional meaning: the image's layout of visual syntax. This includes (a) leading lines, (b) color, (c) visual focal points, and (d) salience (size, focus, foreground/background)

The close reading of the visual forms of appeal within each image offered the means to account for its role in public culture through interpretive analysis. To analyze the images as a mode of civic performance, the following themes were applied to each image: (a) indexicality[1], specifically on a historical account, (b) universal themes, (c) emotional experience (civic pride, outage, confusion, etc.), (d) cultural transparency (people understand the visual information equally regardless of cultural differences), and (e) political context and implications.

Content analysis of the five images allowed the researcher to find common themes and strategies central to the iconic images' meaningful whole. While analysis of the visual makeup of the images can be accounted for, the true rhetoric of each image is never static and changes with the passage of time. Through analysis of what makes these images iconic, a platform for exploration into the images' role in social change was provided.

IV. Findings

An analysis was done on an image-by-image basis by performing a semiotic analysis and then an interpretive analysis before moving to the next image.

Photo 1: Tear Gas Thrower

Representational meaning. The scene depicts three protesters on a road with its location undefined by the image's contents (refer to Figure 1). The protester in the foreground stands with his left arm cocked holding a flaming tear gas canister. His posture implies that the subject is seconds away from throwing the canister toward whatever remains outside of the photographic frame. The protester in the foreground is wearing an American flag T-shirt, a symbol synonymous with patriotism, thus placing America at the heart of

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1: For the purposes of this paper, *indexicality* is defined as the understanding of the relationship between the image and the concepts it stands for.

a scene resistance. Two of the protestors are shown wearing bandanas around their nose and mouth. This practice is common throughout various protest movements and further symbolizes a theme of resistance. The bag of chips in the protester's right hand adds a humorous element to the overall image, as it is an item not conventionally associated with protests. It indicates the strange energy and spontaneity among protests that night.

Figure 1. Cohen, R. (Photographer). (2014, August 9). Photo 1.Tear Gas Thrower: Ferguson protester throws a tear gas canister back to police [digital image].

Interpersonal meaning. Taken from a side angle, the viewer is placed in a position of power where the subject is watched from a distance that yields an objective viewpoint. From a distance, the subjects become less individual and instead become representative of a larger group. The image, devoid of any eye contact, offers no personal connection between the viewer and the subject. The focus of the image shifts away from the subject-viewer relationship to the action processes present in the frame. The image was shot at eye level creating a sense of equality between the viewer and the subjects. This perspective of equality plays into the larger narrative of the image as well as the overall Black Lives Matter movement. In the fight against oppression, equality is the overarching goal. Visual icons of the moment, such as this image, mirror that sentiment.

Compositional meaning. A visual focal point is created between the stark contrast between the bright, white light of the flaming tear gas canister and the dark tones in the background and surrounding elements. The subsequent focal point is the American flag T-shirt. The light radiating from the flaming tear gas canister illuminates the red colors of the shirt. Additionally, the contrast between the vivid red color and the dark tones surrounding it give it emphasis. Despite the similar size of the subjects, the cloud of smoke helps separate the foreground from the background, making the foreground elements more prominent. The background elements then become secondary to the understanding of the image, causing the viewer to create meaning from the flaming tear gas canister and the man throwing it. The cloud of smoke acts as a leading line that causes the eye to follow the path of the smoke to the canister. This line continues to lead the eye to the arm of the subject to the upper body and face. This form of a leading line draws attention to the subject in the image shifting the image's narrative away from a cloud of smoke to an icon of protest.

Interpretive analysis. The narrative of resistance is a universal theme at the heart of almost all social movements. The photograph captures Edward Crawford, the man throwing the tear gas canister, at a moment in time that greatly resembles Bansky's Flower Thrower. The artwork depicts a rioter, indicated by the figure's stance and outfit, about to throw a flower bouquet. Through the use of an unconventional weapon, Bansky promotes peace and hope in a place of destruction. Crawford mirrors the same pose of the figure within Bansky's work. He becomes that iconic hero figure that embodies this notion of hope in a place of destruction. The illustration of a black hero challenges cultural conventions as it is rarely depicted.

