Does Documentary Photography Still Matter?

by

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ABSTRACT

This research establishes the importance of *Life* magazine as a benchmark for determining whether the Internet and its Web-based new media environment is an effective venue for publishing documentary photography. By posing the question, *Does Documentary Photography Still Matter?* this study examines the medium’s ability to reach an audience and effect social, political or economic change in the current new media environment as it once did during the Golden Age of photography, when *Life* magazine dominated the scene.

The findings point to an evolution in documentary photography that reached its peak during the print medium years of *Life* magazine but since has evolved and taken on powerful new forms in the current multimedia environment. The findings define specific examples attributed to affect and change resulting from the new media capability of instantaneous interaction for the viewer. In addition, the research conveys a need for new business models to support the work of documentary photographers and the publishers that support it. This latter point is crucial for the future development of media, documentary photography and those who define them as their livelihood.

The research concludes that the future of documentary photography as an effective communication tool continues to evolve with new trends in society and technology. Its potential to affect an audience lies in the medium’s ability to reach the viewer.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, storytelling has been as much a part of the human experience as the air we breathe. The visual storytelling component is as old as humanity’s first drawings on stone. Today that visual component has evolved into still and motion pictures, and the publishing element, from two-dimensional to multimedia, yet the purpose is the same: to record and convey the human narrative.

With the invention of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, a new visual revolution began, and with it, the growth and evolution of societies’ insatiable appetite for visual information. When, in 1936, a weekly picture magazine called *Life* appeared, developments in technology, media and society had brought about a new and powerful visual perspective of the human story.

During the period of 1936-1978, known as the “Golden Age” of photojournalism, the influence of documentary photography was molded around publications such as *Life* and *Look*. Many of the leading issues of the day—the Civil Rights movement, political assassinations, the Vietnam War, the moon landing, Watergate, among others—were issues that formed the foundations for social and political views of the day. Certainly, newsreels and later television provided coverage of these issues and had an immediate impact on those viewers. However, the images that are imbedded in the nation’s long-term memory are the still images that were published in the pages of mainstream magazines such as *Life*. 
The influence of the Golden Age images and the photojournalists who made them, such as W. Eugene Smith, Charles Moore, Philip Jones Griffith, David Douglas Duncan and Larry Burrows, have inspired generations to pursue careers as documentary photographers.

For today’s documentary photographers, there are more venues for photojournalism than there were during the Golden Age. However, are these outlets able to reach a large or influential enough audience to have significant impact on the social political or economic issues they attempt to define?

One of the oft-stated reasons for wanting to become a photojournalist is to document issues that are in need of social, political or economic change. When there were fewer photojournalists and the mainstream media outlets for documentary photography were clearly defined, the photojournalist was more likely to reach and affect an audience. Today there are fewer mainstream print outlets for documentary photography yet more professionals are defining themselves as documentary photographers. Consequently, it is necessary to look at alternative venues.

Alternative outlets on the Internet are plentiful. However, is the reach of the Internet and its Web based setting too broad, affecting the ability of the medium to influence social, political or economic issues as mainstream print media once did? If the Internet is defined as a mainstream outlet for today’s audience, then its influence opens up numerous possibilities for the future of documentary photography and the photojournalists who produce it.
The purpose of this research is to answer the following: Does documentary photography still matter, and are the new media outlets effective venues for publishing documentary work, as *Life* magazine was during its heyday? The answers may provide a better understanding of social, economic and technological trends that can help guide documentary professionals along a path of maintaining both a viable profession and an effective communication tool.

The relevance of this study centers on the importance of documentary photography published in *Life* magazine and how that benchmark compares to current new media venues for documentary work.

The results reveal the importance of *Life* magazine to society and the development of documentary photography to effect social, political and economic issues in the first phase, while establishing the importance and effectiveness of new media venues on the Internet in the second phase.

The voices of photojournalism experts speak to the purpose of this thesis, to understand current trends, future needs and the social relevance of documentary photography in today’s publishing environment, a relationship presently unavailable in current research. These voices offer the sharpest explanation thus far into the power of the medium to affect society, influence change and develop new media for the future of the profession.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review employed a broad search of journals, magazines, newspapers and books. It was conducted using the Internet and libraries at Brooks Institute of Photography, The University of California at Santa Barbara, The Center for Creative Photography and the University of Arizona. The analyzed literature provides the reader with a historical understanding of why documentary photojournalism mattered and establishes the basis for the discussion: Does documentary photojournalism still matter?

The review is divided into three sections: the early history of documentary photography, *Life* magazine’s impact on documentary photography and documentary photography after *Life* magazine folded.

Documentary Photography: An Early History

Photography has influenced society since its invention in 1827, yet social documentary photography did not begin to affect large segments of the public until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Two important developments led to this transformation. First, improvements in camera and printing press technology allowed text and words to merge onto the printed page. Second, ideological changes within society led to the need of photography “to act as a “witness” and sway public opinion” (Rosenblum 1997, 342). These developments continued to be important
threads throughout the history of documentary photography and continue as important factors today.

Two of the earliest documentary photographers who used photography to effect social change were Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine.

Riis, a police reporter for the *New York Herald*, was “one of the first in America to conceive of camera images as an instrument for social change” (Rosenblum 1997, 359). University of California Santa Barbara historian Ulrich Keller describes Riis as being the “founding father of the ‘Social Documentary’ genre in photography” and “the first to harness the camera for reform purposes” (Doherty 1981, VII).

Much of Riis’ work was made possible through advances in technology, specifically the introduction of flash powder, “a process discovered in Germany, which came to his attention in 1887” (Doherty 1981, 2). This discovery allowed Riis to enter the dark alleyways and boarding houses of New York’s Lower East Side, where his social documentary work centered.

Riis’ early success and ability to persuade the public of his concerns was first accomplished by his use of the lantern slides, which “were photographic images on transparent glass plates which could be projected on walls or a screen” (Doherty 1981, 1). Even though photographs could be published in print media and “the original photographs themselves were strong, reproduction was unsatisfactory” (Szasz 1974, 428).
Riis first traveled around New York then to other parts of the country, projecting his images of social disorder to middle-class audiences at camera clubs and “evangelical Christian churches” (Strange 1989, 280). The audiences saw his presentations as irrefutable “visual evidence” of poverty and class divisions within society, and the work established the use of social documentary photography as a tool to win “public support” for social reforms (Doherty 1981, VII). Riis’ impact was aided by the public’s perceived naïveté when viewing photographs as compared to “contemporary Americans [who] are bombarded daily by thousands of images” (Doherty 1981, 428-429).

The slide shows took on an early form of multimedia presentation by using music and narrative “sequences of images like those encountered in comic strips or films” (Strange 1989, 288). The shows “lasted about two hours, and [Riis] often used up to 100 slides, a quarter of which he had taken by flash powder at night” (Szasz 1974, 429). The shows allowed viewers to look “into these places without actually being present,” sparing the audience the sounds and smells of a firsthand visit (Strange 1989, 291).

Many pointed to the urgency the pictures portrayed and their power over words. “Never before had lantern slides been used in such a fashion, and the press eagerly responded to these dramas…. A New Bedford, Massachusetts, reporter noted that Riis’ slides gave a much clearer insight into tenement misery than reading could ever do” (Szasz 1974, 431).
In addition to the lantern slide shows, Riis authored eighteen books, including a biography of Theodore Roosevelt, who befriended Riis after reading his first book, *How the Other Half Lives*. The book evolved out of Riis’ previous writings on social issues in the Lower East Side and the photographs used in his lantern slide shows. *How the Other Half Lives* was one of the first books to use “half-tone pictures made from photographs” (Doherty 1981, 5). “Moreover, it catapulted Jacob Riis into serving as the major voice of the American social conscience for the next two decades” and created the first “genuine public outcry” of deep social issues facing large cities (Szasz 1974, 422). “The New York *Daily News* noted that every man who read it must awaken to the imperative need of doing something” (Szasz 1974, 423). Clearly, Riis’ work was having a measurable impact on society, while at the same time establishing social documentary photography as a medium to effect change.

As with *How the Other Half Lives*, Riis’ second book, *The Children of the Poor*, detailed the “dreadful conditions” of surviving in the slums of New York. Riis continued to reaffirm “the humanity of the poor immigrant” and “presented the slum as a social problem for which there were specific public remedies” (Jacob August Riis 2005).

Riis’ other books continued to focus on the social documentary theme, including *The Ten Years War, Battle for the Slum* and *Children of the Tenements*. “From 1890 to his death in 1914, Jacob Riis continued to remind the nation of tenement conditions….While these books generally received favorable reviews, by the end of the 1890s, most of his message had been said before” (Szasz 1974, 433).
However, his groundbreaking photographs, seen “through works such as *How the Other Half Lives*,” remain an important source for viewing the effects of poverty and tool that forced change during the social reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Jacob August Riis 2005).

Other of Riis’ photographs illustrated the conditions of the poor living in New York’s Mulberry Bend slum while also paving the way for green space where slums and poverty once reigned (Rosenblum 1997, 359). His work helped to improve social conditions for immigrants and the poor, and led to new awareness of the plight of working children. In addition, his photographs exposed New York City’s contaminated water supply, which led to “the purchase of the Croton watershed” and a permanent source of fresh water (Holmes 2005).

Historians Ferenc Szasz and Ralph Bogardus conclude that “Jacob Riis was able to catch the public’s attention in large part because of his photography. Had it not been for his skill with the camera, he would not have had the same impact” (1974, 425).

Lewis Hine, also a strong believer in “the power of pictures to change public opinion,” began exposing the social conditions of child laborers in 1906, while working for the National Child Labor Committee (Barnet 2000). The NCLC “was the first organization to use photographs consistently and extensively in an effort to bring about social change” (Goldberg 1999b, 16).

Like Riis, Hine used pictures to convince a skeptical public of the horrible conditions of the poor and underprivileged, especially children. He called this type of
photography “interpretive” and used it to reveal “a reality no one had seen before.” Later this form of photography would become known as “documentary” (Gutman 1974, 16-17, 38).

For Hine, evolutionary changes in society played a pivotal role in his work to effect social change. The impact of his child labor photographs were possible only after “American ideas about poverty had shifted” (Goldberg 1999b, 7).

Society’s evolution is central to understanding the role of photography to effect change during this period. “As industrialization progressed in the nineteenth century, it began to look like machines might lift enormous numbers out of poverty, and social and religious thought edged toward considering poverty a social product rather than punishment earned by bad living” (Goldberg 1999b, 7-8). This shift established the movement that made “possible the kind of reform campaign that Hine engaged in with his camera,” while employed by the NCLC (Goldberg 1999b, 8).

Furthermore, the reform movement relied on “evidence” as a means of solving social problems. Hine’s documentary work fit neatly into this model by “striving to illustrate the world for those who did not know or had not seen. Developed by social workers and reformers across the country, it was part of a nationwide effort to illuminate and improve the economic, social and cultural life of America” (Denzer 1988, 50). Hine’s photographs “were vital tools…in a campaign that sought to effect change in society by showing exactly how that society had gone wrong” (Victor 1982, 38).
Hine combined pictures with words, becoming “one of the first photographers to experiment with photomontage… a process of juxtaposing images, or several images, with text.” Hine noted that “the words he used to explain the images enhanced the pictures and vice versa in order to make a compelling document in service to cultural change” (Smith-Shank 2003). Moreover, Hine’s early use of words with text established him as an innovator of the early photographic essay. These “photo stories became part of [the] visual culture…intended to persuade adult viewers to think about the frightful social conditions of child labor and to encourage them to vote for reform” (Smith-Shank 2003).

Hine’s work at the NCLC led to the use of his photographs and words in a wide variety of media. “He controlled the design and layout of his pictures and captions,” which he would publish in slide presentations, brochures, posters and exhibits. His multimedia use of photography “was an important step along the medium’s route into more and more areas of everyday life” (Goldberg 1999b, 18). Just as Riis experimented with visual presentation techniques, Hine also sought new uses for the medium as a means to influence change.

Hine’s work for the NCLC took him all around the country, north and south, east and west, photographing in mills, factories, canneries, mines, agricultural fields and “urban streets with news vendors and messengers…. Sometimes he traveled as much as 50,000 miles per year by car and train; eventually he took more than 5,000 photographs for the Committee” (Goldberg 1999b, 16). The result of this work was
the Fair Labor Standards Act, a federal law that set standards for children in the workplace for the first time (Clark-Bennett).

After leaving the NCLC, Hine documented industrial workers for magazines and industry, and in 1930 was hired to photograph the construction of the Empire State Building. In 1932, he published a collection of these photographs in *Men at Work* (Newhall 2005).

However, it was Hine’s work for the NCLC that had the greatest impact. His work “created [the] visual culture to reform child labor and championed the rights of children to be children during the industrial age in the United States. His photo stories remain powerful images that describe and document child labor, and without them communicating so effectively to the emotions and consciences of their audience, the NCLC’s goal of child labor reform may have been much harder to attain” (Smith-Shank 2003).

“Social documentary photography was still in its infancy early in the twentieth century, yet Hine gave it canonical form. Not that he invented it, but his practice and the tenor of his work would influence American documentary photography for decades to come” (Goldberg 1999b, 9).

For these early messengers, the camera was the tool, while slide shows, newspapers, books and early illustrated magazines provided the outlet for documentary photography to reach a larger audience. As with future documentary photographers, these two pioneers “endured physical hardship to produce essays that
would eventually have a positive impact on both subject and society” (Shame Exposed 1988).

The tradition of documentary photography “established by Riis and Hine carried through to the 1930s with photographers like Doraethea Lange, Walker Evans, Marion Post Walcott, Gordon Parks, and Arthur Rothstein of the [U.S. Government’s Department of Agriculture’s] Farm Security Administration” (Kobre 2000, 336).

The “FSA project,” as it was commonly known, would become the most ambitious visual documentary project to shape the medium during the first half of the twentieth century. Headed by former Columbia University economics instructor Roy Stryker, the FSA project employed eleven photographers to document the actions of the government to help impoverished farmers. “Ultimately, the project demonstrated that the New Deal recognized the powerful role that photographs played in creating a visual analogue of the humanistic social outlook voiced in the novels, dramas and folk-music of the period” (Rosenblum 1997, 379).

The photographs from the FSA were published in newspapers and magazines to expose the problems of farm workers and “show how government money was helping. The pictures were also used to persuade congressional representatives to allocate more money for the Farm Security Administration Programs” (Kobre 2000, 336).

The visual record of the FSA, like that of earlier documentary photographic work by Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, further demonstrated the power of photography in society not only to record and preserve history but influence public opinion enough
to achieve change. The project “not only helped at the time but has left us with one of
the greatest photographic records of any period of our past” (Kobre 2000, 336).

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the “Rise of the Picture Press”
(Eskin 2002), stimulated by social concerns and the advent of new technologies. As
American magazines grew and matured, they established themselves as journalistic
vehicles for social awareness and change (Evans 1999). Documentary photography fit
neatly into this model and thrived during those early years, but its greatest influence
on society was yet to come.

Life Magazine’s Impact, 1936 -1945

The 1930s saw the rise in the “popularity and credibility” of documentary
news photography (Flamiano 2002). As the public grew more reliant on visual
information, the need for a credible news photography magazine grew, too. Henry R.
Luce, publisher of Time and Fortune magazines, understood the public’s growing
visual needs and the power of great journalistic photography. To meet the demand,
Luce published the first issue of Life magazine on November 23, 1936 (Wainwright
1988). The ensuing period marks the coming of age of documentary photography,
“moving from tabloid sensationalism to serious coverage of news and social issues”
(Flamiano 2002). Historians describe the period before television as the “Golden Age
of photojournalism” (Kobre 2000, 350).

