CHAPTER TWENTY

REMEMBERING THE "BIG PICTURE": A PHOTO-JOURNALISTIC ICON OF THE IRAQ WAR IN THE "IDS" AGE

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When thinking about the word "Fallujah," what is the first picture that pops into your mind?

Respondent #37: I think about Justin McCleese, a 20-year-old young man [and friend of mine] who was killed in while fighting in Fallujah [Iraq] in November of 2004.

Respondent #109: When I hear the word "Fallujah," the first picture that pops into my head is Muslims dressed in cloth from head to toe, covered. I also think about crazy men running around with bombs strapped to them, while innocent children get taught that Americans are evil and they should die to kill us.

Respondent #151: When I think of Fallujah, chaos comes to my mind. I see the bodies of three dead marines being pulled through the city streets, then being hung from a bridge to the delight of the Iraqi insurgent. The marines died trying to invoke peace and establish democracy for the people celebrating their death. Overall Fallujah is the perfect example of the grave mistake our wonderful president has committed us all to.

Respondent #204: I see soldiers in a jeep, on deserted looking land. Some look sad and lonely while others look hopeless and in despair. Things are physically calm but it seems as if crazy and

chaotic thoughts are going on mentally in these poor soldiers ... .

Respondent #378: Some kind of food, like a Gyro. Possibly containing Garbonzo beans, pita bread, lettuce and some kind of thousand island looking sauce. Probably looking like a Mexican Fajita of some sort. Maybe it contains some kind of steak or chicken. All I know is that it sound very good. Mmmmm ... Fallujah.

Respondent #602: I've seen so many pictures from over there [Iraq]. I can't seem to focus on a single one. They are all bad, aren't they?

INTRODUCTION: PLATO AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

"Journalism," stated *Washington Post* publisher Philip Graham, "is the first draft of history." Certainly, initial reports, wrong though they often are, create lasting impressions of the events defined by a news story. The actual words of initial spoken or printed narratives by on-the-scene or live-from-ground-zero reporters, however, are rarely recalled for longer than the instant. The few exceptions are legend: William Howard Russell's saber-sharp account of the Charge of the Light Brigade (Coughlan, 2004); Herbert Morrison's agitated but electric witnessing of the Hindenburg explosion; and Edward R. Murrow's composed anatomy of an air battle over London. Subsequent wordsmiths, from historians to textbook writers, supercede the initial reports from the field and create new narratives for contemporary audiences. Indeed, as many journalism-writing instructors have lectured, nobody reads yesterday's news — not even to expose themselves to great prose.

On the other hand, the mind's eye, when prompted by the merest suggestion of a famous occurrence, almost immediately focuses on one or several news pictures that became and remain our mnemonic telescope for symbolizing and summing up the event. For example, a person from the "greatest generation," if asked about the battle of Iwo Jima, would almost certainly visualize Joe Rosenthal's immortal still of the second flag-raising at Mount Suribachi. We may amend Graham, thus, to say that photojournalistic icons can be both the provisional sketch and the final illustration of history.

Other staples in the photo-iconic pantheon include: Robert Capa's *Dying Spanish Militiaman* (1936); Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*

(1936); the photo by an unknown Nazi photographer of a small boy emerging from the rubble of the Warsaw ghetto (1943); Charles Moore's *Police Dogs Attacking Black Civil Rights Marchers in Birmingham, Alabama* (1963); Bob Jackson's *Jack Ruby Shooting Lee Harvey Oswald* (1963); Eddie Adams's *Saigon Street Execution* (1968); John Paul Filo's *Girl Screaming over a Dead Body at Kent State* (1970); Huynh Cong Ut's *Naked Little Girl and Other Children Fleeing Napalm Strike* (1972); and various photographers' *Man Confronting the Tanks at Tiananmen* (1989). Images of "The Fall of Saddam's Statue," "Abu Ghraib Prisoner Abuse," and "Cargo of Caskets" are more recent candidates for iconicity (e.g., Major & Perlmutter, 2005). Each serves the mind and society as an "instant replay" for our thinking about the past and present.