Photo 2: Blood Smear

Representational meaning. Visually uncomplicated, much of this image's meaning is drawn from the element's representation, rather than its literal value (refer to Figure 2). The bloody hand represents the protestors of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the police riot shield represents American police. The ambiguity of the location, identities of the subjects involved, and the specific context makes this image the epitome of the fight against police brutality. The officer holding the shield loses his or her individual identity and assumes the identity of an oppressive force as the word "police" is boldly displayed on the plastic barrier. The identity of the hand is established through its skin color and represents the American black community. The combination of the hand with the blood together symbolizes the police brutalization of the black community. The action of smearing blood on the police riot shield is what separates this image from others that depict similar scenes.

Figure 2. Rayford, S. (Photographer). (2016, September 21). Photo 2.Blood Smear: A woman smears blood on a police riot shield [digital image].

Interpersonal meaning. The close-up angle gives the viewer a personal account to experience the image's details and sensations. Having the police riot shield so close-up and dominant within the frame provides the subject and viewer a somewhat shared experience. The viewer adopts the hand as their own or experiences the hand as belonging to someone next to them, making the viewer have a feeling of oneness with the subject. The blood dripping down the hand can be felt and projected onto the viewer. The eye-level perspective mirrors a natural viewpoint that creates equality between the viewer and subjects. The hand and police riot shield are also positioned at the same eye level, creating a tension between the two. The visual gaze of the subjects in the photo is absent from the image, which offers no connection between the subject and the viewer. Instead of producing a visual demand through direct eye contact, it is established via intimate distance.

Compositional meaning. The eye is immediately drawn to the two bloody fingers touching the police riot shield. The black frame around the word "police" draws two leading lines that direct the eye toward the hand. The word "police" also acts as a leading line that draws a path directly to the two bloody fingers. The saturated red color of the blood contrasts the surrounding soft colors giving it greater salience, resulting in greater visual demand. Excluding the narrow visibility of the background elements, the elements in the frame are equally in focus. The visual focus points share the same relative values that contribute to the rhetoric of the image. However, the word "police" is the largest element as it stretches across the frame, emphasizing its importance. As the dominating element, it appears powerful in comparison to the weak hand.

Interpretive meaning. Violence is a universal theme that transcends cultural boundaries, and the smearing of blood captured in this image speaks directly to this theme. The viewer is instantly able to connect the word police and violence, thus creating a narrative of police brutality. More specifically, the omission of the subject's face makes the narrative about police brutality among the black community. Regardless of any prior

contextual knowledge, this image communicates this narrative effectively.

Photo 3: Mourning

Representational meaning. The image's subject matter depicts the agony of a man mourning the death of his son (refer to Figure 3). The rhetoric of the image relies on context to provide meaning. Without it, the image communicates a different message. There are several subjects within the frame; however, the image is visually constructed to draw attention to a crying Michael Brown Sr. It is a common practice in America to see funeral attendees wearing all black to signify mourning. No subjects are shown wearing black in the image, making it less obvious that they are at a funeral. The emotion is what gives this image its context.

Figure 3. Perry, R. (Photographer). (2014, August 25). Photo 3. Mourning: Michael Brown Sr. cries out as his son's casket is lowered into the ground [digital image].

Interpersonal meaning. A removed social distance is established by the wide angle of the image, but it is still close enough to make the viewer feel as an observatory participant present at the funeral. The casket at the bottom of the frame further adds distance between the subjects and the viewer. An intimate moment viewed at a comfortable distance emulates much of how this funeral service was broadcasted to America, and further, much of how the majority of Americans view the Black Lives Matter movement. The eye-level perspective of the image establishes not only equality between the viewer and subjects but also a sentiment of understanding that elicits empathy within the viewer. Instead of demand being characterized by the visual gaze of the subjects, the visualization of such a strong emotional experience demands a reaction from the viewer.

