

**Writing Assignment #1**  
**Documentary Photography Today**

“The photograph gives mixed signals. Stop this, it urges. But it also exclaims,  
What a spectacle!” — Susan Sontag

Papers are due in class: **Tuesday, October 13th**

***You must submit your papers via SafeAssign on Blackboard.***

This assignment gives you the opportunity to explore the function of documentary photography today.

Your paper should be 4 pages: 3 double-spaced pages of written text and 1 page of photographs/links. Please use 1” margins, 12-point type (use Arial, Helvetica or Times).

Before you begin writing your paper, you must first do some research.

You must **read** and **analyze** the following: (online links and pdf copies are on the OpenLab class website)

1. Look up the term “documentary photography” and define for yourself so that you are clear about what type of photography this paper addresses.
2. Read Chapter 7 (pp. 124-139), “The Social Photograph” in Fred Ritchin’s *After Photography* (2009)
3. Listen to [Sebastião Salgado’s TED Talk “The silent drama of photography.”](#)

**Paper Instructions:**

1. Give yourself ample time to do the reading and to listen to the talk. The essay raises difficult issues that requires time to contemplate and analyze.
2. Consider the significance of documentary photography in Ritchin’s chapter. Do you think that documentary photography is effective in today’s society? Summarize Ritchin’s opinion of photography (list at least three key points). What does Ritchin think are the positive aspects of photography? What are the negative ones? Discuss some examples from the reading.

3. Watch and listen to Salgado's TED talk and consider whether you think documentary photography remains effective in contemporary society. Discuss your thoughts on what Salgado has done with documentary photography.
4. Compare Ritchin's and Salgado's views to **your own ideas** about whether documentary photography is still relevant today.
5. For the last page of your paper, include three examples of documentary art in any medium (photographs, films, books, etc.) and write 2-3 lines on why you find these examples meaningful. You can include sample image in this last page.
5. Lastly, avoid long quotes in short papers (both papers for this course are short). Lengthy quotes will weaken your paper and *diminish* your grade. Please look over the grading rubric for written assignments on the class website, and be sure to run spell check before submitting your final paper.

*Please note that if you fail to discuss both the Ritchin reading and Salgado talk, it is impossible to receive an A on the paper.*

### ***An important note on plagiarism***

**PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED IN ANY FORM AND WILL RESULT UNCONDITIONALLY IN A FAILING GRADE FOR THE COURSE.**

To "plagiarize" is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as:

Take and use as one's own (the thoughts, writings, inventions, etc., of another person); copy (literary works, ideas, etc.) improperly or without acknowledgment; pass off the thoughts, work, etc., of (another person) as one's own. [Lesley Brown, ed., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2 vols. (Oxford: 1993), 2:2231]

If you do additional research for the essay, you must cite all sources for your work, not just books and articles but also internet and non-traditional media sources. If you have any doubts or questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me in class, in office hours, or via e-mail.