That we rely on "big pictures" to summarize and organize the way we think about knowledge is unsurprising. As it is for other primates, the visual system is our primary sense-gathering mode — the way we most prefer to receive, collect, and organize data (Canfield & Haith, 1991; Canfield & Kirkham, 2001; Gross, Heinze, Seiler & Stephan, 1999). Research has shown that holding "mental images" of objects greatly assists in their recall and affects the "view" we hold of them (Anderson, 1978; D'Agostino, O'Neill & Paivio, 1977; Elliot, 1973). Moreover, the vast weight of experimental research has found that visual images are recalled and recognized more quickly, more easily, and for a lengthier duration than are lexical words (Ackerman, 1985; Anglin & Levie, 1985; Joseph, Wain & Stone, 1984; Payne, 1986; Winograd, Smith & Simon, 1982). Furthermore, unlike any other creature on earth, humans create mediated images to express their understanding of the world and to impose order upon it. As the late paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould noted, "the pictures we draw betray our deepest convictions and display our current conceptual limitations" (1994, p. 85).

That certain images achieve stardom — or as is more often the case have celebrity thrust upon them — reveals much about the norms, codes, and ideologies at work within any society, polity, and system of news (Domke, Perlmutter & Spratt, 2002; Hariman & Lucaites, 2004; Perlmutter, 1998; Perlmutter & Wagner, 2004: Major & Perlmutter, 2005). Photo-icons typically are significant not only because of their fame, omnipresence, or mnemonic potential, but because it is commonly assumed that they have power over public opinion as well as policy-shaping toward the very events that they portray. Indeed, accompanying any famous news image, spoken of in today's news or in historical analysis, is usually some ascription by journalists, pundits, political and military leaders, and others that these images "changed the world."

The prospect of the visual image as policy-maker and demagogue has never been popular with traditional discourse elites. In Plato's *Republic*, for example, the philosophers argue that there should be few or no visual artists in an ideal state because painters and sculptors, by creating realistic visual images, fool the senses of ordinary people and lead them to make decisions based on emotion; such pursuits engender a "bad state of affairs in the mind of the individual, by encouraging the unreasoning part of it, which cannot distinguish greater and less but thinks the same things are now large and now small, and by creating images far removed from the truth" (Plato, 1987, X, 595c).

Many political and military leaders of the age of television and our current era of IDS (Internet-digital-satellite) convergence share such sentiments. Lyndon Johnson's National Security Adviser Ellsworth Bunker argued that "television is interested in the sensational, dramatic; this was the aspect of [the Vietnam] war they saw, saw things that happen in every war but had never been seen before. [That] turned opinion against it, made it impossible then for us to go through with our program" (Bunker, 1983). Later, during the Tiananmen crisis of 1989, Margaret Tutweiler, then press spokesperson for the State Department, insisted that her boss, James Baker, also watch the CNN coverage (Henry III, 1992, p. 25; Friedland, 1992, pp. 5-6). "You cannot *not* respond to these images on TV," she asserted, "you have got to say something that expresses the outrage people feel and about how unacceptable this behavior is" (Tyler, 1999, p. 10A). Bill Clinton's first secretary of state, Warren Christopher, similarly maintained, "television images cannot be the North Star of America's foreign policy" (Urschel, 1994). More recently, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld complained to Congress that "people are running around with digital cameras and taking these unbelievable photographs and then passing them off, against the law, to the media, to our surprise, when they have not even arrived in the Pentagon" (Rumsfeld, 2004).

