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The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence

Susie Linfield

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In *The Cruel Radiance*, Susie Linfield challenges the idea that photographs of political violence exploit their subjects and pander to the voyeuristic tendencies of their viewers. Instead she argues passionately that looking at such images—and learning to *see* the people in them—is an ethically and politically necessary act that connects us to our modern history of violence and probes the human capacity for cruelty. Grappling with critics from Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht to Susan Sontag and the postmoderns—and analyzing photographs from such events as the Holocaust, China's Cultural Revolution, and recent terrorist acts—Linfield explores the complex connection between photojournalism and the rise of human rights ideals. In the book's concluding section, she examines the indispensable work of Robert Capa, James Nachtwey, and Gilles Peress and asks how photography should respond to the increasingly nihilistic trajectory of modern warfare.

A bracing and unsettling book, *The Cruel Radiance* convincingly demonstrates that if we hope to alleviate political violence, we must first truly understand it—and to do that, we must begin to look.

Please note: The digital edition does not include 5 of the 20 images that appear in the physical edition.

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