

You are the Photojournalists of Tomorrow

This is the script from a presentation I delivered at BYU on 10 March 2016 for the 3MT (or Three Minute Thesis) research presentation competition.



Photojournalism as a profession is dying, and you are their replacements.

Quickly fading just as typists, telephone operators, and video store clerks, some say photojournalism died the minute the first digital camera was invented. Most point to the newspapers struggle to survive and maintain both their relevance as well as the attention of the advertising community. The internet has eaten away at traditional classified listings (i.e. Craigslist) and the departure of much needed advertising dollars. With these dried up revenue streams, newspapers are making serious cuts. Often the first to go - the photographers.

A major example occurred in 2013. The Chicago Sun-Times' laid off its entire staff of photographers and editors (28 total), sending shock waves throughout the photography industry.

Why?

Directly, it's bottom-line economics.

From the start, photojournalism has always been a low-paying and difficult profession to make a living wage with. Many professionals often supplemented their income shooting weddings and selling stock photos. But even those revenue sources have taken a nose dive by anyone with a DSLR trying to supplement their income or hobby while current stock photos going for as little as \$1.

The US Department of Labor Statistics noted there were only 3,860 photographers full-time employed by Newspapers & Periodicals in 2012 and this was expected to decline by about 36% for the next decade.

They have so far underestimated that number.

And now, with nearly everyone having a smart phone, the simple truth is that the masses are better able to capture the moment, making it difficult to justify the costs of media organizations sending a photographer to every major news scene. While many spectators present are capturing and willing to send in their photos – for free! Wannabee professionals or the average citizen present within the incident's crossfire are often more interested in building their resume, collecting "likes", or gaining a few moments of notoriety. Those who do it for the money are often undercutting the pros in their prices, further complicating professionals making a living doing it full-time.

Indirectly, we have devalued the still and moving image.

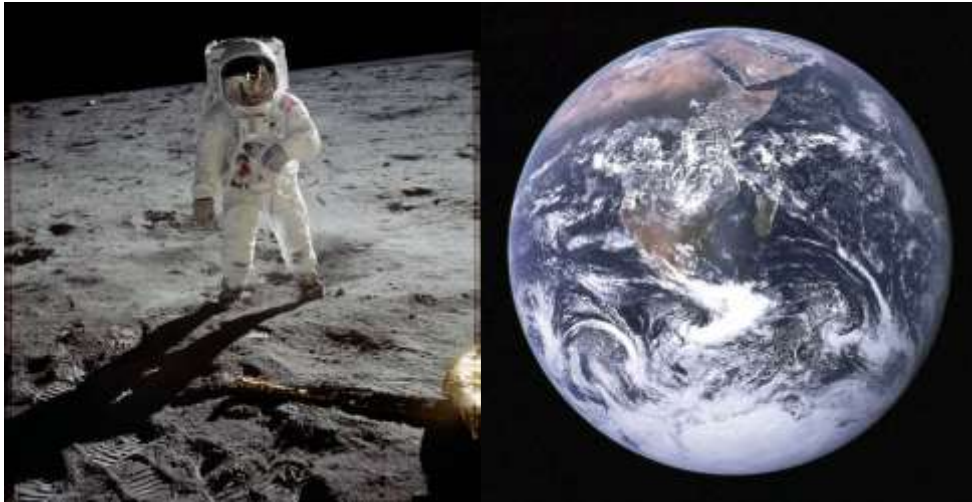
We've uploaded billions of questionable content to Snapchat, Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc., etc.

Now that everyone can afford a professional camera (or a high quality phone), the technological playing field is level. Today's unsophisticated media consumer easily accepts these often blurred, less than perfectly composed photos. We believe these raw, gritty, spontaneously captured images from the amateur participant represents more reality than the professional who turns up after the event, incident, or disaster. Immediacy trumps quality.

Neil Burgess, former Chairman of World Press Photo, in an article for the Editorial Photographers of the UK and Ireland (EPUK) wrote, "I believe we owe it to our children to tell them that the profession of 'photojournalist' no longer exists. The photojournalists were the first to go, but once the destruction of the printed media business model is complete and still no-one has come up with a new one, then the writers will have to go as well." This complication should worry us. How we capture, report and view the world in symbolic images has changed and our words, facts and truths are next to become the plaything of the masses.

There's a popular saying – "the best camera is the one that you have with you when you need it." To most of us, professionals and non-professional alike, that means the camera in our phones. In the same vein, the "best photographer," professional or otherwise may be **any** person, with **any** camera, who is available **at any potential newsworthy event**.

So the next time something happens in front of you, take out your phone...and take those photos. **Because from this day forward, you are the photojournalists of the future.**



Astronaut Buzz Aldrin during the Apollo 11 mission. The Blue Marble - View of Earth seen by the Apollo 17 crew
Images Credit: NASA

Two of the most seen photos ever.
Did you realize they were both taken by amateurs?