A small but growing body of research seeks to examine closely the place such icons have in policy-making, public opinion, and in the historical memory of major events in our lives (Bailey & Lichty, 1974; Bossen, 1982; Domke, Perlmutter & Spratt, 2002; Hariman & Lucaites, 2004; Perlmutter & Major, 2004; Perlmutter & Major, 2005; Perlmutter & Golan, 2005; Perlmutter, 2005; Wright, 1993; Perlmutter, 1998; Perlmutter, 2006; Perlmutter, 2004; Goldberg, 1993; Monk, 1989; Bennett, Swenson & Wilkinson, 1992; Spruill, 1983; Whelan, 2002; Kleinman & Kleinman, 1996). The study of "big pictures" yields evidence that icons are thought of, argued about, shown, repeated, and magnified

in importance far beyond the regular news stream of "coverage" of an event. At the same time, students of news icons appreciate that they are complicated, with their genesis, fame, effects, and even basic meaning both varied and often elusive. Worse, hoary myths often accompany them, much like legendary tales about heroes.

Some basic questions for those of us who study big pictures are:

- How are icons created within a news system and political culture?
- In determining the "effects" of news images, does the mass coverage matter as much as the icons?
- Do news icons have qualities or elements in common?
- Is there an identifiable process that governs their creation and exaltation?
- What are their effects on media, public opinion, policy-making, and ultimately on the events they portray?
- How has new media technology such as the Internet, blogs, cell phones, and digital editing affected icons themselves and our appreciation of them?

The plethora of issues raised by new media can be approached through a number of research methods, from experimentation to surveys to industrial sociology to critical cultural appraisals. I have conducted a series of studies of how my undergraduate students think of, recall, process, react to, draw meaning from, and develop policy-implicating opinions and actions from photojournalistic icons related to the Iraq War. Since the early part of the year 1999, I have been regularly surveying undergraduate students in introductory mass communication survey courses at our institution.

Questionnaires center on three areas of knowledge about photo-icons. First, to certain groups within the general study population, I show stills or video of celebrated big pictures and ask them to provide what information they can recall concerning the provenance and history of the images. Alternately, I ask groups of students to "tell me about the first picture that comes into your mind" when stimulated by minimal prompts such as "Hiroshima," "Iwo Jima," "Tiananmen," and "Oklahoma City bombing." A second set of questions deals with quasi-manipulations of the students' knowledge about particular pictures; most of these are not famous icons. Here I will change the captions, for example, and see whether or not that alteration affects the respondents' interest in, feeling of relevance toward, ascription of meaning for, or empathy and sympathy toward the subjects within a particular picture. Third, I try to gauge the

"icon agenda": Which pictures students are paying most attention to at a particular time and, retroactively, which ones they remember most associated with recent news events. Specifically, I have tried to appraise how the "IDS" generation — a term I employ to mean both Internet-digital-satellite and also in the Freudian sense of one's "primitive" unconscious; that is, our fundamental inner drive for making sense and meaning about the world — processes news icons.

The research question was: What factors influence the lifespan of a "big picture"? If we live in an age of saturation from many sources of sensational images, all designed to elicit our attention, then the durability of the news icon, which in the pre-IDS era had a distinctive note of prominence, is challenged. If icons must compete with more images, do they diminish in status? What implications would such a phenomenon have for picture-makers and policy-shapers?

To suggest an answer to these queries, I examine the allegedly iconic images surrounding the killing of four American contractors in the city of Fallujah, Iraq on March 30, 2004. Every criteria of photo-iconic status was achieved by these images within 48 hours: They were celebrated, frequently repeated, widely commented on, appeared in many different kinds of media, occasioned controversy, and most of all were ascribed as having a "powerful" effect on the public and possibly on American war policy as well. Normally, those of us who study icons might have predicted that these images would become, as is commonly claimed, indelible. As discussed below, according to my surveys this is not the case. But speculation as to why the icons of Fallujah may have faded from the collective memory, at least in the group I studied, offers some insight into the process of iconization itself, especially in our IDS era.

Background: Power and Disposition in Photo-Icons

Preliminary research on news icons has yielded certain parameters for their study (Perlmutter, 1998; Perlmutter, 1999). To begin, famous news images tend to fall into two genera.