“When Life began publication in 1936, it was the first magazine in which
photography played the staring role” (Flamiano 2002). From the beginning, Life had a
clear mission. Luce described it best in the magazine’s prospectus, setting the goals the magazine would go on to achieve over the next four decades:

To see life; to see the world, to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things—machines, armies, multitudes, shadows in the jungle and on the moon; to see man’s work—his paintings, towers and discoveries; things hidden behind walls and within rooms, things dangerous to come to; the women that men love and many children; to see and to take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed.

(Kobre 2000, 349)

*Life* dominated the field of visual communications in America from 1936 – 1945. It did so by “capturing the public’s imagination so thoroughly as to become a household word” (Cohen 1979, 62). Circulation figures bear this out. The first issue of the magazine sold all of its 466,000 copies (Ritchin 1987, 76), and within three years, the circulation had reached three million (Rosenblum 1997, 478). At its peak, *Life*’s paid circulation was eight million (Carr 2003). However, paid circulation was not the only factor measured to determine overall readership. Loudon Wainwright describes how the George Gallup Institute of American Public Opinion estimated the readership beyond that of the paid circulation. According to Wainwright, following *Life*’s publication in April 1938 of “The Birth of a Baby,” Gallup estimated that some seventeen million people viewed the story, leading to the discovery of a “pass-along readership of more than eight to one” (1988, 110). Understanding this “pass-along
readership provided a way of measuring impact, of measuring the real size of the *Life*
audience” (Wainwright 1988, 110).

These figures underscore not only *Life*’s popularity but also the skill of the
photographers and editors who brought stories of interest to the public on a weekly
basis. The winning formula for *Life* was clearly its ability to “humanize through
photography the complex and political social issues of the time for a mass audience”
(Rosenblum 1997, 476). This formula illustrates how *Life* consistently produced
stories that affected society. In addition, no other picture magazines of the day
produced comparable circulation figures. Ronny Cohen believes the reason for this is
simple: *Life*, he writes, “offered the most convincingly packaged version of reality”
(Cohen 1979, 62).

From the beginning, *Life* influenced what the public saw. In the first decade,
readers viewed images of war and conflict from Asia to Europe. The photographs
coming out of these regions gave readers a “front-row seat to observe global conflict”
(Rosenblum 1997, 478). Naomi Rosenblum suggests that these images were a factor
in convincing “isolation-prone Americans of the evils of Fascism” (1997, 478) and
consequently helped prepare the country to enter World War II. Another influential
prewar story titled “Rearmament: U.S. Is Weak in Arms and Industry Is Unprepared”
led to “the upgrading of Army readiness” (Wainwright 1988, 116).

Before publishing the first issue of *Life*, Luce said, “We have to educate
people to take pictures seriously and to respect pictures as they do not do now”
(Ritchin 1987, 78). Images in *Life* did help educate the public by providing first-time
views into unknown societies and global events. Cohen explains that “Life sought to project an image of itself as a magazine able to go anywhere and see everything” (1979, 62). An early example was Margaret Bourke-White’s essay on the Soviet Union, which brought readers their “first glimpse of a largely unknown society” (Rosenblum 1997, 481).

Coverage during World War II continued Luce’s vision of educating the public through pictures. The power of pictures helped increase the impact of Life magazine during wartime, as well as the influence of its publisher. Seeing “stirring photographs of U.S. troops in action” and “coverage of the home front,” people grew to trust the magazine (Wainwright 1988, 205). Stories during this period aimed at keeping the home front “steadfast, calm and secure in its values” (Wainwright 1988, 158). One such issue, published on July 5, 1945, depicted the American flag on the cover. Inside, the magazine ran the names of 12,987 soldiers who had been killed during the first eighteen months of the war. Wainwright notes that this story “was a most powerful statement” as much as it was an “enterprising stroke of journalism” (Wainwright 1988, 159).

Photographs from this period often told of realities that went beyond individual imaginations, such as the images of Jews in German concentration camps by Life photographer Margaret Bourke-White and others. Harold Evans notes that these images exemplify the “central contributions of photojournalism” and make “the unbelievable believable” (1999). The impact of these images helped sway and educate a skeptical public.
Life broke new ground during its first decade by establishing the foundation and framework for future documentary photography and elevating the power of images to that of equal status with written journalism. Luce’s vision transformed the photography of Riis and Hine to a powerful story-telling model that was just beginning to transform society. Maitland Edey describes this model as the “first true photo-essay ever made” (1978, 1), referring to Margaret Bourke-White’s images of Fort Peck, Montana, published in the first issue of Life. Luce reinforced the idea of the journalistic strength of the photo-essay when he insisted, “It has got to be an essay with a point….The mere charm of photographic revelation is not enough” (Wainwright 1988, 111). Edey adds that the photo essay “has a greater impact than any single picture in it” (1978, 1). The photo essay would be Life’s greatest contribution to the medium of visual communications. As Wendy Kozol notes, “Life’s photo-essays worked as they did because of the ways in which the magazine encouraged readers to identify with what they saw” (1994, 16).

The Postwar Decades

With the end of World War II, the power and credibility of Life was unmatched by any visual publication of the day. Wainwright points out, the influence generated by the magazine during the 1940s helped to propel the publication into the next decade by continuing to “see things the way its audience saw them” (1988, 206). Ironically, this same basis would ultimately lead to Life’s demise (Wainwright 1988, 206).
The postwar decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s produced some of the most powerful social changes in America since the end of the Civil War. Using documentary photojournalism, *Life* led the way in communicating and influencing these changes as no other medium before it. Historically, documentary photography focused on the socially oppressed in the hopes of stimulating public sentiment to improve their conditions. However, the postwar photo-essays appearing in *Life* often reflected the middle class, the same class associated with reading the magazine. Kozol points out that this visual change was “*Life*’s contribution to photojournalism” (1994, 91). By turning “the camera’s gaze on the middle class in an effort to mirror the reader’s world” (91), the reader would be better equipped to relate “emotionally to the people in the news” (92).

The period was dominated by issues such as Cold War politics, postwar economic adjustments, American migration to the suburbs, the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War. Kozol points out that *Life* was “the primary source for visual news in those years” (1990, Abstract). As the dominant outlet for photojournalism, *Life* used photography to communicate the important cultural, political and economic challenges of the day.

During the 1950s, *Life* photo-essays focused sharply on Cold War politics and America’s new economic affluence. Kozol notes that “*Life* readers encountered photo-essays about the prosperity of American society side by side with stories about atomic bombs and Communist takeovers” (1994, 120). The influence of *Life*
magazine to shape political and economic debates, both in public and political forums continued for much of the 1950s.

By the 1960s, television played a greater role in influencing society. Much academic research has focused on television’s influence, and this review does not intend to add to that research except to note the partial role of television in the demise of *Life* magazine. Even though television had been competing head on with *Life* during the late 1950s and early 1960s, *Life* continued to maintain its position as a major source of news. According to Kozol, “Despite television’s dramatic growth, the medium did not initially devote financial resources to news gathering” (1994, 185). By the mid 1960s, this also would begin to change, negatively affecting *Life*’s dominance.

Coverage of the Civil Rights movement dominated news from the late 1950s through the first half of the 1960s, with the Civil Rights photographs of Charles Moore having the greatest political and social impact. After appearing in *Life*, Moore’s 1958 photograph of the arrest of Civil Rights leader Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. helped propel King into national prominence (Kaplan 1999, 130). Michael Durham credits Moore’s 1963 Birmingham images of “jets of water blasting demonstrators and of police dogs tearing into crowds with helping to put public opinion solidly behind the Civil Rights movement” (Durham and Moore 1991, 90). So influential were Moore’s photographs that they “helped transform the national mood and contributed to the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” (Kaplan 1999, 127).
The political reaction to Moore’s images in *Life* could be seen across the spectrum and demonstrate the impact these photographs had. They inspired President John F. Kennedy to say that the “situation in Birmingham had sickened him.” Malcolm X noted Moore’s images during a speech in Africa, and Senator Jacob Javits of New York said, Moore’s images helped “quicken passage” of Civil Rights legislation (Kaplan 1999, 134). Howard Chapnick, head of the Black Star photo agency, best sums up the importance of Moore’s images to photojournalism: “The lesson here for aspiring photojournalists is that one has to recognize great turning points in social history, to seize the opportunity to bear witness to them, and to remember that what is in your backyard may be the stepping stone to your success” (Chapnick 1994, 55). Moore’s Civil Rights images clearly demonstrate the power of photojournalism, the influence of *Life* magazine and the impact these images had on society as a whole.

*Life* continued to be the dominant media news outlet, even as ninety percent of American homes had a television by 1960 (Kozol 1994, 185). This would all change when television’s coverage of the war in Vietnam entered American living rooms night after night.

But television was not *Life*’s only problem during the 1960s. According to Kozol, “*Life*’s political and social importance declined in the 1960s as it faced changing audience habits and was beset by economic difficulties” (1994, 185), including declining advertising revenues and “rising production costs” (1994, 185 - 186). Television’s ability to respond to “fast-breaking news events” was another
factor that led to *Life*’s decline with readers. But of all the problems affecting the magazine, quality was not one of them. Images published in *Life* during the Vietnam War continued to influence society and politicians. So much better were the images appearing in *Life* than on television that Edey describes the weekly comparison as “embarrassing” (1978, 19).

The most influential Vietnam War images appearing in *Life* were those of *Life* photographer Larry Burrows. As Moore’s Civil Rights images helped to define society’s view of the Civil Right’s movement, Burrow’s Vietnam War photographs helped define American views of the war. “His images, published in *Life* magazine, brought the war home, scorching the consciousness of the public and inspiring much of the antiwar sentiment that convulsed American society in the 1960s” (Burrows 2002, front flap).

As television brought the war to our living rooms and became the preferred source for visual communication, *Life* magazine responded by publishing more color. Burrow’s Vietnam War essays would lead the color conversion. John Loengard points out that Burrows’ images “began the first extended coverage of war in color” (2004, 91). The power of his first color essay from Vietnam led David Halberstam to describe some of these images as “jarring” and “helped trigger a certain uneasiness among ordinary Americans back home” (Burrows 2002, 11).

The importance of Burrows’ Vietnam War images helped *Life* readers to “understand something so distant and complicated, and penetrated the official cover stories put out by the government” (Burrows 2002, 14). In addition, these images
went beyond the impact of first publication to become historically important. To this
day, new generations are able to “understand and feel the terrible events he recorded”
(Burrows 2002, 13). This is one of the most important influences of documentary
photojournalism, both past and present.

The declining influence of Life magazine continued into the 1970s. Yet
documentary photojournalism published in the magazine during its final years would
continue to have an impact. A notable project was an essay by former Life
photographer W. Eugene Smith. Titled Minamata, the essay documented the results
of mercury poisoning in Minamata Bay near a small Japanese fishing village. Smith
used the images from Minamata to make the world aware of the road down which we,
as a global industrial community, were headed. He hoped to “raise the small voices of
words and photographs in a warning to the world. To cause awareness is our only
strength,” he said (Smith 1975). Evans notes that for Smith, Minamata was a story
that could only be completely understood through the use of photography (1999).

With the declining influence of Life magazine, Smith turned to a variety of
media to reach a large audience, publishing a book, displaying his work in galleries
and reaching out to other periodicals including Camera 35. Even though Life was
losing its status as the main source for documentary photojournalism, Smith sent the
Minamata images to Life, which published the essay in 1974. Jeanne Finley notes that
the work “was pivotal in bringing about an international consciousness of the dangers
of unchecked industrial pollution” (1981, below "Minamata: The Photoessay"). To
drive home the impact this documentary work has had on society, Finley adds that
“although the political climate surrounding environmental issues has changed,…the power of the essay is indicative that these issues are as alive today as they were when the poisoning was discovered” (1981, below "Minamata: The Photoessay"). The final impact from the Minamata documentary essay would come in 1997 when Japanese officials were able to declare it safe again to eat the fish in Minamata Bay (Butler 1997, 41).

**Documentary Photography after Life**

The original weekly edition of *Life* magazine died on December 29, 1972 (Hamblin 1977, 307) but was resurrected as a monthly in the late 1970s and again, briefly, in the 1990s. Today, it exists as a newspaper supplement similar to *Parade* magazine, hardly a reflection its former style. Since its 1972 demise, *Life* never again influenced an audience as it had during its heyday. Moreover, photojournalism’s very ability to survive and effect change would be tested in the decades following *Life*.

Throughout the twentieth century, pictures captured moments—moments that affected the world. As Killian Jordan observes, it’s “why we value photography: It makes time stand still” (1999, 10). Memorable images of the last century gave us views of the first flight at Kitty Hawk, a Spanish soldier dying, child labor, a mother and daughter in Minamata, the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War and so much more. Some even let us look out from the moon. All who saw these images were impacted in one way or another. Some of these images will be remembered long into this century and beyond, while others will fade with time and memory. One thing
is certain: without these documentary images, our understanding of the last century would be far less clear (Jordan 1999, 10).

Goldberg states that twentieth century photography could be characterized by “mass killings and mass imagery, two unforeseen consequences of the industrial revolution” (1999b, 13). From the 1920s, when printing and camera technology changed the way we viewed the world, to the introduction of *Life* magazine in the 1930s and beyond, the photographic image was considered a reliable documentary source of world events. But by the 1960s, the publishing world had been heavily affected by television, resulting in a narrowing of focus for many in the print medium. A number of still photographers were financially affected and scrambled for new outlets in Europe. However, in the 1970s, when photojournalism appeared to be on its deathbed, the International Center of Photography opened, legitimizing photojournalism as an art form. The opening of the ICP created new outlets for photojournalists in museums and galleries. Even after all the negative attacks on photojournalism through the late twentieth century Goldberg concludes, “The reports of photography’s death have been greatly exaggerated” (1999b, 16).

However, many outlets for photojournalism during the 1980s and 1990s turned away from serious documentary images and instead focused on “life-style journalism,” fueled by the success of magazines such as *People* and *Vanity Fair* (Miller 2000, 38). During one of its reincarnations, even *Life* emphasized celebrity coverage, but the competition was too stiff and the magazine again folded. In one of its final issues, *Life* returned to the photo reportage that had made it a household name.
and included a photo-essay by James Nachtwey. Russell Miller notes that the essay, “about a poor family eking out an existence in a shack by the railroad tracks in Jakarta, Indonesia, led readers to contribute ‘thousands of dollars’ transforming the life of the family (2000, 38). The example, small as it may be, illustrates the continued influence *Life* had, even in its final days.

Without this powerful magazine, how could documentary photojournalism reach a large enough audience and still have an impact? As outlets for documentary photojournalism have dwindled, established professionals have voiced their concern. Miller quotes David Burnett, co-founder of Contact Press Images, who notes how “it is getting more and more difficult to find space for serious stories. Mainstream magazines are still publishing some photojournalism, but it is no more than tokenism” (2000, 40). Similarly, former *Life* magazine Director of Photography Peter Howe states, “Although rumors of photojournalism’s death have been substantially exaggerated during the last decade, it certainly isn’t what it used to be” (2001, 25).

