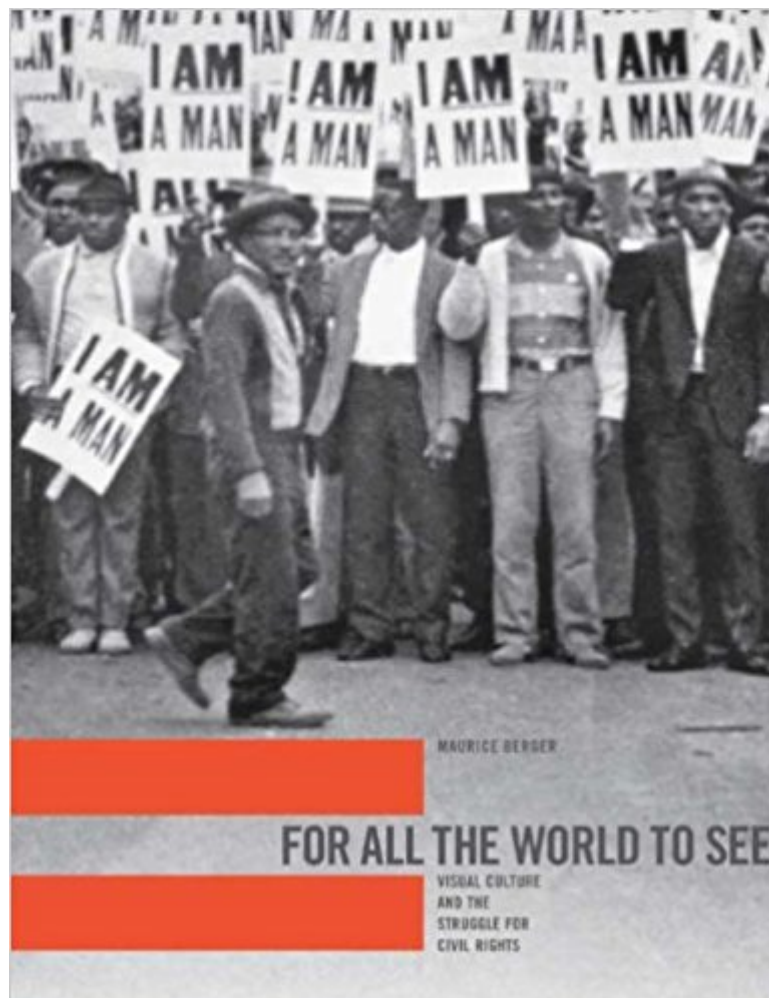




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For All The World To See: Visual Culture And The Struggle For Civil Rights



Synopsis

In 1955, shortly after Emmett Till was murdered by white supremacists in Mississippi, his grieving mother distributed to the press a gruesome photograph of his mutilated corpse. Asked why she would do this, she explained that by witnessing with their own eyes the brutality of segregation and racism, Americans would be more likely to support the cause of racial justice. "Let the world see what I've seen," was her reply. The publication of the photograph inspired a generation of activists to join the civil rights movement. Despite this extraordinary episode, the story of visual culture's role in the modern civil rights movement is rarely included in its history. This is the first comprehensive examination of the ways images mattered in the struggle, and it investigates a broad range of media including photography, television, film, magazines, newspapers, and advertising. These images were ever present and diverse: the startling footage of southern white aggression and black suffering that appeared night after night on television news programs; the photographs of black achievers and martyrs in Negro periodicals; the humble snapshot, no less powerful in its ability to edify and motivate. In each case, the war against racism was waged through pictures—millions of points of light, millions of potent weapons that forever changed a nation. Through vivid storytelling and incisive analysis, this powerful book allows us to see and understand the crucial role that visual culture played in forever changing a nation.

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Customer Reviews

“Even ‘unforgettable’ images such as those contained in this project can be forgotten if they are not part of a public and highly visible record. With this tremendously important book, Maurice Berger has ensured that these powerful, affirming, and harrowing images will remain central to the story of this country’s furious and joyful struggle for civil rights.” —Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard University (Henry Louis Gates, Jr.) “Stunning both visually and interpretively, this marvelous book is by turns chilling and inspiring, poignant and gritty. The images it chooses and juxtaposes will introduce young people to worlds of struggle too little recalled and remind us all of the stakes involved in images of race and freedom.” —David Roediger, author of *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (David Roediger) “In 1955, the photograph of Emmett Till’s mutilated body was for many African-Americans the visual equivalent of a knock-out punch. . . . That single image played a powerful role in building the civil rights movement, we learn in Maurice Berger’s *For All the World to See*.” —*Boston Globe* (Boston Globe) “For All the World to See. . . .” reminds us through text and images just how powerfully photography affected the course of a major social movement that changed the history and the fabric of American life, all for the better.” —Robert Leiter, *Jewish Exponent* (Robert Leiter *Jewish Exponent*) “[An] attractive and compellingly written new work.” —Tracy E. K’Myer, *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* (Tracy E. K’Myer *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*) Selected as a Choice Outstanding Academic Title for 2010 in the Art & Architecture category (Choice 2011-01-01) Winner of the 2010 Outstanding Exhibition in a University Art Museum, given by the Association of Art Museum Curators (Outstanding Exhibition in a University Art Museum Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC) 2011-05-16)

Maurice Berger is Research Professor and Chief Curator at the Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture, University of Maryland, Baltimore County and Consulting Curator at the Jewish Museum in New York. Berger’s essay series, “Race Stories,” a continuing exploration of the relationship of race to photographic portrayals of race, appears monthly on the *Lens Blog* of the *New York Times*.

This wonderful book captures extraordinary moments in the Civil Rights movement, starting for me during the period from my late teens. I grew up in a small farming community in Wisconsin; there were no African Americans closer than ten miles away, and it was a shock to visit southern Illinois and see segregated toilets. But my first real exposure to the cultural struggles occurred during a

student exchange trip to Texas; my exchange partner's mother was adamant that her grandchildren would never attend segregated schools as had been recently mandated in the Brown decision. Her intensity of feeling made a deep impression, and I resolved to learn a great deal more about race and America. One of my first discoveries in the stacks at the University of Wisconsin library was a "Life" magazine look alike called "Ebony". I read ten years worth of issues, and was shocked at images I had never seen before, including the battered face of Emmett Till. A few months later when the bus boycotts began, similar images began to appear in the local and then the national press. Over the next several years I became much more aware of the struggle, serving as a volunteer lawyer in Mississippi with the President's Committee, among other things. And, of course, the number and intensity of the images proliferated. But they tended to be isolated in my mind, tied to specific events and people. During that period, photographs of newsworthy events made them visible, more immediate, and it seemed more real. Today, in the age of social media and its enormous effect in Egypt and elsewhere, it is hard to understand the impact. But for Gordon Parks, a leading photographer of the era, the camera was the "'weapon of choice' in the war against racism and segregation, part of a visual arsenal that could transform public opinion, motivate political action, or bolster morale." Civil rights leaders and activists agreed. They were, according to the exhibition notes, "often exceptionally skillful image-makers, adept at capitalizing on the authority of pictures to edify, educate, and persuade. They also understood, and took advantage of, new visual technologies as well as society's insatiable hunger for pictures." As the publisher writes, "This is the first comprehensive examination of the ways images mattered in the struggle, and it investigates a broad range of media including photography, television, film, magazines, newspapers, and advertising." It's an examination that anyone interested in the history of the modern United States simply has to see. Otherwise, you will remain as naive and uninformed as I was as a Wisconsin farm boy many years ago. Robert C. Ross 2010 Revised March 2012 Revised February 2015

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