The first is called the *acute*, that is, the single still or moving picture or video image that shows an individual, not repeated, event that becomes idiosyncratically famous. Eddie Adams's notorious picture of a South Vietnamese police general summarily executing a "Viet Cong suspect" on the streets of Saigon during the Tet Offensive of 1968 is a case in point. There is one event in question, although it was captured in the film

footage of other photographers as well as by Adams's still camera. In contrast are chronic icons, which typically are images showing scenes similar to each other in varied events and occurrences. For example, if I offer the prompt "African famine," a whole set of images of starving, fly-besotted, swollen-bellied, dark-skinned children may flood the news viewer's mind's eye. Certainly, some of these images — such as for example Kevin Carter's Pulitzer Prize-winning "Little Girl Refugee in the Sudan, 1992" — are more famous than others, but at the same time there is a host of pictures from individual African famines that are effectively both physically and symbolically interchangeable.

A corresponding insight about the nature of the news icon is the diffuse nature of its ascription of having "power." In a study of the alleged superlative influences of several "big pictures," thousands of descriptions of photo-icons fell into the vein of "they changed the world" or "they shocked the American public" or "they overturned policy." These descriptions were used habitually and often inaccurately. Research on news icons should attempt to parse out individual potential of differential powers for any particular picture. These powers include, in part, influence on public opinion (which may further be differentiated into influencing certain groups in a society but not others); influence on policy shaping or execution; mnemonic potency; symbolization; the stirring of political discourse; emotional incitement (which may or may not include the activation of empathy and sympathy for the subjects); and aesthetic reaction. In sum, a picture might contain a striking visual panoply or stir our emotions, but will have no particular measurable political impact — that is, not "change the world" or even our hearts.

A brief but notorious example will suffice to describe a larger research area. The Saigon execution picture still exists today frequently captioned as "the picture that lost the [Vietnam] war." Literally hundreds of commentators, from all over the political spectrum including super hawks and super doves, have made and continue to make this assertion, typically explained as that the American public was so "shocked" by the brutality of the slaying that, in its disgust, it turned against Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam War. Extraordinary claims, however, as any scientist will assert, will require extraordinary evidence. The problem for researchers is that the "power" of the Saigon picture is so commonly assumed that few have considered it necessary to provide any evidence for the assertion. Actual scrutiny, however, has found almost no evidence of any major or even minor impact on the psyche or sympathies of the American public by the famous scene from Saigon (Bailey & Lichty, 1972; Perlmutter, 1998). Public opinion polls, letters to periodical editors, epistles to Congress and

the White House, and oral history projects all suggest either an absence of a "shocked" public or, in contrast, antipathy toward the victim of the shooting and indifference to his plight. In retrospect, from the point of view of political reality and psychological schema, this is in fact an unsurprising result. Surveys demonstrate that the American public's opposition to the war in Vietnam was largely based on the mortality rate of American soldiers and the interminability of the conflict (Mueller, 1971, 1973; Milstein, 1974; Kernell, 1978). Only the tiniest fraction of the U.S. public cheered or cared in the least for the fate of the enemy soldiers and guerillas, and civilians (or, indeed, our in-country indigenous allies).

In addition, those of us who study news icons typically challenge two of the very pillars of why they are worth studying: their universality and their mnemonicity. Other researchers and I have found that so-called famous pictures are not as famous as we would commonly suppose (Perlmutter, 1998; Messaris, 1994).

Generally, the accuracy of people's memories of icons and the details that they are able to provide about the events to which icons are linked is directly related to their familiarity with them. Familiarity, in turn, is affected by many factors. We know that audience recall of most news stories is low, although many variables may affect the strength, accuracy, and length of recall of any particular news item (D'Haenens, Jankowski & Heuvelman, 2004; Lang, Potter & Grabe, 2003; Gibbons, Vogl & Grimes, 2003; Grabe, Lang & Zhao, 2003). Sociologists, however, have discussed the phenomenon of "generational memory": People tend to have the sharpest memories of events that occurred during their years of maturation and early adulthood (Schuman, Belli & Bischoping, 1997; Wilkerson-Barker, 2003; Gongaware, 2003; Weispfenning, 2003; Haskins, 2003; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2000). This is a fact that most of us viscerally feel, whether or not we ponder it. Our cultural tastes, such as the kind of music we listen to, are determined at this critical life period. My research reveals that icons are regulated by generations as well as other conditions. People tend to remember the famous news pictures of their early adult years rather more than the pictures of previous generations. Culture, nationality, even gender and race can also be strong influences on which pictures are familiar to us. So, while there are certainly some "global icons" — say, the images of the 1969 Apollo moon landings — an 18-year-old white, southern Baptist college student may retain for his instant replay different images of different events than would a 70-year-old Muslim Iraqi grandmother.