The loss of *Life, Look, Picture Post* and other influential magazines for documentary photojournalism has left a large gap in outlets for the printed page. Howe observes that the decline in mainstream print media began with a cultural shift in the 1980s and continues today. Yet, “right now, the Web is a much–used vehicle for documentary photographers, many of whom have developed their own sites, including galleries and online print sales” (2001, 26). As Internet technologies advance and users adopt faster broadband connections, the ability of the Internet to be an influential medium for photojournalism may put to rest rumors of its death.
Howe further notes that photojournalism “as an activity is alive and healthy; it is the market for photojournalism that is in need of life support” (2002). Yet a brief renaissance did occur following the events of 9/11, when publications were starving for documentary images. More recently, technology has propelled photojournalism back as a competitive medium. Even considering the enormous hurdles, young people continue to flock to the profession. And why? Howe concludes that passion and having an impact on society continue to be powerful lures to photojournalists (2002).

It is clear that photojournalism is going through another of its many transformations, and like pulling teeth, it may hurt at times. But with the determination, ideals and conviction of those engaged in the profession, photojournalism will continue to be an honorable pursuit. At the same time, the Internet may turn out to be the outlet for its survival.

Tom Kennedy, managing editor for multimedia at Washington Post-Newsweek Interactive, describes the potential for photojournalists and editors in the Internet era as “the chance to reinvent photojournalism by enabling us to blend the best practices from still photojournalism, broadcasting and independent films” (2003). Through technological advances, the Internet is becoming a medium where still pictures combined with other forms of media give us an opportunity to produce compelling documentary work. Kennedy adds, “I believe we we’re just beginning to scratch the surface of the web’s potential as a storytelling device” (2003). This new media approach works to overcome limitations associated with traditional print media and is an attempt to attract a broader, more technologically educated audience. “With
voiceovers and music capabilities it is a very powerful medium,” notes Adrian Evans, Director of Panos Pictures, a photo agency specializing in documentary photojournalism (quoted in Brown 2000, 24). Vincent Alabiso, former executive photo editor for the Associated Press, notes, “With the merging of still and video technology and the burgeoning use of both media on-line, photojournalists need to look hard at how to approach the changing marketplace (1999, 58).

Sarah Brown, of the British Journal of Photography, states, “The Internet affords photojournalists another outlet for the classic photo story” (2000, 24). Panos’ Evans describes the Web as “the most radical way of using pictures” (quoted in Brown 2000, 24). Miller similarly describes how “in-depth photo essays that once would have made their debut in magazines,” are increasingly finding their way onto the Internet and “online publications such as The Digital Journalist” (2000, 41). The jury is still out as to the power the Internet can have on photojournalism, and some, such as Miller, are not convinced that a Web site can accomplish what “turning the pages of a well laid-out magazine” will do (2000, 41). However, it is clear that the potential of the Internet to reach beyond the subscription numbers of a single magazine publication, such as Life, is great. David Walker of Photo District News explains that “in this age of global media, average citizens around the world understand the power of photography to sway world opinion, inspire outcry or action” (2002, 28). Professors Robert Harriman and John Louis insist, “In the emerging Digital Age, photojournalism will continue to provide powerful resources for advocacy” (2004, 14).
Today’s documentary photographers face added challenges, starting with a public that is bombarded with images and stiff competition with television news. Yet despite all these obstacles, photojournalists today continue to be held together by a common thread stretching back to their peers from the last century: their desire to have a positive impact on both subject and society. Documentary photographer Eugene Richard refers to it as the desire “to bring things to light. I am more concerned than ever about the way the world is going. I want to be involved in it” (quoted in Shame Exposed 1988).

The public may no longer have Life magazine to turn to, but that does not mean, as some in the profession have implied, that photojournalism’s death is inevitable. Poynter Institutes’ Kenneth Irby highlights an institute study which confirmed that “people were emotionally affected by pictures and that they are a dominant entry point during the digestion of printed information” (2002). In an interview in The Digital Journalist, Dirck Halstead, speaking with David Friend, a former Life magazine director of photography, whether photojournalism has as much impact on culture now as it did during Life magazine’s heyday. Friend responds by noting, “As a society, we communicate in extremely visual terms….We’ve become comfortable with images and the immediate and often emotional gratification that pictures provide” (Halstead 1998).

“Photojournalism has always been visually powerful, but does it actually change anything?” asks Sarah Brown (2000, 24). Responding to Brown, Victoria Lukens of the Independent on Sunday says, “It makes people question their vision of
the world and hopefully inspires them” (quoted in Brown 2000, 24). Marie Claire’s Nitrato-Izzo agrees: “I think there is still a place in this day and age for great still images that make you stop and think” (quoted in Brown 2000, 24). It is worth noting that Marie Claire, traditionally a women’s magazine, “dedicates at least eight pages to photojournalism a month in a section entitled Reportage” (Brown 2000, 23). Such untraditional sources for photojournalism are good signs for the medium. The Independent Magazine picture editor Nick Hall “feels the situation now is better than it has been for the last five years.” Hall states, “I think there was more lifestyle photography 10 years ago. Things are blurring now” (quoted in Brown 2000, 22-23).

The impact of documentary photojournalism can be measured on a number of levels: global, national, regional and local. Panos’ Evans describes how a set of images taken in Kazakhstan, showing the results of Russian nuclear testing, led to medical help for the local Kazak people after members of the charity Medicins Sans Frontiers viewed published portraits of the affected population (Brown 2000, 24).

John Taylor of Manchester Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom makes the point that “there are both historical and contemporary cases made for the uses of hard-hitting photojournalism in improving the lives of strangers” (2000, 137). Goldstein describes images as being “extremely powerful,” and the thing we first “notice in a publication and the last thing we forget” (2004, 17).

**Photojournalism on the Web**

Still in its infancy, photojournalism appears on the Web in a number of forms, including online magazines, news sites, agencies and individual sites. Dirck Halstead
of the online magazine *The Digital Journalist* says, “The key for online photojournalism is sponsorship and nonprofits” (quoted in Dorfman 2002, 62).

Describing Camera Works, an online photography section of *The Washington Post*, Tom Kennedy says that their model is more commercial, while incorporating a multimedia approach (Dorfman 2002, 62). Pixel Press, the creation of Fred Ritchin, a professor at NYU’s Tisch School and former *New York Times Magazine* editor, “publishes photo essays in which the pictures change on screen like a slide show, to the accompaniment of music or other sounds (Dorfman 2000, 63). Photographer Jon Levy felt times were tough for photojournalism when he started *foto8*, “a bi-monthly forum for photojournalism that otherwise might not find an outlet in today’s difficult publishing climate” (Senft 1999, 10).

The Internet has the potential for displaying images that otherwise would not appear in traditional media. Ridma Mendis points out that “people have the liberty to watch things that print media would hesitate to publish because of censorship or laws that do not apply to new media – such as graphic pictures of war” (2004).

Allen Beem of *Photo District News* notes that “many are turning to community Web sites in order to share their images” (2004, 106). John Loomis’ online magazine site *Blueeyes*, [http://www.blueeyesmagazine.com/](http://www.blueeyesmagazine.com/), “gives young and emerging photographers a forum for their work” (Beem 2004, 106), while aiming to reach a larger audience than any “one photographers Web site would” (Beem 2004, 110). A visit by influential industry professionals also helps spread the word and raise a site’s profile. Allen Beem points out that “*Time* picture editor MaryAnne Golan is
among the growing number of photo professionals who check out Blueeyes regularly” (2004, 110). Another site influenced by photojournalism professionals is ojodepez.org. The site, run by photographer Frank Kalero, receives support from the Madrid photo gallery La Fabrica and relies on professional guest editors to provide material (Documentary Work Online 2005, 21).

Space, always a limitation in traditional print publications, is less of a concern on the Web. Stephen Hart notes that photojournalists and editors “are no longer bound by the space limitations or static nature of newsprint” (1997, 15). Beem points to Blueeyes founder Loomis when he says, “We have infinite space as long as we can keep viewers’ interest” (quoted in Beem 2004, 110). Space and influential viewership are not necessarily formulas for reaching an audience that would result in social, political or economic impact. However, John Dorfman adds, “There are some promising Web sites that showcase sophisticated photojournalistic work and allow photographers a degree of freedom rarely available in traditional media”(2002, 63).

With more documentary photojournalism appearing on the Web, the potential for reaching larger audiences is enhanced.

Online news sites offer other potential for reaching large audiences. However, as Mendis points out, “most news sites fail to grasp” the advantages available to them (2004). Kenneth Kobre concurs when he notes that “online news sites use a rigid format thus sapping the drama out of visuals” (quoted in Mendis 2004). A number of large news organizations are dedicating sections of their sites to photojournalism. For
instance, the BBC site includes a section called "In Pictures", while MSNBC hosts "The Week in Pictures."

The reach of news sites such as MSNBC.com has grown significantly in the short time they have been available. Brian Storm, founder of MediaStorm and former director of multimedia at MSNBC.com notes, “Prior to September 11, 2001, MSNBC.com was reaching 25 million unique readers a month. In September we served almost 50 million” (Storm 2003).

Storm believes that the Internet and its Web-based multimedia venues offer the photojournalist the best chance of survival. He describes the challenges as opportunities and sees “gathering ambient sound and recording a subject’s interpretation of a story” as the “perfect complements to documentary photography” (Storm 2003).

“As magazines continue to give more pages to celebrities and runaway brides, Web sites that showcase serious documentary work continue to proliferate” (Documentary Work Online 2005, 21). Innovation and growth online will add to the potential of reaching audiences who in turn will respond to the work as readers of "Life once did."
Chapter 3

Method

Qualitative research methods were employed in collecting the research and presenting the results that follow. To help guide the methodology and achieve a structured approach, Michael Quinn Patton’s *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, Third Edition, was used. Patton spent eighteen years on the faculty of the University of Minnesota and was Director of the Minnesota Center for Social Research for five years. His expertise and writings in the field of qualitative research are well established in academic circles.

Design

A *Basic Research* approach was employed in the overall design of this thesis. *Basic Research* aims to contribute to existing knowledge and theory within the specified discipline. Patton notes, “The fundamental questions undergirding each discipline flow from the basic concerns and traditions of that discipline.” Researchers “strive to make a contribution to knowledge in that discipline and thereby contribute to answering the fundamental questions of the discipline” (2002, 215). The fundamental concerns and questions raised in this thesis center on the field of photojournalism. Historical research combined with answers to questions put to established experts in the profession make up the *Basic Research* approach.
Sample

The sample consists of established professional experts in the field of photojournalism. Professional experts are defined as those recognized as experts by members of the professional photojournalism community. The snowball, or chain sampling, method was used to identify professional experts.

Experts on the initial group were drawn from the researcher’s experience, knowledge and professional relationship with some of those interviewed, and based on twenty-five years as a professional photojournalist and photo editor, as well as consultation with Jim McNay, Director of Visual Journalism at Brooks Institute of Photography and advisor on this project. The initial list included ten experts: Brian Storm, president of MediaStorm.org, a multimedia production and consulting service; Tom Kennedy, managing editor for multimedia at Washington Post-Newsweek Interactive; Peter Howe, former director of photography at Life magazine and current executive editor of the Digital Journalist; Kenneth Kobre, Professor of Photojournalism San Francisco State University; Kenneth Irby, visual journalism group leader and diversity program director at the Poynter Institute; Charles Moore, photojournalist and author of Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore; and Dirck Halstead, editor and publisher of the Digital Journalist and director of the Platypus Workshops.

All ten potential interviewees were sent e-mails describing the project and requesting their participation. Initially, all ten responded, willing to participate. A second set of e-mails sent to schedule interview times resulted in seven replies.
The snowball method was employed during the interviews to establish a final list of professional experts. By asking each expert to name other experts in the field, the sample continued to grow. Once the experts started to repeat names, the final list was established. Of eighteen potential experts contacted by e-mail, fifteen responded to make up the final sample. The final sample consists of a broad range of experts whose professional experience and expertise span the period 1937 to present, which is important in that the breadth of the research analysis spans the early twentieth century to present. Most of the fifteen interviewees confirmed each other as experts in their field.

**Data Collection**

A standard, open-ended interview approach was used. Nine carefully worded open-ended questions were designed and provided to each of the fifteen professional experts in advance of their interview.¹

Interviewees were asked to provide a landline telephone number on which to be contacted. Landline interviews were preferred to help maintain recording quality. Fourteen of the fifteen interviewees provided a landline number; one interviewee provided a cell phone number. Connection problems did occur with the interview subject on the cell phone. The cell phone interview was completed to the researcher’s satisfaction with all questions and answers recorded and transcribed.

¹ The nine standard open-ended interview questions are listed in appendix B.
To maintain accuracy, all the interviews were recorded using a Sony HI-MD digital minidisk recorder. The recording media used was a one-gigabyte HI-MD minidisk. The recorder was set to long-play mode, allowing for nearly eight hours of record time per disk. Two one-gigabyte HI-MD minidisks were required to record the fifteen interviews.

At the start of each interview, the interviewee was asked permission to record their interview. All fifteen interviewees agreed to be recorded.

Interviewees were notified by e-mail that the interview could take at least one hour to complete. Interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour and five minutes, for an average of fifty minutes each. Interviews took place over a six-week period in November and December 2005.²

Data Organization and Analysis Procedures

All fifteen digital audio interview files were transcribed by the Tech-Synergy.com transcription service and returned as Microsoft Word documents. The transcribed documents were then reviewed for accuracy by replaying the digital audio files and proofreading the Word documents.

The process of organizing and coding the transcribed documents involved the use of Atlis.ti Visual Qualitative Data Analysis software, version 5.0. The use of this software simplified the process of synthesizing the interview responses for analysis.

² A complete list of interviewees, their backgrounds, interview dates and times can be found in appendix A.
To organize and classify the transcribed data, a coding system was developed from an initial reading of the material. Once relevant codes were applied to significant passages within the data, the codes were then categorized into family sets. These sets were then analyzed for relevant patterns and significant occurrences before being organized for inclusion in the results chapter.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

The results that follow are a summary of the data from interviews with fifteen photojournalism experts. This chapter is divided into five headings: 1) The Importance of Life Magazine; 2) Impact: The Photographs of Life Photographers Charles Moore, W. Eugene Smith and Larry Burrows; 3) The Loss of Life Magazine; 4) The Internet as a Venue for Documentary Photography; and 5) The Internet as a Medium to Effect Change. Subheadings are used to organize each section. The purpose of organizing the data in this way is to emphasize the development of patterns, stress diverse points of view and bring clarity to the results. Furthermore, the chapter is designed to emphasize the voices of the experts. Because the data consists of quotes from multiple interviews, a system of first reference is used to avoid repetitive citations.

The Importance of Life Magazine

Analysis of the research found the importance of Life magazine to be expressed in degrees. All fifteen experts expressed multiple viewpoints in describing the importance of Life magazine to society and photography. A unanimous point of view was not established.

Collectively, the experts’ diverse answers represent a consensus that Life magazine was both important and influential. In addition, the experts were divided on whether the Civil Rights images of Charles Moore, the Vietnam photographs of Larry Burrows or the Minamata photographs by W. Eugene Smith had a social, political or
economic impact as a result of their having been published in \textit{Life} magazine. The subcategories that follow outline these points of view.

Brian Storm, founder of MediaStorm, a multimedia production studio, and former vice president of News, Multimedia & Assignment Services for Corbis and Director of Multimedia at MSNBC.com, summed up the importance of \textit{Life} when he described it as “one of those icons” (Brian Storm, interview by author, November 16, 2005).