Compositional meaning. This image does not heavily rely on compositional techniques for its narrative. The main visual focal point is the face of Michael Brown Sr. The wide-mouthed sob stands out among the serious expressions surrounding him. The majority of the people in the image are looking at Brown, causing the viewer to follow each gaze's path back to him. There are no leading lines physically present in the image. Color in this image does not serve as a compositional technique, but rather as a political function as the majority of the clothing is red, white, or blue. Brown is the most in focus, with the casket in the foreground out of focus. As a result, the narrative becomes a story about the impact of the passing of Michael Brown Jr. on those who knew him, especially his father.

Interpretive meaning. The emotional experience of viewing this image is what makes it so powerful. According to Hariman and Lucaites (2007), "The emotions captured in the iconic image acquire additional significance because they become political emotions" (36). The pure agony of Michael Brown Sr. speaks

more than just a man mourning the death of his son. The image of Brown at his son's funeral became an icon for the pain and suffering of those affected by the injustices surrounding police brutality as it captured national attention. The loss of a loved one is a universal theme that everyone eventually comes to face. The image becomes personal for the viewer as he or she is confronted with the idea of losing a loved one.

Photo 4: 'Unrest in Baton Rouge'

Representational meaning. This image in its entirety is a symbol of the civil unrest of the black community that has spread across the nation (refer to Figure 4). The image is a construct of the visual tensions between excess and restraint, male and female, black and white, protection and vulnerability. The location is ambiguous, yet contains objects that are easily recognizable, thus creating a familiar scene that could take place throughout the country making it more relatable to the viewer. The stark contrast between the heavily armed officers dressed in riot gear and the unarmed black woman symbolically points to the long history of the brutalization of black people in the United States. The riot gear acts as an indicator of a scene of violence, yet the lone woman appears calm, as she stands straight-bodied, with nothing but car keys, a phone, and her fluttering dress in the breeze. The long dress further emphasizes her femininity, which is a theme classically associated with vulnerability. The riot gear obscures the faces of the officials, lessening their individual identities and unifies them as a powerful mass. Conversely, the woman standing alone humanizes the subject and the contingent cause of the Black Lives Matter movement. Body language defines the key action processes within this image. The woman's stance, bold, and tall, dominates the space around her. It's this stillness that personifies the power of resistance - an invisible force that appears to repel the approaching officers as their bodies arch backward. This moment of non-violent heroism taps into our collective memories as it embodies the same style of peaceful resistance used by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Figure 4. Bachman, J. (Photographer). (2016, July 9). Photo 4. 'Unrest in Baton Rouge': Ieshia Evans is detained by law enforcement during a demonstration following the shooting of Alton Sterling [digital image].

Interpersonal meaning. Captured at exactly 90 degrees to the side, a perfect portrait profile of the woman makes the image appear posed. The subjects are also displayed at eye level, making it appear as if the photographer was waiting in position for this moment to happen. The humanistic qualities visible in images through slight imperfections make them appear slightly more in the moment and true to reality, which adds to the images' rhetoric. The exactness of this angle along with the calm composure of the woman makes the image appear more as an illustration, rather than a photojournalistic representation. This illustration speaks to a much deeper meaning, but in the current media-saturated world of the present day, iconic images

need to immediately evoke a response from their viewers. Whether this image was posed or not, it lacks a quality of realness.

The subjects are captured from a comfortable social distance that puts the viewer in an observatory role. A closer social distance would allow the viewer to better feel the tension between the woman and the arresting officers. Direct visual gaze is absent from the image, further making the viewer feel like an observatory participant. Visual demand is established through body language and compositional construction rather than direct eye contact.

