

Philip gifter

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



In the world of art, the photograph has conventionally been used to establish original subjects that document and reflect cultures as accurately as possible. However, in Philip Geftter's essay, "Photographic Icons: Fact, Fiction, or Metaphor", Geftter points out that, "just because a photograph reflects the world with perceptual accuracy doesn't mean it is proof of what actually transpired. (208)" What Geftter is telling us is that it is that the ordinary reality of the image is not what is important; the metaphoric truth is the significant factor. What makes photojournalism essential is that it helps show us how to view the world in an individualized way. It is, essentially, a public art, and its power and importance is a function of that artistry. From the war photography of Mathew Brady (who was known for moving dead bodies to create a scene) to Ruth Orkin (who directed a second shot to capture "American Girl in Italy", when the first "real" shot was not to her liking), Geftter underscores that, although these shots are not the unedited version of life, this was life, just in a more appealing fashion. Geftter does not feel these photos are historically invalid. In fact, he believes that they are "proof of facts in real time, moments in history brought to the present. (208)" Seldom are photojournalistic efforts important primarily because of the "fact" of what they show; their informational value is minor. Such is the case of the 1956 United Press International photograph of Rosa Parks sitting at the front of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. For many years, we were led to believe that this photograph was taken on that famous day. It was not until many years later that Parks revealed that the photograph was taken over a year after the day she refused to give up her seat on the bus. The power of this photo resides in the image itself. In general, how much of the value we

place on a photographic image is based on what's actually in the photograph, and how much of it is based on what we're told about the photograph? The photographer isn't trying to cheat us by being deceitful in some way to history: Rosa Parks did start a revolution by sitting in the front of a bus while a white man sat behind her. The photograph is powerful enough to take us back to that famous day. It makes us feel as though we are stepping onto that bus, looking up to see a sight not seen before. Although it may not have been taken as the moment happened, it gives us an understanding. The manipulations that attended the creation of this picture are invisible, superficial elements. The amount of manipulation that will deprive a photograph of its value depends on the level of value we assign to it. We revere some photographs because they are images of a fact or time in history, others are compelling because they capture an aspect of the human condition, and yet others appeal to us because they point out to us something beautiful; it's inspiring and exciting to be reminded that the world can be good and charming. All three of these perspectives ring true for the Parks photograph. She is an icon herself; her story is a force of history. She helped define human condition for an entire race of people and bolstered the Civil Rights Movement. And it is, without a doubt, a quiet, beautiful tale of a kind, demure woman who wanted change. As Geffter asserts, " Here is a staged document that has become a historic reference point (214-215)", the power of this picture hangs on the basis that this is life. All photographs are subjective viewpoints. At the most fundamental level the photographer has decided where to position the camera, what is in or not in the frame, and when to take the shot. It is most certainly one of the reasons

why not everyone who owns a camera is a photographer and not all photographers are the same. The real value of the art of photojournalism is its way of telling us the truth about that moment in time. Whether or not the photo was staged means little if it served its purpose. And the photo of Rosa Parks absolutely served its purpose; it invoked emotion and made us feel as if we were there. Sometimes fiction tells history truer than nonfiction. Photography is an art; it is an illustration of a point of view, or concept. Photography is story telling. Photography is history. Even if they were orchestrated, all of the photos Geyter discusses in his essay are historical documents. They represent a certain way of life, of thinking, a set of beliefs that the people that composed them held dear to them. Would anyone think less of a beautiful portrait just because the people in it posed for the artist? Art has a truth in itself. There are no lies in a work of art, because it is the observer who gives them value, meaning, and content. We need to be just more thorough to decipher the hidden truth. And that where lies most of the excitement of the beauty of a work of art; a brief look into past, in the development of the analysis of their hidden messages which are different for each and every one of us.