\textit{Before Life}

\textit{Life} magazine was not the first or only source of pictures when it appeared in 1936. Several experts expressed the importance of understanding the historical visual perspective of the period.

Kenneth Kobre, author and professor of photojournalism at San Francisco State University explains, “The first thing we have to understand is where \textit{Life} came from.” It came out of two different predecessors. “One was the German magazine [\textit{Berliner Illustrate}], where …this kind of photography or documentary photography was already going on in Europe. In addition, newspapers had picture pages,” and \textit{Life} magazine founder Henry Luce was already publishing \textit{Fortune} magazine, in which “he had started to really use photography extensively….At the same time, people could go to the movies and see newsreels. So there were many predecessors before \textit{Life}. It wasn’t that \textit{Life} came on the scene and there was no documentary
[photography] before. There was plenty of documentary photography. . . .” 

Life was “just a new outlet.” (Kenneth Kobre, interview by author, November 13, 2005).

Dirck Halstead, former Time photographer and founder of the Platypus Workshop and online magazine the Digital Journalist, concurred with Kobre in pointing out that the German magazine Berliner Illustrate “was the first magazine to use sequential photography and to feature photo spreads.” Halstead observed, that following the Berliner Illustrate, the London-based Picture Post “became the forerunner of the picture magazine” (Dirck Halstead, interview by author, November 14, 2005).

John Morris, author, former executive editor of Magnum Photos and former picture editor for Life, Ladies’ Home Journal, the Washington Post and the New York Times, began his career with Time in 1938, two years after the start of Life magazine. Morris noted that “the visual resources of our nation, of the world, were really limited before television to newspapers and newsreels” (John Morris, interview by author, November 17, 2005). According to Kobre, “The key difference is that while a lot of people read one magazine, Life, only a certain number of people read any given newspaper of the 1,500 newspapers. . . . While a lot of people were reading them, no individual story alone had the same breadth that it did when it appeared in Life magazine.”
Showcase for Photojournalism

A majority of the respondents associated the importance of *Life* magazine with being a showcase for photojournalism.

Kenneth Irby, visual journalism group leader and diversity program director at the Poynter Institute, described *Life* magazine as the “primary showcase of documentary photojournalism and…the primary way that American people learned about their neighbors and their countrymen” (Kenneth Irby, interview by author, November 9, 2005).

Melvin Scott, former director of photography for Time-Life Books and former Deputy Director of Photography at *Life* stated, “People were able to get their *Life* magazines, go through them and really see what was happening in other parts of the world” (Melvin Scott, interview by author, November 21, 2005). Halstead similarly described the magazine as “the dominant American publication for photojournalism.”

Tom Kennedy, managing editor for multimedia at *Washington Post-Newsweek Interactive*, suggested that *Life* was “probably the most important mainstream vehicle for a certain kind of photojournalism” and “one of the first venues in which documentary photojournalism in the United States had an opportunity to be seen by a large scale audience.” Kennedy qualified his definition of “documentary photographic work” as being separate from photojournalism. According to Kennedy, documentary photography showed what “was actually happening outside the boundaries of the major publications of the day” (Tom Kennedy, interview by author, November 16, 2005, emphasis added).
Peter Howe, former *Life* magazine Director of Photography and Executive Editor of the *Digital Journalist*, argued that the importance of *Life* magazine was in the way it brought stories of the world “into the homes of people every week in a visual way.” Howe added that *Life*’s importance was in the way it affected photojournalism by setting a “mythical standard,” a standard that other magazines and photographers aspired to (Peter Howe, interview by author, November 16, 2005).

Kobre described the importance of *Life* in its being “part of a group that was showing the world what was going on at the time, showcasing documentary photography.”

Fred Ritchin, former picture editor of *The New York Times Magazine*, executive editor of *Camera Arts* magazine, and founding director of the Photojournalism and Documentary Photography Program at the International Center of Photography, is now Associate Professor of Photography and Communications at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts and director of PixelPress.com. He agreed with Kobre’s assessment but emphasized that it was the weekly *Life* and not the monthly that provided “a way for audiences to feel in touch with world events.” Ritchin added that many readers had “a fascination with seeing the world, in a sense, for the first time” (Fred Ritchin, interview by author, December 5, 2005).

Morris said *Life* was the publication “where the country got its look at what was going on in the world,” and where the documentary photographic essay “flowered…. perhaps more than at any other magazine in history.”
Jim Hughes, author of the biography, *W. Eugene Smith: Shadow & Substance*; founding Editor of *Camera Arts* magazine; Editor of *Camera 35*, which published Smith's Minamata essay and co-founder and past president of the W. Eugene Smith Memorial Fund, echoed the majority when describing *Life* magazine: “In terms of the photojournalism that we think of today,…it was the medium that formed it and brought it to maturity” (Jim Hughes, interview by author, December 16, 2005).

Travis Fox, a staff photographer with washingtonpost.com, described *Life* simply as “the pinnacle of photojournalism at the time” (Travis Fox, interview by author, December 18, 2005).

*Venue for Photographers*

Another essential element in determining the importance of *Life* magazine is the significance experts placed on *Life* as a venue for professional photographers.

Halstead emphasized this importance by describing *Life* as the “aspirational high ground that all photographers wanted to work for.”

Morris said, “*Life*, from the moment it began publishing, became the goal of virtually every news photographer.”

Kennedy pointed out that *Life* magazine “marked a turning point of an era in which photographers could aspire to create a certain kind of work and have a sense that that work would find a home, find an audience, and in the process of doing it, they would be paid enough to sustain them in the pursuit of that work.”
Meredith Birkett, Senior Multimedia Producer at MSNBC.com, described *Life* as the place “where everyone wanted to be published and obviously treated photography very well” (Meredith Birkett, interview with author, November 22, 2005).

Cathaleen Curtiss, Director of Photography at America Online noted, “If you had a great piece you were working on, you were going to try to pitch it to *Life* magazine” (Cathaleen Curtiss, interview with author, December 7, 2005).

Fox said, “It was everything. It represented mainstream photojournalism and it was the outlet that photojournalists wanted to work for….The old *Life* magazines and *National Geographic* really prompted me to become a photojournalist.”

Scott explained, “The logo of *Life* had a sort of magical quality about it, the big red and white logo of *Life* magazine. And I think, so many of the photographers felt that once I’ve arrived in *Life*, I’ve been published in *Life*, I’ve arrived.”

*The Narrative Story*

During the interviews, experts credited *Life* magazine with establishing the narrative picture story. The experts agreed that this was a pivotal point in the development of photojournalism.

Scott stated, “*Life* offered a first real expansive view for photography to tell a story, a picture story. The whole approach to using pictures to tell a story, a beginning, middle and an end, had its first and its expansive use through the *Life* medium.” He emphasized that “text with the pictures” creates a “swaying force.”
David Leeson, senior photographer at the *Dallas Morning News* agreed with Scott: “*Life* magazine seized onto that and actually saw it as a great opportunity and a terrific medium for journalistic storytelling, visual storytelling, and were among the very first to recognize that” (David Leeson, interview by author, November 7, 2005). Leeson added, “I think they recognized the impact that it had on people’s lives and the stories that it could tell. In that sense, it completely revolutionized what the photo essay is.”

Halstead described how, in founding *Life* magazine, Henry Luce “began to assemble a stellar group of photojournalists and their job was not to fulfill an editor or reporter’s concept illustration,” but to “create narrative stories, to which the words would be secondary.”

Kennedy likewise also believed that the significance of *Life* was in its providing a home for specific content in a “commercial venue,” and that *Life* pioneered “content parameters” that are accepted today as being “the beginning of a certain kind of narrative storytelling that relied heavily on pictures and supporting text.” All of this, Kennedy suggested, “helped develop the boundaries of photojournalism itself.”

Charles Moore, a freelance photojournalist whose Civil Rights photographs were published in *Life* and whose images later became the basis for the book *Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore*, emphasized “that the reporter is also important, because he is writing the story, and I am illustrating it,
and that’s what *Life* magazine was. You worked as a team. You went out as a reporter and a photographer” (Charles Moore, interview with author, December 12, 2005).

**Money, Large Staff, Slick Paper and Big Pages**

Some experts link the importance of *Life* magazine to a financial commitment that supported photography, photographers, a large editorial staff and quality of paper in relation to the magazine’s physical size.

Irby suggested that Henry Luce’s willingness “to invest in documentary photojournalism was one of the major profound aspects or benefits of *Life* magazine. That *Life* magazine was able to demonstrate that investment in photography would pay off in the subscribers and the response of the readers and viewers.” Irby went on to add, “Photographers were given the full breath of resources in support, to exploit and to fully utilize the power of still photography.”

Storm noted that *Life* gave “the space to photography, and they were spending the money to do the kinds of assignments that you don’t really see funded today.” Storm opined that “one of the things that defined *Life* was they had some of the best picture editors on the planet working there. I mean they just had sort of the icons on the editing side, and that allowed them to attract the best photographers.”

Halstead explained, “Henry Luce had the resources to fund a staff of what were at the time considered to be the best photojournalists in the world.”

According to Kobre, “*Life* was able to underwrite stories and that was an important element. They had money to pay people to go out and shoot pictures, and
that turns out to be a critical factor in the gathering of photojournalism… The importance was that it had the biggest budget and ran the most stories, had the biggest staff, and so I would say that was the key to its importance.” As a result, “stories went to it first.”

Hughes pointed out that *Life* was one of the few publications to send “a team.” A team could consist of a photographer, a writer, assistants, and “there might even be a researcher.” *Life* would send the team to “do a major story. They would spend the money. *National Geographic* did the same thing and more, but they never had the same effect.”

When it came to quality, Kobre noted, “*Life* brought some important things to the table. One was its size. It came out weekly, and it had glossy paper, but it also had a much better layout than previous magazines.” Hughes described the importance of page size as coming as “close as one could get to a photograph itself, a photographic print, especially black and white.”

Because it presented the weekly news in a large format glossy paper, Morris opined, *Life* “was a sensation.”

**Advertising and Circulation**

Interviewees pointed to advertising and circulation as a way of illustrating the reach of *Life* magazine.

Halstead described *Life* as “the dominant magazine” and “the prime vehicle for advertisers….It just controlled eight million eyeballs….The pass-through rate at
one point was like six to one, which essentially meant that it had 48 million” viewers a week.” Halstead added that “Life maintained its dominance in terms of circulation and advertising until the advent of television.”

Similarly, Hughes noted, “There were other players besides Life, but I think it was Life that had the largest circulation.” Morris described a booming circulation “by the end of the war [World War II]. It was up to six million or something, and despite paper shortages, Life was it.”

Audience

Another significant development centered on the importance of the Life audience to its overall success. Interviewees describe a variety of aspects that lead to an understanding of the demographics of the day.

Storm stated that “it was a different time then….I mean, they had mind share. They had an audience that was not fractured in the way audiences are today….People talked about what was in Life magazine. It was a water cooler conversation piece.” He added, “I think the time is…gone now, because there is so much diversity out there….It’s hard to have that common, collective thought now.”

Howe noted, “The brilliant thing that Luce did was to find a level which had broad appeal and yet could, when the occasion demanded, treat subjects in a serious manner.” Howe recalled how older readers would tell him what a huge part Life

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3 In his 1988 book The Great American Magazine Life: An Inside History of America’s Most Famous Magazine, Wainwright describes the pass-along rate as being eight to one. Wainwright concluded that determining pass-along rates was a useful measure of impact.
magazine played in their lives. People said, “‘I used to wait for the magazine to be delivered every week.’…It would be shared amongst the family.”

Curtiss pointed out that *Life* “brought our stories from being just local stories to a more national, international audience.” These stories, he continued, “were passed on and talked about.”

Fox called *Life* a “magazine for the masses, and the message got out; the stories were communicated.”

Hughes described *Life* as being “fully democratic and accessible to anyone who had a dime. It came out every week.” Although television existed, it “wasn’t competing at that point…. [Life] was basically the only game in America.”

Ritchin again emphasized the differences between the monthly and weekly *Life*. The monthly, he said, “Was intended for a much more upscale audience.” The weekly was meant for “audiences to feel in touch with world events.” Ritchin suggested, “The period of the weekly was actually a more interesting period for magazines in the sense that it wasn’t imitating, competing with or celebrating television at the same time.”

**Impact: The Photographs of *Life* Photographers Charles Moore, W. Eugene Smith and Larry Burrows**

The analysis results in this section address the impact of the Civil Rights images of Charles Moore, the Minamata essay of W. Eugene Smith and the Vietnam photographs of Larry Burrows, all of which appeared in *Life* magazine. The analysis
looked at whether these images had a social, political or economic effect after appearing in *Life* magazine. The experts disagreed as to the power of these photographs to have had a measurable impact but did agree that these images were important on a number of social, political and economic levels. Some experts felt that these images were a part of a cumulative effect, while some pointed to other images, unrelated to the initial questioning, that they felt had greater, though not quantifiable, resonance when associated social, political or economic impact.

*Overall Impact*

Irby described these examples as having “led to a major positive result in human kind and the human condition. I think that is one of the most profound aspects of the power of still photography that *Life* took fully under consideration and supported and endorsed in a powerful way.” Irby described the images as bringing “the harsh realities of life to the forefront of the consciousness of American citizens.”

Halstead similarly described these essays as “three of the most important photo essays, socially, ever done.” However, he believed that impact cannot be associated with just the photography of the day, as “there were a lot of things [going on] other than pictures.”

Howe concurred with this view: “I think it’s very hard to say. I mean it is incredibly hard to quantify whether any particular photograph, any particular essay, any particular publication made a specific difference. There are very few incidences where you can quantify that. One example that comes to mind is Ron Haviv’s work in
the Balkans, which was used by the International War Crimes Tribunal. *That’s a quantifiable thing*” (emphasis added).

Kobre was also of like mind. He noted, “It’s very rare for an individual picture or story to actually change society” and even harder to “show that one picture story from one magazine turned and caused something to happen.”

Morris simply stated, “I think it’s hard to say specifically.”

Storm equated the impact of these photographs to the “impact they have had on photographers. I mean, how many people are in photojournalism right now based on the principles, the core ideas of what *Life* represented and the pictures you’re talking about here…? You know, those were the early icons and the pictures that really got people excited about being a photographer….Those are the pictures that grab a photographer and say, ‘You could accomplish this.’”

Birkett agreed that these photographs “are obviously the projects held up to young photojournalists who are going through a photojournalism education or just seeking to educate themselves. Those are the models for the kind of deep, rich and important projects that every young photojournalist wants to pursue. They speak to multiple generations, in addition to, obviously, the great historical impact that they had.”

In a similar vein, Moore said, “In the mind of all photojournalists [the] world over that *Life* magazine was known as the magazine.”

Ritchin summed up the overall impact by making a distinction between then and now: “To me, the fallacy of the entire thing is that what we thought of as
government and citizenry in the time of *Life* magazine is very different than today. You can have the largest demonstration in world history against a war, but there’s still a war, and there’s a feeling people have that what they say or do doesn’t really have an impact, and I don’t think that was true of the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam or even the environmental movement the same way as it is true now.”

*Impact Moore*

The analysis found the experts divided on the question of how much impact Charles Moore’s Civil Rights images had. A majority of the experts believe that other Civil Rights photographers played as important a role in documenting the movement as Charles Moore did. An area of agreement, though, focused on the collective power of multiple tools of communication available at the time.

Charles Moore himself stated, “I am very, very happy I was able to work for *Life* and bring so many of the pictures to the public and to the South, because it made people take a long look at what was wrong.”

