

Photography: saving nature

[Design](#), [Photography](#)



Photography: Saving Nature “ A good snapshot stops a moment from running away. ” - Eudora Welty. There are many different types of photography: Portraiture, commercial advertising, nature photography and photojournalism. Nature photography, in particular, can be used to document life and nature on planet earth that could be destroyed within seconds by a natural disaster. It can also be used to help preserve and raise public awareness of the wilderness just like Group f/64, Ansel Adams and Imogen Cunningham were able to achieve. Critics may state that photography is simply a hobby or something that it does not require much skill. However, throughout history, photographers have exposed millions of viewers to the true beauty of nature. In doing so, they have impacted the public’s demand for nature conservation and have truly had an impact on saving much of the world’s pristine wilderness. In 1826, the first successful permanent photograph was made by Joseph Nicephore Niepce, (Joyner & Monaghan) but the term “ photography” was not used until 1839 by Sir John Herschel. (Leggat) Photography is a combination of both art and science, and with the help of a camera, it gives one the ability to record a moment in time, forever. A camera is simply a lightproof box with an opening to admit light onto light-sensitive material or imaging sensor to record an image. The first camera ever invented was called camera obscura, which was invented hundreds of years before photography itself was invented. These cameras were used as drawing aids for Western artists in the sixteenth century. (Joyner & Monaghan) “ Cameras have come a long way, from the first crude cameras that projected images onto walls to the day-long exposure times of the 1820s to the 60-second Polaroids of the 1950s and ‘ 60s to digital cameras

today. " (Lynn) As time passed, technology advanced, aiding the development of higher quality cameras. Cameras obscuras continued to be used with a variety of printing treatments, however, when the first folding camera was introduced by Charles Chevalier in 1840, it made cameras much more portable. (Lynn) Due to the fact that these folding cameras were easier to travel with, it was now possible for photographers to begin recording events happening around them at that very moment in time. In the mid-1850s Bellow cameras, which allowed for greater focal length and the ability to take close-ups, were introduced. (Lynn) With the ability to take close up pictures, portrait photography would begin to emerge and rapidly become widespread since it offered different ways of viewing the world. " In 1888, the George Eastman Company introduced the first Kodak camera, the lightest and simplest camera to date. It sold for \$25, with the slogan ' You press the button, we do the rest.'" (Lynn) This showed how with time and technology, cameras began to become practical and affordable for the first time and also grabbing the general public attention. Zin 1900, the popular Kodak Brownie camera debuted with a retail price of \$1. (Lynn) Now, owning a camera was more affordable than ever and the majority of the public would be able to own a camera and make their own pictures, developing the public's greater appreciation for photography. In 1947, Edwin Land produced the first Polaroid camera, which produced an image in just 60 seconds. (Lynn) With this new camera, one did not have to wait for the pictures to develop but rather the pictures were produced from the camera in seconds. It was not until the 1980's that the development of professional, autofocus 35mm SLR's and point-and-shoot cameras took off; for example in 1981

Sony's Mavica recoded images onto a minidisk instead of film but it was not until 1991 that the first digital camera was introduced by Kodak. (Lynn)

Thanks to the development of digital SLR's, photographers would be able to preview the final product of the pictures taken at that very moment. These advancements enabled photographers to start an important activist movement for the cause of wilderness and the environment in the United States. Group f/54 was composed of many photographers-Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edwards, Preston Holder, Consuelo Kanaga, Alma Lavenson, Sonya Noskowiak, Henry Swift, Willard Van Dyke, Brett Weston and Edward Weston- with the same belief of how life should be recorded as it is seen with the eyes. " The camera should be used for a recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself, whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh. " — Edward Weston (Hostetler). This quote explains how an object's true beauty can be seen through a photograph because it eliminates prejudgment of the subject like nature. The Group's main focus was landscape photography and this is specifically seen in Adams' Winter Yosemite Valley and Weston's Dunes, Oceano. (Hostetler) These photographs show that these photographers aimed for " close-up images of items from the natural environment" such as specific plants or pieces of wood. " The chief object of the Group is to present in frequent shows what it considers the best contemporary photography of the West; in addition to the showing of the work of its members, it will include prints from other photographers who evidence tendencies in their work similar to that of the Group. " (Krehbiel) The group would hold exhibits of their landscape and close-up photographs of nature