In sum, we know much less than we should or can about the most famous and ubiquitous incarnations of journalism and history. The project

worth engaging in by researchers from many disciplines as well as journalists is to try to investigate the anatomy of how icons are created, how certain meanings come to be attached to them, and what powers, influences, or effects they may have on events as well as ourselves.

Iraq as Hyperwar: The Temporal Dimension of the Icon

New media — which, we should always recall, are not "new" to those exposed to them in early life — quantitatively affect icons in two ways. First, icons are speeded up — that is, they can arrive for our inspection faster than ever via the Internet or satellite. Second, there are many more venues now than ever for sending, processing, and receiving all news pictures including icons: millions of Web sites, many new news channels (some "24 hours"), cell phones, digital software, Personal Digital Assistants, and so on.

The *temporal* dimension of the news icon, thus, means not only how fast it gets to us from the field, but also its provenance in the general flow of pictures in our life (Perlmutter, 2006; Perlmutter, 2004). Updating Plato, we need to ask whether the nature of modern communications technology has changed the equation of the icon as an instrument of public affairs — in reporting, public opinion, and public policy-making. My method is to use the surveys of my students' knowledge of and opinions about news of the day or of the past. I seek to understand if the "instant replay" quality of the icon, its mnemonic aspect, is being affected by the IDS convergence.

The last 500 years has seen a series of inventions, including the popularization of moveable type, that allow for the delivery of accurate, repeatable visual images of events to be transmitted to home audiences. It is only in the last 150 years, however, that the modern picture world was both born and industrialized. Photography was the first step, of course, but a series of other breakthroughs later allowed the creation of what we call today photojournalism: black-and-white halftones (1880s), radio-wireless transmission (1895), hand-sized still cameras (1888), roll film (1889), the commercial single lens reflex camera (1925), and the rise of color photography (1950s). By the late 1930s pictures were routinely sent "over the wire".

The 1960s witnessed further acceleration in the delivery of news images. At the time of the Vietnam War it was still common to take news film from the battlefield and fly it to developing labs in the United States

— a 24-hour delay in reporting. Satellite transmission (1962), video (1970s), and fiber optics (mid-1970s) allowed the first "live broadcasts," although the technology "tail" was quite extensive, comprising a huge truck and a crew of technicians. The commercialization of the Internet, digital photography, and cell phones (1990s) finally created what was hinted at in the first Iraq War and now seems to have been fulfilled in the second: the ability to see news images "live from ground zero." It seems to be a situation in which, as one writer put it, we face the "death of distance" (Cairncross, 2001).

The impact of instant communication (and replay) on the news icon is, thus, one dimension for study (Perlmutter, 2006; Perlmutter, 2004; Wright, 1993). News icons are seldom delayed events; they emerge almost immediately after the occurrence that they depict. It is the rarest news picture that becomes famous only in a historical time frame. But the "speeded up" quality of temporary celebrity is just one measure of the means by which the news image has entered the pantheon of immortal images of news and public affairs. Often, yesterday's icon can become today's blurry disassociations.