Halstead believed the images of both Moore and Flip Schulke “during the Civil Rights movement were instrumental in forcing the American public to look at inequality and brutality toward minorities in the South.” Curtiss likewise felt that Moore’s images addressed the issue in such a way as to give “people the opportunity to get behind it….It helped to get people to speak out by allowing everyone to see this story….Anyone could look at those pictures, regardless of their background or their color, and say, ‘This is wrong.’” The pictures “gave everybody the opportunity to just
really see it, as opposed to maybe reading it or hearing it secondhand. Nothing quite grabs your emotion or your mental attention like a photograph.”

Irby concurred, pointing out that “Charles Moore’s work, like the others, Eugene Smith and Eddie Adams’ works, all brought America in consciousness to a fundamental point where people recognize that the stories they had read and heard about through radio commentary were horrific stories that needed to be addressed.” Irby noted, Moore’s place “was to share the wrongs of the world….I think the Civil Rights era photographs of Charles [Moore] will bear out the record of history and be seen as a major body of photojournalism that’s changed American life.” Irby added, “Charles Moore’s work, along with other courageous photojournalists, led to the changing or major emphasis beyond the Civil Rights movement in America.”

Kennedy pointed to Charles Moore’s photographs as giving “a visual confirmation and proof to the notion of white repression that had been part of the historical pattern of inter-reaction of the races in the South for most of the twentieth century up to that point. I think that the viciousness of it was clearly caught by his pictures in some ways.” Furthermore, “I think that they gave a certain momentum to the political dynamics of the time in terms of people seeking reform. They could point to his pictures and say, ‘See? This is proof of what needs to be changed.’”

Kennedy, along with other experts, believed that Moore “was not alone….There were other photographers doing that work, but the fact that he was a white Southerner…I think had a certain resonance and certainly it gave voice to it.”
Scott agreed: “I think Moore’s pictures became very important, but I think a host of photographers who documented the Civil Rights movement sort of acted as a supporting cast and, in some areas, competing [sic] with Moore’s pictures on Civil Rights. I think those pictures did a lot in terms of bringing the war to the forefront, as [Dan] Budnik’s did, as Gordon Parks did, as many of the photographers who documented, you know, Bill Epridge, all those guys who documented this whole movement.”

Scott added, “I feel that the body of work that Life did on the movement brought significant changes across the country. Now, I don’t want to say one photographer’s body of work did it. I think a host of photographers photographed for Life.” Moreover, “the showcase that Life gave the Civil Rights movement had a major impact. I really feel that in some instances, television took their cues from what Life ran and what Time ran in the magazines.”

Kobre stated, “The story on Civil Rights was that there were many important pictures that were taken. Charles Moore’s [sic] one of them.”

Howe noted, “I have no idea how much difference they made, but within a growing collective awareness, they played a vital role. A growing collective awareness was coming to the American public through a variety of different media, and it seems to me that it’s the collective effect that was so important at that time of which, his [Charles Moore’s] photographs are very, very important.”

Morris likewise suggested this possibility of cumulative effect: “I would not credit Charlie’s pictures with being more than three percent of the total influence on
the Civil Rights movement. I mean there were all kinds of things happening. I don’t want to put Charlie’s pictures down. I think they were some of the best, but I can name a half-a-dozen other photographers who also did fabulous stuff on the Civil Rights movement. So it’s not, it’s not one story.” This is similar to Hughes’ view that, “in terms of the Civil Rights thing, I don’t think that the photographs carried much weight as the actual marching, the people putting themselves out there, the constant pressure from King’s people. In fact, I think the movement was certainly larger than the photographs.”

Moore stated his belief that the changes brought about are still present today: “When I came back to Alabama four years ago, I wondered if I was going to have to keep my doors locked all the time,...but it’s just the opposite....The change is just amazing. It’s my hometown area, and blacks and whites get together. I look back at what I went through....This is the effect that we’re talking about, that you could see in so many places. And you know....everybody can vote.”

Moore concluded, “It’s the photographs that matter, or it’s what they do. How they can help people understand. Southerners, the people that I am back here with now know how wrong it was. When I see blacks and whites standing in many, many things that I attend, laughing, talking, enjoying being together, I believe, that is a political, social, social definitely and even an economic change here in the South.”
The experts are divided on whether W. Eugene Smith’s Minamata essay supports the notion of measurable or quantifiable social, political or economic impact. As with Moore’s images, the experts agreed that they represent a cumulative effect and symbolize the first major essay to document the effects of industrial pollution. But they also noted that although *Life* magazine published Minamata, it was not the only important venue.

Ritchin described Minamata as being “considered the first environmental photo essay, in which people began to get in touch with the fact that a polluted environment is going to hurt people in very significant ways. The fact that it was on a platform like *Life*, I think was important, because it got into a lot of people’s living rooms.”

Halstead agreed: “The Minamata essay was one of the first real environmental issue photo essay.” Additionally, “that particular essay was a tremendous call to action on the part of people, who, for the first time, began to realize that the things that they took for granted and business practices in the environment were actually doing damage in human terms.”

Kennedy stated that Minamata “showed the consequences of corporate avarice, the cruelty of environmental degradation and the damage that it could do on a population in very powerful, very personal and stark terms.”

Howe felt that Minamata caused “some of the Japanese companies to clean up their acts, but in a global sense, has it done very much to effect pollution itself? I
don’t know. Maybe it contributed a little bit to our awareness of the effects of uncontrolled pollution, but I think, really, its value to us and the value of that story is the picture of the woman bathing.⁴ I think the value isn’t in any specific topic, such as environmental pollution. I think its value is as an icon of human compassion.”

Leeson added, “I think it’s a lot tougher to look at Eugene Smith and say, ‘How did that essay change things?’ Well, I know it did, even in Japan. However, I think his change has a ripple effect that lasted throughout photojournalism…that social injustice is something worth our sacrifice, worth our deepest endeavors, and that we can make a difference through visual communication.”

Kobre noted, “The effect of the story was not to turn the world around. There was not a Green movement that started the day his pictures were published. But it was the first…to begin the discussion that we now see has become an important discussion, twenty, thirty years later. Not necessarily, let me repeat, because of that single book….but it was part of what became a large movement….It’s one of the bricks that built the wall.”

Similarly, Kobre said of Smith, “He just reported what was there, and I think that’s often true with reporting, that they report what is there and then other people come along, and if it’s a real problem, they add to it and eventually we see whole movements grow from that. That’s really what I think is the case.” He further described Smith’s Minamata images in Life magazine as part of a “passing

⁴ The image Howe refers to depicts Tomoko Uemura in her bath. The image is one of the iconic images from Smith’s Minamata essay.
phase….They just showed one story, and as far as I know, he never mentioned anything in his interviews as to whether they had any great impact or not.”

Hughes was even more emphatic. “I don’t think that Minamata in *Life* had much of an effect,” he said. However, “Smith’s going to Minamata and making the photographs that he did and his very presence had a tremendous effect.” Hughes noted that last year, the “legal machinery, some thirty-five years after he did it, finally found the government itself at fault.” He added, “Smith’s presence was more important than the photographs being published in *Life*….He was kind of a hero himself in Japan…the American photographer with a heart who, during World War II, photographed [the Japanese] as victims, not only as aggressors. So, because he was celebrated, his presence brought enormous amounts of focus to the problem he was photographing.”

Hughes stated his opinion that Smith’s greatest success was cumulative. Not only were his pictures published in magazines such as *Life* and *Camera 35*, which led to the book, but they were “exhibited in department stores all over the country,”5 putting a “spotlight on the whole tragedy.”

*Impact Burrows*

In describing Larry Burrows’ images and their impact, the experts suggested that images from the Vietnam War, along with other influences, acted to change

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5 Japanese department stores are major forums for art and photography exhibits.
public and political opinion. Burrows’ images are significant the experts agree, but again, they also point to other important photographs, both inside and outside *Life*.

Kennedy observed, “I think Larry’s pictures of Vietnam were significant in the sense that they were the real first windows, along with some early television coverage, into the violence of the war.…It was a different kind of war, and I think Larry’s pictures gave voice to that.”

Halstead believed not only that “Larry Burrow’s work in Vietnam was very significant,” but he associated its significance with *Life’s* early use of color. “*Life* was the first to use color in combat photography, and Larry Burrows was the master. It was his color work that really commanded the attention and was something people related to, because you saw the red blood, you saw those people on that mountaintop, in the mud—it was enormously graphic.”

Scott agreed with Kennedy, noting, “When we speak of Larry’s situation with Vietnam, I think those pictures helped to make America see the war as it really was.” Furthermore, “Television gave you a big, quick image of what was happening, but the actual still photograph took you there and kept you there as long as you wanted to be, as long as you were able to deal with it.” With Larry’s images in *Life*, “we could look at those pictures again and again.” Scott emphasized, “I think those pictures helped to motivate moms, sisters, brothers and families to say, ‘Hey, this isn’t the kind of war we want to be involved in,’ and I think it helped to bring more pressure to Nixon to bring these guys home.”

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6 Dirck Halstead refers here to the iconic Larry Burrows photograph of a wounded soldier reaching out to another soldier in the mud near Dong Ha, South Vietnam, in 1966.
Howe partially agreed when he stated, “The iconic pictures from that time were really a confirmation for the American public that what they were hearing was true, and I certainly think that that does apply to a lot of Larry Burrow’s work.” Howe added, “I don’t know how much you can say any photograph changes anything,” and pointed to an example to illustrate: “One of the interesting things that Philip Jones Griffiths once told me was that he felt that the photography that came out of Vietnam didn’t change anyone’s mind about the war back home.”

Morris noted that “Larry Burrows had the misfortune to work for a magazine that believed in the war….I wish it were true that Larry turned the country against Vietnam….but he didn’t.”

A number of experts pointed to Eddie Adams’ 1969 Pulitzer Prize winning image, while half the interviewees felt that the headshots of one week’s American war dead that *Life* published in its June 27, 1969 issue were more significant.

Kennedy stated, “The reality was that public opinion was probably more changed by the photo that won Eddie Adams’ his Pulitzer. The shift was started by Larry’s pictures probably, but it wasn’t the only thing that drove the erosion of popular support for the war.”

Irby agreed when he stated, “Eddie Adams’ photo led to a heightened concern [for] the change in [the] American military position in Vietnam.”

Kobre, on the other hand, disagreed that the Adams picture had much impact at the time: “The truth is that the Eddie Adams’ picture ran extremely small; it was

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7 The picture Tom Kennedy refers to here is Adam’s 1969 Pulitzer Prize winning photograph showing Vietnamese Brig. Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a Viet Cong prisoner on a Saigon street.
not seen as an important image at the time….It was then reproduced over and over and over again and became what we know of it today.” Kobre argued that pictures sometimes have a “second life”: that when we see an image “over and over,” it takes on a life of its own. If you are looking for effects, Kobre said, then “you’re looking for what happened at the time, not what we remember.”

Morris believed that “when Ralph Graves, as managing editor, published the portraits of the 242 GI’s who died in one week, that was the most influential story Life ran on Vietnam. The pictures were nothing, just drugstore mug shots.”

Howe agreed and pointed to the importance of Life publishing these headshots when he stated, “I think the contribution they made to the debate about the Vietnam War, [was] by publishing the pictures of one week’s dead. That was a significant serious and quite in its own way, a courageous thing to do.”

Hughes described the effect of the headshots in Life by noting the layout: “They ran page after page. I think that really brought it home. I clearly remember when that came out. It was stunning.”

Kennedy added, “Life chose to run the mug shots of all the people who were killed in one week, and it was a fairly significant casualty count that week. I think that the shock of that on the American public was pretty profound at the time.”

Kobre likewise described the American reaction to these headshots as “shocked.”

Ritchin noted that the headshot images signaled the “turning point, where Life started to have serious misgivings about the war.” He continued, “In a sense, you
could argue that Burrows was effective in making people feel close up, in a sense, to what was going on in Vietnam, but in some senses, it was agony and horrific [sic] and in some senses, it was action-packed and exciting. A more cool, cold kind of look at just the ID photos of all the soldiers that died—it was just saying, ‘Let’s take an accounting of the war,’ and, ‘Is it worth it?’

**The Loss of *Life* Magazine**

The experts agreed that there were significant effects associated with the loss of *Life* magazine. As with previous responses, the experts did not unanimously point to any single event that affected documentary photography when *Life* departed the newsstand. Although a majority of interviewees associated *Life’s* loss with declining advertising revenue and economic challenges of the day, other aspects included the loss of an important venue for documentary photography and photojournalism, television’s influence, as well as, social, political and cultural changes. It is important to note that none of the interviewees concluded that documentary photography was dead because of the loss of *Life* magazine. All the effects associated with the loss of *Life* are broader in scope when placed in the context of media evolution.

Irby stated, “The American people lost a major forum where they got a stimulating and dynamic dose of documentary photography on a regular basis.” He further explained, “I think understanding of photographic literacy began to wane greatly as a place for photography to be presented, equally with the written word, as a dynamic mode of communication. I think the citizens, the subscribers in particular
lost…not just the subscribers, because the secondary and tertiary readers and viewers of *Life* were profound. People reading the magazine in libraries and doctors’ offices—there were so many places” to read the magazine if you “couldn’t afford *Life.*”

Ritchin remarked, “*Life* was a very prominent front page in terms of setting societal focus. If *Life* magazine put something in the magazine, on its cover or did a big story, people would talk about it and think about it. So I think any loss like that, whether it’s *Life* or any other major publication, is a significant loss.”

Howe suggested simply that American society “moved substantially from an information culture into an entertainment culture, and…*Life* magazine in some ways was one of the early casualties.” Curtiss described the loss as meaning there was “one less outlet for people to see stories on a national and international level.”

Moore noted, “Every town in America had a *Life* magazine….and they’d open it up and, wow, there was a story, whether it’s [sic] Minamata or Civil Rights. So that was an important magazine to lose” (emphasis added).

Hughes suggested that “the loss of *Life* magazine forced newspapers to do more, which they have since….I think it moved things away from magazines, forcing people to find other outlets.”

*Loss of Life: Economic*

Storm addressed the loss of *Life* as being “all about ad dollars. It wasn’t really whether people enjoyed the content; it was a purely back-end economic situation that
changed, that caused the magazine to go away….It wasn’t necessarily a lack of demand or a lack of interest. There was an economic collision.”

Halstead agreed: “In the late 40s, when you began to see entertainment packaging on television, suddenly, the advertising dollars became siphoned away….It was harder for them to sell and get add rates…People found that they could see the world as it was on television, so Life became less important to them.” Furthermore, “the problem with both Look and Life was their numbers were killing them. The costs of producing the magazine were far higher than the revenue stream that was coming in from subscriptions or newsstand sales….As I recall, by the late 1970s, Life magazine was selling for twelve cents a copy, but the printing costs were running about forty cents a copy, and you’re multiplying that by 8 million.”

Kennedy described the loss of Life associated with television differently: “A lot of people attributed the demise of the original Life that folded in ’72 on the impact of television, but it really wasn’t so much television, per se, but the migration of advertising. They perceived it cheaper to advertise on television than in print at the time.” Scott likewise noted, “Advertising revenues were going from the still print matter to television.”