for the general public to witness nature's true beauty and raise the public's awareness of nature. Ansel Adams, as one of the primary members of the group, focused the majority of his work on landscapes, in particular those of the Yosemite Valley. As a photographer and environmentalist, Adams used his work to raise awareness of the environment and save his treasured Yosemite Valley. His appreciation for Yosemite Valley started when he first visited the park at the age of fourteen. During his first visit of the park, he also received his first camera, a Kodak Brownie. (Luongo) This event was the foundation for his career and his great desire to protect the environment. " I know of no sculpture, painting, or music that exceeds the compelling spiritual command of the soaring shape of the granite cliff and dome, of patina of light on rock and forest, and of the thunder and whispering of the falling, flowing waters. " (Luongo) This was Adam's perspective of Yosemite, showing how passionate and different his outlook was compared to others view of nature. His adoration for Yosemite was the driving cause for Adam's necessity to conserve this beautiful piece of land. Adam's photography even had a great influence in persuading presidents to preserve other parks like Yosemite. " After the publication of his book in 1938, *The Sierra Nevada and the John Muir Trail*, he sent a copy to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, who showed the book to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and in 1940 they joined together to pressure Congress to pass the Kings River National Park bill. " (Luongo) Adam's work was impressive enough to have an impact on politics, and the passing of this bill was proof that the use of photography alone had the power of creating effective changes. Imogen Cunningham, one of Group f/64's founders, also helped raise public awareness of the

environment not only in the American West but across the globe in Europe. Recognized as an American Photographer and artist, Cunningham made her first photographs in 1901 but it was not until about twenty years after that she began photographing plant forms. " Starting in the 1920s, she began making sharply focused, close up studies of plant life and unconventional views of industrial structures and modern architecture. " (Cunningham). Cunningham began to create abstract patterns with plants by using light, engaging the viewer to perceive the beauty of an everyday object. In her piece named, Agave Design 2, one can see the way she uses light and positions the plant in such a way, that the eyes are immediately drawn to the image, forcing the mind to question the reality of the subject. "Edward Weston selected ten of these works for the historic Film und Foto exhibition held in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1929. " (Cunningham). Due to the fact that her work of abstract plant forms were now being exposed to audiences across the globe, she would begin to positively influence the way people interpreted nature's true value. The evolution of photography, from its early stages, has changed greatly over the years. Today, there are many ways that photography can be used, which makes it such an important tool for society. Not only does it have the power to help save and preserve nature, but also save and preserve events happening now and later on in the future. Photojournalism is a prime example of its great importance to society, due to the fact that it delivers raw emotions of human conditions or historical events like wars or political protests and even culture from other countries all around the world. Another example is portraiture, which one may ask, " How is taking a picture of a person, important? " Perhaps having a picture

snapped of one's self-image at the age of seventeen may not seem like much of an importance at this moment, but once that particular person has grown old, changed, and experienced life, they can look back at the years, and the innocence that has left them. A picture is so much more than just a piece of art. It is a treasured memory that cannot be relived, but one can always hold that image in their hands, look back and remember. All of these aspects and achievements in photography have helped expose nature's true value to the public, creating a positive influence on its viewers to change their outlook of the environment's importance. Group f/64 which included, both primary members Ansel Adams and Imogen Cunningham, were only a few of the many early photographers that helped save and preserve the wilderness. Simply with the use of skillfully made photographs and exhibiting the photographs to the public, the public awareness of the environment rose successfully. Without those early nature photographers, it may be quite possible that wilderness parks like Yosemite and other similar nature parks would not exist today. Nature photography can not only be used to convey people about saving the environment but it can also be used to document life and the wilderness that could possibly one day become extinct. As one protects their own belongings from damage, the protection of our home planet, Earth, should be a priority among anyone and anything that inhabits it.