Compositional meaning. A study of contrast that can be divided into two halves - the concentration of officers gives the left side of the frame a heavy visual weight that contrasts the lone woman on the right. The concentration of the dark tones of the riot gear outfits worn by the officers also contributes to a greater visual weight on the left side of the frame. The imbalance of visual weight speaks to the greater imbalances of power and equality of the represented groups in the image – a metaphor for a dynamic that has been repeated throughout history. The image is framed in a way that cuts off where the line of officers begins and ends. This makes it appear as if the row of officers is never-ending and greater in force. This framing, in addition to the visual weight of the left side of the frame, drawing attention to the line of officers so that they are not lost in the background. The key action takes place directly in the middle of the frame, immediately drawing in the viewer's attention to the foreground. The line created by the division in the road with the green grass draws a path that leads the eye directly to where the hands of the officer and woman meet. Directly below where the two hands meet is a cracked line in the road that creates a vertical division between the two subjects, yet simultaneously brings them together by acting as a leading line.

Interpretive analysis. An individual standing up to a more powerful force, the oppressed confronting the oppressor is a visual narrative that is been captured numerous times before and has become a part of our collective memory. Marc Riboud's iconic 1967 photograph Flower Child captured a young American holding up a flower to a line of National Guardsmen during an anti-Vietnam march. In part Unrest in Baton Rogue gains part of its rhetoric by transcending the experience captured in Flower Child. It demands viewers to remember the political struggles of the past. The problem that remains is that Unrest in Baton Rogue bares too many similarities to its counterpart, which make it appear almost as a replication of the original. Recycled iconography merges together in our collective memory and lacks individuality. Unrest in Baton Rogue is ultimately a cliché that fails to offer a new perspective. Further, the relative lack of emotion on the woman's face makes it seem as if the image is a representation of this message rather than the reality captured within it.

Photo 5: Hands up, don't shoot

Representative *meaning.* Raising both hands in the air is a classic gesture to signal surrender to authorities. Protesters after the shooting of Michael Brown adopted this gesture as a symbol of protest with the slogan "hands up, don't shoot." In this defining moment, a figure raises both hands in the air in a sea of tear gas as the person kneels alone in the middle of the street. Appearing almost as a silhouette in addition to having her back turned, the identity of the subject becomes ambiguous about gender, facial features and race are obscured. Identity is insignificant to the understanding of the image, as the "hands up, don't shoot" gesture tells a powerful narrative of its own. The subject, surrounded in a cloud of smoke and glaring lights, appears in the middle of an unidentifiable road. The setting is ambiguous, signaling to the viewer that this could occur almost anywhere. What is clear is that this is a scene of a protest.

Figure 5. Olson, S. (Photographer). (2014, August 17). Photo 5. Hands up, don't shoot:
Tear gas surrounds a woman kneeling in the street with her hands in the air after a protest
for Michael Brown [digital image].

Interpersonal meaning. It is an uncommon practice in photography to capture subjects' backs because it is unengaging for viewers with some exceptions. There is some degree of suggestibility that comes from being behind an action that creates a visual innuendo. Additionally, silhouettes engage viewers differently as it creates a visual that is open to interpretation. The viewer subconsciously projects his or her own emotions onto the silhouetted figure in reaction to the scene. As the viewer sees the lone figure in this image kneeling on the ground, hands up surrounded by tear gas and glaring lights, a range of feelings of fear, anxiety, helplessness, or disempowerment are projected onto the subject. The far social distance of the image puts the viewer in an observatory role and creates a focus on the scene rather than just the individual. Void of any visible facial features, the photo's demand is not established through any sort of visual gaze; rather, it is established through compositional techniques.

Compositional meaning. Positioned in the center of the image, along with surrounding negative space, draws attention to the subject. The stark contrast of the dark tones of the figure with the bright white and orange hues in the background further emphasizes the subject. The white light in the image has a blinding effect that strains the eyes upon viewing. It elicits an emotional reaction that brings feelings of vulnerability, confusion, and intimidation, simulating some of the characteristics of tear gas. The parallel solid white lines in the road that horizontally cut across the bottom third of the image act as leading lines to the legs of the subject. Even though the image is compositionally built around the subject, these leading lines create an awkward focal point that leads the eye to the legs, instead of the arms and hands, which are far more significant to the image's narrative. Salience in this image does not play a significant role.