In Howe’s opinion, “Life magazine hastened its own demise….Towards the end of publication, they were virtually giving the magazine away in order to maintain their circulation base to get the advertising, which was already going somewhere else.”
Storm argued that this issue is “consistently overblown….I work with pictures all day long. I interact with people who work with pictures. I interact with people who consume pictures. There’s no denying the power of the still image. I mean, it’s just there….I think when it [Life] went away, there was this perception that people didn’t care about photojournalism. That’s total nonsense.”

Howe stated, “I think the loss of Life magazine was an effect, not a cause. The same forces that caused the downward spiral in the publication of documentary photography were what caused Life magazine to go out of business.”

In a similar vein, Kennedy said, “I don’t think it’s been a period in history that’s been particularly kind to people who are trying to work in the purest sense of photojournalism or documentary photography. It’s been much more of a struggle for these kinds of photographers to make a living, and virtually everything in the publishing game is stacked against them right now.” The end of Life magazine “marked the turning point at which photojournalism and print began to decline. I think that decline has continued to this day.”

Birkett believed the loss of Life “cast a moral pall over the photojournalism community, knowing that that kind of magazine could not make it work based on work that all photojournalists think is very important.” Irby agreed: “I think photographers lost—as photographic reporters—lost [sic] a great deal of credibility because it was viewed that if Life gave up on it, then it couldn’t have been that important. Many editors in newsrooms used that in an adverse way or in a negative
way to say photographs really don’t make money.” He added, “They lost the forum that supported and fully endorsed the power of still photography.”

Ritchin provided a different point of view. He described the loss of Life as a “filtering mechanism, heavily edited and designed in a rather formulated way,” which “liberated photographers to then search for their own forms: books, galleries, long term projects, whatever it was that they would do to develop a point of view of their own. In a sense, it contributed to the growing independence of the photographic witness.” Ritchin elaborated, “It’s good in the sense it’s more extensive work…and bad in the sense that you don’t have the same impact.”

Hughes noted that while Life and other magazines in the United States were dying, “European magazines stayed fairly strong,” an observation with which Kobre agreed. Kobre stated, “While Life eventually died, other magazines in the rest of Europe have continued, like Paris Match continues in France.” He then added, “Remember, it wasn’t just Life that died. It was all these magazines dying. Along with Life went Look, Saturday Evening Post, and Click Pick.” As a result, “the support system for making pictures disappeared.”

Fox regarded the loss of Life magazine as the “first bad news for photojournalists, through the decades ‘til today.”

Loss of Life: Evolutionary

Leeson described the loss of Life magazine as “an evolutionary process….We went through a period where Life magazine was doing this great work, and then it
went to Time and Newsweek....They weren’t anywhere [near] where Life magazine was, but they did amazing things, too. They had their era. Then, in the mid-80s, newspapers took it up.” He added, “Yes, it’s a loss, but I don’t think it affected documentary photojournalism. It didn’t affect photojournalism at all....The loss of something in our society usually means the birth of something else.”

Kobre agreed that there was a “shifting of pictures from Life magazine to Time and Newsweek and U.S. News [& World Report]....People magazine and Sports Illustrated grew. These magazines took up what was missing as Life magazine went away.” He added that, with changes in technology, especially “the fact that offset printing came in,” the improvements in print meant “that newspapers started publishing pictures of much higher quality....Now there are a lot of publications, and that’s when we get to the Internet.”

Howe described Life towards the end as having become “a little bit of People magazine, a little bit of Time magazine, even sometimes a little bit of Sports Illustrated. And I think at the time, general interest magazines were being supplemented by much more focused publications.”

Similarly, Morris noted, “On a positive side, some of the things that Life did have been carried on in other publications.” Kennedy pointed to the “flourishing Sunday magazines that had quite a commitment to photojournalism,” mimicking “Life magazines commitment.”

Hughes stated, “The loss of Life magazine forced newspapers to do more, which they have since then,” while Birkett added, “Yes, we have less Life magazines,
but perhaps we have a whole new arena in the Internet and broadcast world that can help fill some of the void of funding and some of the void of viewership that these magazines from our past have left us.”

Fox concluded, “I feel the Internet is a great place for documentary photojournalism,” just as *Life* magazine was in “its heyday….I think we’re just at the beginning of the heyday of Internet journalism.”

**The Internet as a Venue for Documentary Photography**

Since the end of mainstream publications such as *Life* magazine, few prominent or far-reaching outlets for publishing documentary photography have appeared. The Internet and its Web-based medium is perhaps the first venue to offer a potentially far-reaching outlet for documentary photography.

The experts were asked questions on a number of topics associated with the Internet as a venue for documentary photography. Their answers are reported within subcategories as a means of emphasizing voice, clarity of subject and patterns within the results.

As with previous results, not all the experts agreed on a single point of view. However, a majority recognized the potential for the Web as a venue for documentary photography.

Storm described the Internet as the “ultimate venue….It changes all the rules. It doesn’t have the same limitations that a broadcast spectrum does, or a print distribution.”
Irby noted, “The Internet as a medium for documentary photojournalism is still truly in its embryonic, its early stages of evolution, and the possibilities appear to be numerous and exciting. The truth of the matter is that there’s so many new ways that documentary photojournalism is being engaged on the Web, in its traditional sense or its classical sense, as well as in some new and exciting iterations, if you will.”

Halstead saw the Internet as a medium “to continue the use of photography as a narrative form but in a far richer way. It’s becoming much more personal photojournalism, because not only do photographers create essays, but they also write, and we can mix in multimedia and video.” He believed that the Internet has led to a “democratization of the journalistic process. Now we have a place [where] we provide space and the destination for the kind of photojournalists who used to dream of having something in Life magazine.”

This was an assessment with which Howe agreed, further remarking. “The Internet is an absolutely extraordinary opportunity for documentary photography, which will, in the fullest of time [sic], completely reestablish the credibility of documentary photography. It will continue to be a terrific outlet for documentary photography. All we’ve got to do is to work out how to make it pay.” Howe continued, “It’s not only that you can put a lot of it up, but you can make it look incredibly good. I think the photography on the Internet looks absolutely phenomenal.” Furthermore, “photographers themselves can produce their own stories
and put them on the Internet,” their own “little mini publications” that reach a “global
audience.”

Kennedy described the Internet as providing the “only opportunity to revive
the flagging fortunes of photojournalism and photojournalists. It offers the best
opportunity to reinvent the medium and to reconnect a worldwide audience to the
power of visual journalism.”

Birkett described the Internet as “a tremendously powerful medium for
documentary photojournalism for several reasons.” First, it “reaches a humongous
audience” and “provides a great deal of depth,” including a limitless number of
images. It also “allows documentarians to pretty seamlessly incorporate other
documentary tools into their coverage.”

Ritchin stated, “The potential for a new evolving medium is fantastic, and I
think it could have significant social impacts and should. But it’s not simply applying
an older style of documentary photojournalism to the Internet.”

Curtis opined, “Your computer is the most perfect place to view a
documentary story. One, it’s personal. You can do it at your own speed….interact
with it,…look at the picture and go back,…go forward. You can vote with it….listen
to sound from an event,…see video and stills together.” It “pulls in all the senses.
Maybe not touch so much, but you’re there, and it’s almost as if you’re interacting
with the story much more than a newspaper….I feel the Internet right now is just sort
of this wide open canvas, and everybody’s still figuring out exactly where it’s going
to fit, but I think it’s an incredible medium for documentary photojournalism.”
On the other hand, cautioned Moore, “The Internet requires a lot more study. It requires becoming an expert to some degree with a computer…, and not everybody has a computer. Not everybody wants a computer.” Yet, “there’s always the magazine store….There’s a real big gap between the Internet as a medium for photography or for people to go on and look at photography or read a newspaper….I’m not against the Internet…. [but] I would not want to…go online and stay on there for a long time, trying to understand what was happening in Iraq.”

Scott struck a similar note in saying, “I sort of worry about the Internet as a medium, because you have to be very computer savvy to understand how to use it.”

Hughes agreed: “I have a problem with it, but I understand that there are people who don’t have a problem with it, especially young people. It probably is where things have to happen, but I cannot stand to look at photographs on a computer screen. It offends me. It offends my aesthetic notions of photography. I get a stiff neck and a headache.”

More positively, Fox stated, “I think it’s a great medium for documentary photojournalism. I think the Internet is a visual medium. It’s more visual than we’re using it [sic] right now. I think the more we work with it, the more we’ll figure out how to display documentary photojournalism on it.” He added, “Many of the stories that we do on washingtonpost.com, that Brian Storm has done on MSNBC.com, using straight documentary photojournalism in the tradition of Life magazine,” are reaching the masses via the Internet “in a way no other medium really does…. certainly more than any print medium would do.”
The experts differed on the subject of the Internet versus print as a medium for documentary photography. Some experts believed that the ease of publishing dilutes the power of images, while others viewed the multimedia experience and interactivity as positive enhancements.

Kobre had no doubt that the Internet is “reaching millions of people, so the numbers are always impressive…. and lots of people come to see practically anything.” Yet he also suggested that this has “homogenized the quality of the pictures. A great picture on the Internet and a terrible picture on the Internet look quite similar. It’s taken away the edge or the demand for the amazing image, and I’m not sure how to get that back again, but I think that has been the effect.” Kobre also commented on the sense of “Since we can run as many pictures as we want on the Internet, why not run more?”—as if more is better. I think that there’s been a real quality shift. It’s almost like an animal that has to be fed.”

Birkett agreed, noting, “Internet publications need to maintain a very high bar of quality. Unlike a newspaper or a magazine, it is very easy to have images of lesser quality published online…. Who is going to maintain the drive for quality that comes from documentarians?”

Scott summed up the issue of quantity succinctly: “Get some good editors involved, period.”

Storm remarked, “What you’re going to see happen over the next few years is the same thing that happened in the magazine space, where people were actually
competing to get the best photographer to shoot something for them, to give them a visual signature, and paying for the right to have that person. That’s going to start happening on the Internet.”

Halstead stated that, unlike print publications, Web publishers “are not forced to edit based on what the financial budget is going to allow us to publish, and that is a huge change.” He noted that the only limitation on the Web should be “the quality of the content.”

Kennedy spoke of other trends: “People are committed to exploring a form of storytelling that can occur by using visual communication as the core essence, in ways that are more dynamic and exciting than I’ve seen in print in many years.” He added, “I think you are seeing work done by individuals and reflected in various places on the Web that may not have found their way into print publications in an earlier era. For example, the effort that Ed Kashi put into his project on Aging in America,” or “individual sites such as Zone Zero in Mexico, with Pedro Meyer.”

Fox agreed: “The Internet allows you to do so much more than you can do in print. In many ways the Internet allows you to take off all the constraints of either print or television and gives you the best of both worlds.” In a similar vein, Kennedy remarked, “The economics of producing [photographic work] and displaying it on the Internet are different than they are in print and you can do it without some of the risks associated with the publication of print.”

Howe described this point in time as “incredibly exciting, where photographers have a much wider range of skills than just taking great pictures.”
Many photographers “are becoming quite good radio reporters, in as much as they are producing sound to go with the photographs on the Internet. I think this amplifies the experience of digital, of documentary photography in a way that we’ve never been able to do and is compelling to the viewer. If you can see Vincent Laforet’s pictures out of New Orleans and listen to him talk about his experiences….boy that is so much more compelling [a] package than looking at them on the front page of the New York Times.”

Kennedy stated, “The challenge for most Web sites right now, that are associated with big media outlets, is that they exist in a world where the basic process of content-gathering, production and distribution are driven by print models that are no longer useful to online entities.” He further compared the two media: “If you looked at Life in its heyday, or if you looked at examples of television in the 60s and 70s, you knew these were truly mass mediums….trying to define what was the middle ground, what was acceptable to the mass audience. They were developing an engine, a mechanism of production and distribution that could satisfy that audience with everybody getting exactly the same thing. What the Internet allows is anybody with a particular interest to find information totally to that interest. There may be mass numbers, but the range of interest is much narrower, and you can find something on every topic.”

Morris again expressed mixed feelings: “I love and hate the Internet. It can be so time-consuming. I’m a print person, and I just resent the amount of time it takes to
get information on the Internet. But my god, what you can find there if you work at it is incredible.”

Ritchin opined, “We haven’t really explored what the Internet has to offer. I think the Internet is only a piece of the digital media, or new media, in the sense that cell phones, personal assistants, clothing, all kinds of things will become platforms for looking at imagery. I think the Internet is really just at the beginning point for the most part. The problem is that we apply paper standards to the Internet, and we really haven’t thought through what it can do.” For example, “When I did the Bosnia Web site for The New York Times, [by] Gilles Peress in ’96, somebody who went through it said it was a four hour thing to go through, which is, again, very different than the printed page.”

*Internet Business Model*

One aspect that continued to surface during these interviews was the need for viable business models to fund documentary photography on the Internet. All the interviewees spoke of the necessity for viable funding options. None of the experts agreed on a specific model.

Irby asked plainly, “How can you fund the work? Because one of the things about *Life* was that Luce was willing to invest in documentary photojournalism. That was one of the major, profound aspects or benefits of *Life* magazine. *Life* magazine was able to demonstrate that investment in photography would pay off in the subscribers and the response of the readers and viewers. Now, on the Internet, we
know that people will come and look at the work, but a business model that funds, supports and sustains the work is a bigger question.”

Irby continued, “The Constitution supports free journalism, but it doesn’t fund it….A funding model, a business model that will allow people to demonstrate that they will put their finances where their eyeballs are…. that’s a hugely challenging model.” Irby also noted that the current subscription models haven’t “bode well,… with the exception of some professional-interest publications like The Wall Street Journal, where people still see the great value in having access to that information….It’s a great challenge, and I don’t have the answer.”

Irby added, “I think one of the things [needed] is an integrated model of advertisement—a model, which can demonstrate that, while people are consuming visual information of merit and value at an informational level, they’re also willing to engage in the advertisement that accompanies that work. It’s the same model that magazines and newspapers thrived on for the last 150 years.”

Halstead was of similar opinion: “The funding model for the Web has got to be through advertising and sponsorship. You cannot ask the viewer to pay for it….The way you regard the Web is as a brand enhancer. You don’t regard it as an alternate. The whole point of the Web is to enhance the basic brand and allow you to take the brand in new directions.”

Kobre felt that “until we find a financial plan/model that will support this, be it advertising or people pay a certain amount to see it,” then the financial obstacles will continue to stand “in our way to create photojournalism.” He then pointed to the
*New York Times* and MSNBC Web sites as examples of “outside people” who are paying for photo packages, noting, “They’re mostly paying if it’s multimedia….

Along those lines, I think that that’s a temporary activity, that pretty soon video will replace what we know of as multimedia. As the computer can handle a faster stream of information, and as the technology improves, the in-between step of still pictures and sound will primarily disappear and be replaced by video.”

Howe remarked, “It’s incredibly hard to get sponsorship, funding and advertising, all of those things. The biggest problem at the moment is getting people on the Internet to pay.” Howe argued that “younger photographers are almost abandoning the idea of getting assignments and working in that manner. They are much more focused on getting grants,…working for not for profits,…doing a project and finding an outlet for it.”

Kennedy thought forums have “to exist that can be accessed easily by mass audiences, even if those mass audiences are actually a series of micro, niche audiences bundled together on one side. Then on the other side, the economics of it has to be restructured completely so that people who are producing the work in the first place have got enough wherewithal to succeed.”