Take an "icon" of a short time ago. On March 30, 2004, a group of Iraqis killed four American contractors who were driving through the city of Fallujah. A mob of civilians attacked the bodies and hung two of them from a bridge over the Euphrates River. Many onlookers and participants danced with joy and chanted anti-American slogans. The images — the burning car, a boy holding up a shoe with which he had beaten the bodies, the hanging men — were shown in video and in stills in most major newspapers and television networks in America and the world (Perlmutter & Major, 2004). Saturation coverage also brought controversy — and not just about the war. Various print and electronic media showed edited or cleaned up versions of the events. These are listed as follows:

A1- 'Contractors Hanging from Bridge'
A2- '3 Iraqis Cheering with Burning SUV'
A3- 'Burning SUV'
A4- 'Cheering Iraqis with Burning SUV'
A5- 'Iraqis Beating Burned SUV'
A6- 'Graveyard of America with Boy'
A7- 'Iraqis Dancing on Burned SUV'
A8- 'Joyous Iraqis with One Corpse on Bridge'
A9- 'Graveyard of Americans, Smoking SUV'
A10- Cropped photo of A4, 'Cheering Iraqi with Burning SUV'
A11- 'Beating Burned Corpses with Shoes'

A12- Cropped version of A3, 'Burning SUV'
A13- 'Man in White Shirt in Front of Burning SUV'
A14- 'Bridge Scene with Hand in Victory Salute'
A15- 'Iraqis on Roof of Burned SUV'
A16- '3 Iraqi Boys in Front of Burned SUV'
A17- Video capture of Americans engulfed in flames

The grisliness of the pictures occasioned much soul searching by news gatekeepers (quotes are from Perlmutter & Major, 2004). Ellen Soeteber, editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, deemed the decision about which image in what form to print "one of the toughest calls I've ever had to make." Bill Keller, executive editor of the *New York Times*, ran "Contractors Hanging from Bridge." He commented, "On the one hand, you can't shy away from the news, and the news in this case is the indignities visited upon the victims and the jubilation of the crowd. At the same time you have to be mindful of the pain these pictures would cause to families and the potential revulsion of readers, and children, who are exposed to this over their breakfast table." Fort Lauderdale's *Sun Sentinel* printed no photographs of the incident because, as editor Earl Maucker put it, "I felt the story could be told without the horrific pictures to accompany it. When you have charred corpses that are hung from a bridge you can say that without putting it in front of a reader who really has no choice. There is no right or wrong answer."

Certainly such heavy coverage and discussion made the incident and the images famous. When, on April 5, 2004, 620 students were surveyed, most were able, when given the prompt "Fallujah," to cite at least *one* of the images of the contractors' deaths and the aftermath, from the jeering crowd to the desecrations of the bodies. Moreover, their accuracy of recall was high.

To proportionally measure such a phenomenon, qualitative responses were coded within a 1 to 5 scale. A "1" on the scale — *first-level recall* — is the highest level of accuracy and faithfulness of recall and is accorded when a respondent directly describes either the exact icon when an acute icon is in question or a reasonable facsimile of the portrayal of a generic icon. Furthermore, the respondent provides details of place, setting, time, main characters, event, and possibly significance. For example, as one student in the April 5 survey described his recollection of the events when prompted, "I am thinking of video I saw on the news that showed these people in the town of Fallujah, Iraq. They were jumping up and down and happy; they had just killed some civilian Americans. This happened just a few days ago. I remember being angry and saying, 'Hey,

aren't we supposed to be saving these people?'"

Second-level recall, a "2" on the scale, is when, while some details of the picture or the corresponding information about its provenance may be indistinct. Overall, it is clear that the respondent has the basic icon in mind connected to the verbal prompt or, when shown the icon itself, has at least a moderate understanding of its place, time and event. For example, in the group to which I showed images of the dancing Iraqis with the burning car of the contractors in the background, one respondent stated, "This happened recently in Iraq. People were killed, and these [dancing] people were happy about it. I'm not sure who was killed."

Third-level recall is when the respondents have vague associations of image and narrative. When shown the picture, they know only the sketchiest details of its provenance. When given a verbal prompting, they provide a description of a picture that does not correspond strongly to the notorious news image. Of the respondents surveyed for the first time about Fallujah, for example, one reacted with the statement, "Something bad happened there. I have a picture in my head of some people on the street, dead. I think some Americans were killed there recently. I saw something on this."

Fourth-level recall is when there is minimal association between any kind of accurate description of time, space, or details of event and the corresponding image.