Interpretive analysis. Protesters took a universal gesture and turned it into a reminder of the police brutality upon unarmed black individuals. Image rhetoric and body rhetoric are separate entities, meaning that the act of this gesture captured in this image is not equivalent to the rhetoric of the image as a whole. This image captures the spark of a social revolution where the transition from passivity to confrontation is personified, making it stand out from the countless other photographs depicting the same gesture. Tear gas, commonly used by law enforcement during riots, juxtaposed with the image's characteristics reminiscent of a crime scene transforms the narrative from one of oppression to one of defiance.

V. Analysis

The study sought to identify the distinctive forms of appeal of the photographic icon and its implications as a mode of civic performance. Through analysis of the visual characteristics of each of the photographs, it was revealed which of those were successful in contributing to the image's meaningful status. Features and patterns of the visual characteristics shared by the images were identified to present a proposed standard for the practices that can produce photojournalistic icons. It was found that each image included a single protagonist. This supports the notion of the identifiable victim effect proposed by Slovic et al. (2017), who asserted that a photograph of a single identified individual captures the attention of people and moves them to take interest in ways that other media are unable to do. The revelation that each protagonist is black played an imperative role in each image's narrative. *Unrest in Baton Rouge, Tear Gas Thrower,* and *Hands up* portray the single protagonist as a hero. In the American media, black civic heroism is rarely portrayed. The visualization of the black hero introduces a new narrative into the American media landscape.

All of the photographs tell a simple narrative that plays into a collective desire for defiance. The archetype of the individual confronting a powerful force is a part of a collective memory. Each photograph was a different version of that archetype. Michael Brown Sr., in his state of despair, acts as a call to action to challenge the injustices committed by law enforcement. Whether confronting the oppressive force directly or by promoting the need for change, each image, *Tear Gas Thrower, Blood Smear, Mourning, Unrest in Baton Rouge,* and *Hands up, don't shoot*, was a different narrative of resistance told through a single person.

The semiotic analyses revealed that the most successful of the images have a clean composition, were taken at eye level, have ambiguous locations, and are devoid of direct visual gaze. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) wrote that demand established through direct visual gaze is the first place that creates "a visual form or direct address" that "acknowledge the viewers explicitly" as well as demand that "the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her" (p. 122). The photographs studied in this research reveal that key action processes can establish such demand. The absence of direct visual gaze shifted the image's rhetoric away from the subject-viewer relationship, but to the action processes.

VI. Conclusion

Photojournalism plays a unique role in defining and shaping public culture and has become an integral role in American democracy. In a media-saturated society, true photojournalist icons recast social knowledge that initiates change and strengthen their influence rather than dilute it due to their wide circulation. Through the close reading of the photographic images of the Black Lives Matter movement, the author proposed a standard for the practices of photojournalistic icons. A finding here is that what makes a photo iconic is not the event itself, but what was captured and how it was captured. Photojournalistic icons are not art, rather as Hariman and Lucaites (2007) proposed, they represent a mode of civic performance that functions within the interaction rituals of everyday life.

Images like these must deal with the biases that already move people to think and act. "To change that behavior, you have to create a system of repetition around your issue in order to create new neuropathways in people's brains so that they interact with black people and blackness differently," said Shanelle Matthews, director of communications for the Black Lives Matter Global Network (Tringali, 2017, para. 7). Rooted in a deep history, the photographs of the Black Lives Matter movement generate a new narrative surrounding race and police brutality. The photographs analyzed here did more than mere documentation. Rather, in their re-use and repetition, these images became iconic as they reshaped collective memories to construct a new narrative about American politics, society, and identity.

Acknowledgments

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