Birkett similarly suggested that one “drawback to the Internet as a medium for documentary photojournalism are [sic] the finances of the Internet. At this point, the advertising model that supports Internet publications is very young, it’s changing and growing all the time….The hope is that advertisers move into the Internet space and become more comfortable with that means of advertising. As editorial budgets begin
to grow, some of that money [can be] invested in documentary photojournalism. At this point, very few players on the Internet are publishing documentary photojournalism and are actually paying for it.” He added, “I know that the washingtonpost.com is paying not only staff…, but I believe they’re also buying outside work. I know they did a big project on photojournalists who are working in Iraq that was quite impressive.” Moreover, for a long time, “MSNBC.com has been paying for in-depth photojournalism projects like Aging in America by Ed Kashi.”

Birkett continued, “I think there needs to be more money flowing towards documentary photojournalism from publications. At this point, there aren’t many Internet publications that are paying top dollar for documentary photojournalism. I think the greatest danger to documentary photojournalism really taking hold is the funding issue, because the documentation is such an expensive thing to do.”

Ritchin remarked, “The political structures have to change and the commercial structures have to change, meaning that there has to be a feeling that by knowing about the world, you can do something about it, which is political process. Then there has to be some sort of financial stream to make it worthwhile for people to both build the sites and contribute to the sites. That has to come from someplace, whether it’s corporate support, government support, subscribers, advertising or something. Right now, it’s dead in terms of the finances. Anybody doing anything is either scraping by or just doing it by the seat of their pants.”

Fox also opined on the need for a “business model that pays for it all,” but added, “Web sites now are doing incredibly well. The business model is coming; I
don’t think we know which way it’s going yet. All we know is that the advertising for online news sites has gotten better and better….My feeling is that if the content’s there and if the content’s good,…the possibilities are really limitless….If the viewers are there, then there’ll be a way to support it, and if the content’s good, the viewers will be there.”

Storm agreed with Fox, noting, “The ad dollars are shifting. The first six months of 2004, there was 4.6 billion -- with a ‘b’ -- in online ad spending. The first six months of this year, it’s up 5.8 percent. It’s a 26 percent increase in ad spending in this medium. No other medium is up. Every other medium is flat or down. Every metric you look at shows that this is the medium where content is going to explode. It’s the medium where the advertisers are going to move and therefore fund content.” However, Storm emphasizes, “We’re in that sticky spot right now where it’s much harder to produce something of true quality in the space [because] the financial backing isn’t there.”

The Internet as a Medium to Affect Change

This section is broken into three subcategories: Internet Reach, The Power of Interactivity and Examples of Change. Each subcategory represents the variety of methods by which the experts approached the question of whether documentary photography published on the Internet leads to change.
As previously noted, the experts were divided on whether published documentary photography or photojournalism has directly or indirectly led to measurable change. Some experts provided specific examples, while others could not. Leeson described a project that produced measurable change, while others used e-mail evidence and anecdotal evidence to support their points of view.

Irby noted, “That’s probably your most difficult question, because you don’t have the kind of tracking mechanism that you have in a printed publication. I’m not aware of any particular forum outside of some publication’s projects that have been placed online and have actually tried to quantify change.”

Birkett, on the other hand, remarked, “I genuinely believe that each time we’ve published a documentary project,… it’s effected change. It may not have effected change on a global scale. It may not have changed legislation and congress, but I think in small ways, it has definitely influenced people. I know because I get tremendous feedback from readers. That’s one of the greatest things about working online: within several minutes of publishing a piece, you know how people are feeling about it, because it’s so easy to click that ‘write us’ link and send an e-mail.”

Internet Reach

Because Life magazine was a mainstream outlet for documentary photography, it was able to reach large numbers of people through subscription and pass along readership. Most of the experts believed the Internet to be a mainstream outlet for documentary photography. The results that follow address the reach of
documentary photography published on the Internet, as a prerequisite to having an
effect or leading to change.

Storm plainly stated that the Internet “is a mainstream medium. There are 900
million people using it at any given time. I mean, how much more mainstream do we
need it to be before people start saying it’s ‘new media’ or its ‘niche.’” He added,
“The kids are riding this medium to the ground. I mean, they’re not reading
newspapers or looking at magazines the same way we might have when we were
younger. This is their medium.” Storm also noted, “There is greater circulation of the
nytimes.com than there is of that newspaper.” Storm argued that reach is not
associated with looking “at one publication” but “looking at a diversity of things.”

Storm continued, “I don’t know if anyone’s done the pass-along study yet on
the Internet, but it’s certainly core to what I think is important. We did projects in ’98
that are still getting people looking at them. Something like Aging in America that we
did with [Ed] Kashi has had millions and millions of people see it. Not necessarily
when we launched, but over time,…it still gets traffic.” Fox also pointed to Aging in
America, stating his belief that, “Ed Kashi’s essay on MSNBC [is a] good example of
straight, traditional documentary photojournalism that reached mass audiences.”

Storm also stated his opinion that “Yahoo, America Online, MSN and
Google…are the new networks,” having “more reach than ABC, NBC and CBS in
their heyday.”

Halstead noted, “The Digital Journalist gets “e-mails every month from the
widest range of locations you could possibly imagine.”
Howe stated, “Documentary photography is mainstream on the Internet….The photography that the New York Times puts out on the Internet is way superior to the photography they put into the paper. That’s not because Michelle McNally isn’t doing a great job—I think she is—but there’s just much more opportunity….You’re not using up real estate that is being fought over by other people.”

Kobre saw it another way: “The problem is you need some place that everyone is going to, and I can’t see that the general public has chosen a place the equivalent of Life magazine to go to for this kind of material. I think they’re going for headline news, they’re going for MSNBC, they’re going for AOL, but they’re getting a little snapshot of things.” Kobre did believe that some parts of the Web are getting large numbers. Particularly, these are sites that run “the pictures of the day, the pictures of the week, the pictures of the month that newspapers are running and that everybody else is running….People go for entertainment and love those. These [sites] are getting huge traffic. They are not what you would call ‘social documentary photography,’ but it does show that it’s possible to attract people.”

Storm pointed to search engines and word of mouth as leading factors associated with reach. “It’s usually about me doing a Google search or getting an e-mail from someone. It’s a different kind of entry plan….It’s not about publishing in this week’s magazine; it’s about publishing something that matters and gets into that sweet spot of being viral. Because viral is what makes the Internet so powerful. It doesn’t matter what Web site something’s on. It doesn’t matter what brand it’s under.
If it’s excellent and people see it, they’ll start forwarding it around. That’s the best marketing vehicle there is.”

Curtiss spoke in a similar vein, believing that the Internet “allows my Aunt Clara in Michigan to see the same story that someone in South Carolina or someone in California [can]. It brings the world back to smaller communities if they want to see it.” Curtiss also agreed that “word of mouth” is the future for getting stories to an audience.

Irby agreed: “As much as the Internet super informational highway makes the world smaller, a lot of the cases that I’ve seen are having impacts in a local community as opposed to a national kind of movement or international movement for that matter.”

Birkett opined, “The Internet has the great ability to affect change because of its reach. It’s worldwide. It [cuts] across different economic levels. You’re breaking the bounds of regional and even national boundaries.” You are “able to reach a worldwide audience and perhaps niches of the population that [you] wouldn’t normally be able to penetrate as deeply.” He illustrated this point with an example of a documentary story published on MSNBC.com that dealt with “U.S. soldiers coming back from Iraq…. Not only did we reach the Internet audience, but we also found out that many people were taking a link to the slideshow and e-mailing it to their friends and to their families,…putting them on blogs and discussing them in chat rooms…. Through this sort of smaller community that the Internet can reach, through e-mail and sort of a viral kind of network, we were able to reach an even deeper segment of
the military population…. It wasn’t about everyone going to MSNBC.com and clicking on a link. It was about friends [and] family telling [other] friends and family members about a particular link.”

Moore, on the other hand, saw economics and accessibility as limiting reach. “The Internet is a different animal all together. First of all, the person that’s going to see what’s happening in the world via the Internet must have the money to own a computer. They must have the money to be online…if they want to see the story and the pictures. it’s a lot different than just picking up a magazine and opening it up and looking at it, reading it and studying it.”

Ritchin, however, begged to differ: “I did a Salgado thing on refugees, and, you know, somebody in India said that he’d never seen photography like that before in his life, because they couldn’t afford books in his school, [but] there was one Internet connection and that was incredibly powerful and important for him. There’s all kinds of things like that in terms of reach.”

Ritchin continued, “If people can show Abu Ghraib, which was digital cameras by amateurs and e-mailed around the world, that certainly can reach people in ways that any magazine in one country never could.”

*The Power of Interactivity*

A few experts pointed to the power of interactivity as playing a direct role in determining the impact photography can achieve via the Internet.
Ritchin remarked, “The Internet promise is very different than the printed page. It promises that if an image affects you and you want to do something about it, there should be a way to click and volunteer, give money, vote….It gives you sound, it gives you hypertext. It gives you the possibility of mixing media in ways that the printed page doesn’t.” To illustrate, he pointed to the importance of interactivity on NGO Websites he has worked on, where “people can contribute money” or download information on “how to help.” He said, “We did one on the digital diary of Brian Palmer on Pixel Press….We got dozens of e-mails from soldiers, Marines in Iraq, because he followed one group and they we’re very appreciative. We would update it every Friday for six weeks, and [the families] just couldn’t wait to go online to see a picture of their son or husband….They couldn’t get that from the government. They couldn’t get that any other way, except from what we did.”

As another example, Ritchin described the reaction to Gilles Peress’ Bosnia work produced for the nytimes.com: “There was a major change in the sense that the New York Times invited its readers to express their own opinions, to argue. That was fantastic in the sense that it wasn’t just one-way journalism but two-way.” It allowed, “Serbian people and Bosnian people to debate…It brings to people’s attention the profundity and complexity of the entities that existed. It gives people a place to let off steam. It gives people a place to learn from each other.”

Likewise, Storm opined, “The key is the ability for people to take action. You look at something in a magazine, or you watch it on television ,and it might move you, but you can’t act right away. How do you interact? With the Internet, you can
fire off an e-mail, you can transact or you can donate immediately….Look at what happened in the fallout of Katrina. The Red Cross did something like $650 million in donations. Over $300 million of that came from Internet donations….It’s the ability to be moved by the narrative spine of a story and then actually doing something about it. That’s brand new, and I think that’s really powerful and can’t be underestimated.”

Storm described another example from his tenure at MSNBC: “I’ll never forget an e-mail I got from a guy who said, ‘I love The Week in Pictures. Every Saturday morning, I bring my whole family around the computer, and we look at it, and we experience the world together through what you guys put up every day….’ He went on to say, ‘I have an eight year old boy on my knee every Saturday, and sometimes you guys publish pictures that are hard to look at, and I wish there was a way for me to know that that was coming.’ From that one e-mail, we actually developed a process where you had to opt in to certain pictures….That came from one individual, and to me, we were helping that one guy and his family learn about the world he lives in. I mean, it wasn’t making a major dramatic social shift, per se, but it was certainly giving him a window into the world,…and that’s pretty powerful.”

Leeson also noted the power of interacting, stating, “One of the great aspects of the Internet, of course, is interactivity—the ability for us to quickly respond to, to make suggestions, to criticize or applaud the work that’s being done. I think if you look around at most photo sites, you’ll find that almost none of them have that.”

While he also noted that “many [sites] have voting systems for voting which image is
the best—MSNBC did that,…I think *Time* magazine has a voting system”—more can be done to “allow people to interact with us. I think that’s one of the great changes taking place—our ability through this digital age to be one-on-one with our readers.”

Leeson continued, “That in itself can bring about change. I know [because] I saw that first hand in Iraq, and I hadn't really considered it…In every other conflict I’ve done overseas, I was out there by myself and very often didn’t have communication with anybody, much less the Internet. Yet here I am in the middle of the desert, and I’m getting an e-mail from someone who’s father or mother of some soldier in the unit that I’m traveling with, saying, ‘Have you seen my son? If you find him, can you tell him we love him, we’re proud of him?’ I mean, this is direct access,…not just a reader, but a reader who’s intimately involved with the very thing that you are covering. For all I know, towards the end of the day, I could be photographing their dead son. Those things have powerful impact. I mean, this is a powerful aspect of the Internet and of our digital age that I think we can learn to exploit.”

Curtiss also remarked, “The cool thing about the Internet and documentary work is that you can instantly react to it. You can see an article, and at the end of each story, there can be links to the Red Cross or places that can either provide relief, more education, an opportunity to volunteer or donate. I think that it’s more instantaneous, and [you are] able to get people to react faster than a newspaper….It’s right there at your fingertips, as you’re looking at the article.”
Examples of Impact, Affect or Change

Leeson’s project, on dogs killed by members of a local sheriff’s department in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, represents the best example of change associated with Internet publishing. A majority of experts pointed to Ed Kashi’s *Aging in America* as having the greatest reach and most impact, while Meredith Birkett described a number of stories that led to change following publication on MSNBC.com. Some experts pointed to the photographs from the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq as important examples of impact and effect.

When discussing the Internet as a venue to affect change Leeson said, “It’s difficult to quantify what’s happening on the Internet, and yet I know that it exists and I’ll tell you one reason I know it exists: because it’s happened to me. Leeson continued, “It’s interesting, because if we focus on the photojournalism, we think of still photography, but photojournalism can exist in another form, and that is video…. I never want anyone to think that I’m saying that video replaces it—it doesn’t—but video can tell stories and provide us with information, powerful information, in a powerful format that can bring about change in the same venue.”

Leeson described the video he shot in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina as having led to actual change. “When I came across sheriff officers in St. Bernard Parish shooting dogs, and what appeared to be indiscriminately shooting dogs—they claimed later that they were violent dogs—of course I questioned, ‘How do you know it’s a violent dog when you never get down from the back of your jeep or truck?’

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8 St. Bernard Parish is a district in New Orleans, Louisiana, that was severely damaged by hurricane Katrina in August 2005.
They were in two vehicles and driving around, just randomly shooting dogs—every dog they saw, dropping it with a rifle and very often leaving it lying, choking in its own blood in the street.”

Leeson continued, “I have these guys shooting dogs. I have to get some sort of sheriff office response to that, so I spend hours actually trying to find someone who will talk to me, and lo and behold, if I’m not able to find one of the shooters themselves, who actually agrees to speak with me. I interview him, and towards the end of the day, I put the story together. It runs on the Internet and creates a worldwide protest with [sic] animal lovers and animal rights activists, thousands upon thousands of phone calls to all levels of government, including to this sheriff’s office in St. Bernard Parish. The Internet was ablaze with righteous indignation about what they [sic] had witnessed on this video. The end result was the suspension of the sheriff’s officer, followed by his dismissal. Last week, the Louisiana Attorney General’s office and, I understand, the FBI, as well, are investigating these shootings in St. Bernard Parish, and sometime this week, I’m supposed to spend some time with investigators, because now they are pursuing criminal charges.” Furthermore, “animal rights activists who were involved with what was happening in regard to stray animals, pets that people had to leave behind when they fled, [were] saying to me that the video helped bring about an end to that process, to that shooting. So you see, here’s a very microcosmic view of how doing something, exploiting the Internet in a way that I couldn’t do before, brought about actual change to that situation.”
Birkett contended, “We’re changing people’s minds about particular situations. I know when we did our project on *Aging in America* with Ed Kashi and Julie Winokur, we had a lot of people write in and say it had shed new light on what it was like to be an older American. It had made them value their older loved ones or older neighbors and friends in a new way. It made them see them in a new light, and in some cases people were saying, ‘I really need to spend more time with them,’ or, ‘I really need to listen to them more closely, because they are so smart and wise after all these years of living.’ So that’s sort of one way that it’s affected how people have thought.”

