

**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: **Monday, October 20**

***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 3 double-spaced pages, 1” margins, 12-point type (Please use Arial, Helvetica or Times).

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

You must **read** and **analyze** the following (pdf copies are online on the OpenLab class website with a link to the talk):

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. Read an excerpt from Chapter 5 in Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2007).  
*Sontag is a renowned philosophical thinker who has published many seminal essays on photography, including the essays collected in On Photography* (1977).
4. Listen to [Sebastião Salgado’s TED Talk “The silent drama of photography.”](#)  
Salgado has an exhibition this semester at the International Center of Photography in midtown (an option to visit for Writing Assignment #2).

## Paper Instructions:

1. Give yourself ample time to do the readings and to listen to the talk. The essays raise difficult issues that require time to contemplate and analyze.
2. Consider the significance of documentary photography in Ritchin's and Sontag's articles. Do you think that documentary photography is effective in today's society? Summarize each author's opinion of photography (you must discuss **both** readings). What do the authors think are the positive aspects of photography? What are the negative ones? Discuss some examples from each 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 Sontag's views to **your own ideas** about the effectiveness of documentary photography in contemporary society.
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 and Sontag readings, 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.