Birkett described another essay published on MSNBC.com that led to change. “There was a Getty images photographer named Paula Bronstein” who “came upon a mental institution in Kabul [Afghanistan]” where the “conditions were horrible….There were young children and older people who were being chained to walls, who were maybe not getting nourished the right way. They were not being kept in a manner that anyone would want anyone they loved retained. The eight or nine image slide show that we published [led to] such an outcry from our readers that we were able to contact Paula [and] find out what local organization could help these mental institution residents. The Red Crescent Society actually got involved, and, in fact, the institution was improved. I think some of the patients were moved to different facilities…. In that way, we were actually able to reach across the world and effect change.”
Birkett continued, “As far as economic change goes, we do have one project that I think in a small way effected some economic change. We did a project a couple of years ago called Coffee Crisis by a photographer named Janet Jarmen. She spent years documenting Mexican coffee farmers…. She was doing audio along the way,…so we’re able [sic] to produce it in the multimedia format. In that case, we got plenty of letters saying that they had really never thought about where their coffee had come from. In some cases, people were deciding to make a change, to try to buy coffee whose proceeds would go more directly back to these impoverished farmers.”

Birkett’s final example showed how readers responded with money after another essay appeared on MSNBC.com. The story, titled “Hope at Heartbreak Motel, was by Kari Rene Hall,” formally of the Los Angeles Times. “She spent several years following a family who were impoverished and living in a sort of pay-by-the-week or month kind of motel in California. It was a family of four, and eventually the parents split. The father actually ended up taking on the care for the kids…. We got a lot of letters wanting to help this family, wanting to know an address where they could send a supportive letter…. There was a P.O. Box set up for the family where [sic] people could send letters and contributions.”

Curtiss described a project by Donna Ferrato, done “when I first came to AOL, on Women of Abuse. I think that the work she did,” and its being “on the Internet, helped to raise awareness and funding for some of the shelters that she worked with.”
Ritchin pointed to the photographs from Abu Ghraib as being “digital manifestations” that “did a lot to erode America’s image worldwide and did a lot to erode [a] certain amount of support for the war in Iraq. You could argue that there’s been a number of cases, particularly concerning the war in Iraq, of digital imagery getting out uncontrolled, in Afghanistan or wherever it might be, that changes public opinion and maybe in fact will lead to the end of the war.”

Fox likewise pointed to the Abu Ghraib Prison abuse images and stated that the “Abu Ghraib photos have changed things. Those photographs have changed the whole debate about the war, the whole image of the United States abroad…. Those photos came out on the Internet and in traditional media…. The fact that they were done on digital cameras and the technology was so accessible,…that a soldier in Abu Ghraib prison would have access to this technology and be able to disseminate the technology…, meant the photos could get out to the greater public through that technology. I think that’s an example.”

Leeson summed up the power of documentary photography on the Internet to effect change, saying, “Now, if the Internet’s there, and I can use video, I can use audio, I can use still photography, I can write, I can do all kinds of things, why won’t I do them if it’s for the same purpose, which is communication, telling powerful stories for bringing about social, economic [or] political change? To me, the Internet gives us an even wider opportunity than what we’ve ever had before…. I think it’s probably one of the most exciting periods of our entire time. Yet you’ll find a great deal of people sitting around bemoaning it and saying, ‘Oh, wow, Life magazine is no
more. *Time, Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report* and the great weekly magazines, they’re not doing those kinds of stories anymore…’ I’m not being critical of them either. I’m just simply saying that things have changed.”
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

The research involved two objectives, which are supported and denied here. The first aimed to establish the importance of *Life* magazine as a venue for documentary photography; the second, whether the Internet and its Web based publishing environment offer an effective venue for documentary photography.

*The Importance of Life Magazine*

The current findings and past research support the importance of *Life* magazine as a significant venue for documentary photography, as well as a mainstream visual outlet viewed for its coverage of national and world events. Morris summed up *Life*’s reach and importance as a publication “where the country got its look at what was going on in the world,” and where the documentary photographic essay “flowered…. perhaps more than [in] any other magazine in the world.”

As with past research, the current findings expand on the belief that *Life* contributed to society and documentary photography on many levels, marking a unique period in which the evolutionary forces of society, economy, technology and media merged to create a publishing environment for documentary photography, unequalled before or since.

In addition, the research looked at *Life*’s loss as a method used to establish its importance. The findings associate *Life*’s loss with the same forces attributed to its loss.
mainstream success. Moreover, the research supports the notion that the loss of *Life* did not lead to the demise of documentary photography as some have implied.

Finally, the research established the importance of *Life* magazine by analyzing the potential social, political and economic impact of three documentary works appearing in *Life*. Specifically, the research examined the published Civil Rights images of Charles Moore, the Minamata essay by W. Eugene Smith and the Vietnam War photographs of Larry Burrows.

In exploring whether these works produced a measurable effect, the findings revealed differences among the experts interviewed and previously published studies. The experts were unable to confirm or deny that these images led to a measurable effect and that such measurements were rare or hard to show. However, the experts agreed that, combined with social, political and economic forces of the day, cumulative effects were achieved. This was especially true of Charles Moore’s Civil Rights photographs as noted by Howe: “I have no idea how much difference they made, but within a growing collective awareness, they played a vital role.”

Previous research points to a somewhat different conclusion, articulated by Kaplan in describing remarks by Senator Jacob Javits of New York who claimed that Moore’s images helped “to quicken the passage” of Civil Rights legislation (Kaplan 1999, 134).

Even though the research shows differences among the experts while attempting to define impact or effect, it is clear that these differences in no way dilute the results associated with *Life*’s overall importance. The findings clearly establish
the significance of the publication to society and its relationship to the evolutionary development of documentary photography.

The Internet as a Venue for Documentary Photography & a Medium to Effect Change

The research supports the Internet as a mainstream outlet for documentary photography and as a medium to effect change.

Current results and past research point to the Internet medium as being in an early stage of development, while stressing the medium’s far-reaching potential for hosting documentary photography. Kennedy described this potential “as the only opportunity to revive the flagging fortunes of photojournalism and photojournalists. It offers the best opportunity to reinvent the medium and to reconnect the world wide audience to the power of visual journalism.” The power described by Kennedy and others emphasizes the potential to enhance the medium’s visual experience by employing multimedia tools. These advances expand the capabilities of the medium and provide the viewer an experience of greater depth than the two-dimensional space of print.

The research links the future success of documentary photography with the need for a new business model. These findings reveal that the current funding models are insufficient when compared with Life magazine’s financial success and ability to support the medium in its heyday. Nonetheless, the results do not reveal a consensus
for developing effective funding models, but rather highlights advertising and sponsorship as the most viable options.

On the question of whether documentary photography can effect change once published on the Internet, the research defines specific examples and describes reach and interactivity as effective tools.

**Conclusion**

At the heart of this research is the question: Does documentary photography still matter? The findings reveal the simple answer to be yes. However, the investigation leaves us with new explanations, interpretations and insights into the historical and future evolutionary developments surrounding the medium.

Not only has the research established the power of *Life* magazine as a venue for documentary photography, but it has also put to rest any notion that its demise led to the end of documentary photography as a visual communication tool. Many bemoan the loss, but for those who stand still, others seize new opportunities and press forward.

The medium and the media continue to evolve as they have since the first photograph appeared in the nineteenth century. *Life* magazine, once part of that evolution, thrived on developments in technology, narrative storytelling and society’s visual growth.

With *Life*’s loss, evolution continues. The importance of this research illustrates that new technologies have improved upon the power of photographers and
photography to tell a story, thus enhancing the narrative spine and providing new outlets for its reach.

As with past evolutionary developments, this research exposes social gaps linked to advances in new technologies—a “viewer generation gap,” as it were—where one generation, conditioned to the printed page, lacks the education, patience or finances required to access the new media environment. This generation gap also extends to the documentary photographer, whose future success is tied to adaptability.

The implication exposes cracks in the reach of new media to effect change within certain segments of the population, as well as excluding those professionals who previously contributed to mainstream outlets of the past.

The study likewise exposes a need for new business models to support the work of documentary photographers as Life magazine once did. Financial issues have always plagued the documentary photography business, but today’s new media environment requires a response that moves beyond the status quo.

The results reveal a financial system that mirrors print, a system limited by a reliance on old, two-dimensional advertising approaches. The experts touched on the expansive opportunities inherent in the current interactive, multimedia environment but were unable to provide a consensus solution, opening the way for creative approaches to solve these issues.

Furthermore, the opportunity now exists for the documentary photographer to reverse years of financial influence once controlled by publishers who had their own interests in mind. The findings go further by demonstrating that the capability to
publish has moved into the hands of the author, highlighting creative and financial opportunities in an environment open to growth.

Most importantly, the research reveals the potential for Web-based documentary photography to influence or effect change. The results stress divisions among the experts as to whether measurable cause and effect is attainable. However, it is clear that new technologies present a degree of measurable legitimacy. The ability to respond instantaneously, interactively or both cannot be underestimated. These new media tools promise new opportunities for measuring change by recording the viewer’s response.

Furthermore, examples associated with cause and effect, specifically David Leeson’s first-hand account of Louisiana sheriff’s deputies shooting dogs in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina that resulted in a criminal investigation and policy changes following publication on the Web, is evidence that documentary photography can be effective.

The findings published here provide a view into the present state of documentary photography to effect change and reach a credible mainstream audience in the new media environment. Although the future for documentary photography remains uncertain and unpredictable, the opportunities to affect an audience through global, national and local reach appear bright. For many, the reason for entering the profession—to influence or effect change within society—is still valid, and the prospects remain hopeful.
Limitations of Study

Several limitations surfaced during the research and analysis phases of the study.

First, the study limited focus to Life magazine as the sole method for establishing the importance of documentary photography. Other magazines that published documentary photography during the same period, such as Look, Camera 35 and Click, were excluded, as were overseas publications of documentary work.

In addition, the Life years were limited to a specific time frame, 1936 to 2000, when Life appeared as a weekly and a monthly. Excluded from the research is the Life magazine newspaper supplement, which began publication in October 2004.

Finally, with some older members of the expert group, technical limitations surfaced when questioning centered on advances in new media and its relevance to documentary photography. The scope, depth and breath of experience the experts provided were essential for the rich, descriptive historical results, but limiting when the questions centered on the Internet and the multimedia potential for documentary photography.

Future Research Opportunities

The current study revealed a number of potential opportunities for future research.

The interactive multimedia aspects of the Internet and Web-based publications offer new opportunities for study. Specifically, research aimed at interactive systems
that use voting, donation gathering and e-mail response may result in the development of more effective systems.

Pass-along readership was an important aspect pertaining to the overall reach of *Life* magazine. Similarly, pass-along readership studies using Internet examples would help define reach and effect.

Finally, new research centered on funding models that provide greater flexibility and opportunity for documentary photographers and publishers is needed. By providing more equitable funding, the future growth of documentary photography can remain strong. Current models that include direct advertising rely on systems designed for print. Future research should explore systems more suitable to online venues that employ interactivity and multimedia, dimensions not available to the print medium.

**Final Note**

Qualitative research achieves the greatest outcome when rich descriptive results are realized. The breath of experience from those interviewed here is substantial. The professional scope of the fifteen experts interviewed spans more than seventy years within the history of photography. This research paper maybe the first time that such a distinguished list of expert photojournalism voices has expressed their views on the pages of a single publication, and that is of considerable note.
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APPENDIX A

List of Photojournalism Experts Interviewed

Meredith Birkett, Senior Multimedia Producer at MSNBC.com. Interview took place over the phone at 4:00 pm PST on November 22, 2005.

Cathaleen Curtiss, Director of Photography at America Online. Interview took place over the phone at 8:30 am PST on Wednesday, December 7, 2005.

Travis Fox, staff photographer with washingtonpost.com. Interview took place over the phone at 12:00 pm PST on Sunday, December 18, 2005.

Dirck Halstead, former Time Inc. photographer, founder of the Platypus Workshop and online magazine the Digital Journalist. Interview took place over the phone at 9:00 am PST on Monday, November 14, 2005.

Jim Hughes, author of the biography, W. Eugene Smith: Shadow & Substance; founding Editor of Camera Arts magazine; Editor of Camera 35, which published Smith's Minamata essay; co-founder and past president of the W. Eugene Smith Memorial Fund; recipient, National Magazine Award for General Excellence, and NPPA Editor of the Year. Interview took place over the phone at 08:00 PST on Monday, December 16, 2005.

Peter Howe, former Life magazine Director of Photography and Executive Editor of the Digital Journalist. Interview took place over the phone at 2:00 pm PST on Wednesday, November 16, 2005.

Kenneth Irby, visual journalism group leader and diversity program director at the Poynter Institute. Interview took place over the phone at 08:00 am PST on Wednesday, November 9, 2005.

Tom Kennedy, Managing Editor for Multimedia at Washington Post-Newsweek Interactive. Interview took place over the phone at 9:00 am PST on Wednesday, November 16, 2005.

Kenneth Kobre, author and Professor of Photojournalism at San Francisco State University. Interview took place over the phone at 11:00 pm PST Sunday, November 13, 2005.

David Leeson, Senior Photographer at the Dallas Morning News. Interview took place over the phone at 10:00 am PST on Monday, November 7, 2005.
Charles Moore, freelance photojournalist whose Civil Rights photographs were published in *Life* magazine and whose images later became the basis for the book *Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore*. Interview took place over the phone at 8:00 am PST on Monday, December 12, 2005.

John Morris, author, former Executive Editor of Magnum Photos and former picture editor for *Life, Ladies’ Home Journal, the Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. Interview took place over the phone at 12:00 am PST on Wednesday, November 17, 2005.

Fred Ritchin, former picture editor of the *New York Times Magazine*, Executive Editor of *Camera Arts* magazine, and founding director of the photojournalism and documentary photography program at the International Center of Photography; current Associate Professor of Photography and Communications at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts and Director of PixelPress.com. Interview took place over the phone at 8:00 am PST on Monday, December 5, 2005.

Melvin Scott, former Director of Photography for Time-Life Books and former Deputy Director of Photography at *Life*. Interview took place over the phone at 6:00 pm PST on Monday, November 21, 2005.

Brian Storm, founder of MediaStorm, a multimedia production studio, and former Vice President of News, Multimedia and Assignment Services for Corbis and Director of Multimedia at MSNBC.com. Interview took place over the phone at 9:00 am PST on Saturday, November 5, 2005.
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

In discussing Life magazine, I want to make it clear that I am referring to the periods 1936-1972 as a weekly and 1978-2000 as a monthly, and not its current incarnation as a newspaper supplement.

1. What was the importance of Life magazine to documentary photojournalism?

2. In your opinion, what social, political or economic changes resulted from the publication of Charles Moore’s Civil Rights, Larry Burrows’ Vietnam, and Eugene Smith’s Minamata essays in Life? Please describe each separately.

3. What effect did the loss of Life magazine have on documentary photojournalism?

4. What are your thoughts about the Internet as a medium for documentary photojournalism?

5. What is your opinion about the Internet to effect change as it relates to documentary photojournalism?

6. What Internet published documentary photojournalism essays are you aware of that have resulted in social, political or economic change? Please explain how change was achieved.

7. What needs to happen for documentary photojournalism to become mainstream on the Internet?

8. Who are other experts in the field I should talk with?

9. That covers the things I wanted to ask. What should I have asked you that I did not think to ask?