The final level of recall, the *fifth level*, is when there is obviously no correspondence whatsoever between word and image. People given a textual prompt do not recall any particular associated image, and people shown an image offer details which suggest no knowledge whatsoever about the event itself or familiarity with the icon. Typically, here a respondent will answer something like, "I don't know what that is; I don't remember anything about that picture," or will get the details completely wrong. Interestingly, and testament to the saturation coverage of the Fallujah killings, of the 620 respondents in the first survey, even those respondents with the barest level of recall were placed in category 4, because they were able to connect Fallujah with Iraq if shown the iconic image, or if offered a verbal prompt were able to recall (or perhaps guess) that Fallujah is in Iraq and that, as one put it, "something bad was happening there." The recall and accuracy rates for the April 5, May 1, June 10 and Oct. 23 surveys are listed in Table 22.1.

Such findings for April 5 are not surprising. The images were at the top of the news agenda for days and were displayed in every news source possible — on blogs as well as in mainstream media.

TABLE 20.1
"FALLUJAH" RECALL
(IN PERCENTAGE POINTS)

	April 5, 2004	May 1, 2004	June 10, 2004	Oct. 23, 2004	38430
Level of recall	**N=620 %**	**N=603 %**	**N=89 %**	**N=480 %**	**N=365 %**
Level 1 (highest)	70	53	30	12	3
Level 2	15	26	14	12	8
Level 3	10	13	20	30	32
Level 4	2	4	24	24	37
Level 5 (Lowest)	3	2	12	22	20

In addition, I sought to know where the students saw the image in the first place. For each respondent I asked whether they had seen images on television, the Internet, in print (as pictures), through text or verbal descriptions of the pictures, and/or through Web sources or some combination of the three. Here are the results:

Level 1 (Highest) — Combination of Television, Internet, Print
Level 2 — Combination of Television, Internet, Print
Level 3 — Television
Level 4 — Television
Level 5 (Lowest) — NA

On May 1, 2004, I surveyed (mostly) the same group of students. Accuracy had dropped. In Summer 2004, a small number of other students were surveyed. The Fallujah prompts received much lower rates of recall.

Then, on Oct. 23, 2004, a large body of students was surveyed. The recall and accuracy rates for this survey indicate a fading memory of the Fallujah incident. The most recent survey, March 20, 2005, two years after the Iraq War started, demonstrated the increasing erosion of memory of the Fallujah incident.

In sum, *highest-level recall was generated among respondents who reported seeing the original images from many sources.* Then, taking into account confounding factors such as the variation in respondents and the

"memory" effect when the same group of respondents was used, there is a clear and sharp drop-off in recall of Fallujah "contractor killing" images. Basically, the prime word "Fallujah" became diffuse over time — prompting scenes of mayhem, combat, or bleakness in Iraq generally, but less tied to any specific picture or event. Consistently, however, in later surveys, American soldiers play a prominent role; respondents tended to include "American Marine" or some variation of such as part of the Fallujah panorama.

CONCLUSIONS: WHY DID THE ICONS FADE AWAY?

To recapitulate, icon studies of the past have suggested that big pictures often avoid the fate of much news in our memory: They don't fade away. Icons encountered in early adult years as related to salient issues stay lodged in our memory and serve as summing up and symbols of the events for us. History itself — as recorded by historians, textbook writers, documentarians, scholars of visual culture, journalists, and political leaders — also contributes to the "indelibleness" of icons by repeating them and continuing to discuss them.

Such, however, was not the case here — at least by inference, since the same group of respondents was not surveyed again in the later surveys (after the first cohort). The icons of Fallujah have become something else, from the ridiculous to the general.

I argue that several forces are at work. First, as with all subjective, qualitative coding schemes, the coders and the primary researchers are called upon to make judgments of nuance in the responses. There is a well-known social desirability effect in political polling, for example, wherein participants strive not to appear ignorant on any given subject. So a certain number of responses in the 3 and 4 categories are most likely simply good guesses. After all, that America was involved in a war in Iraq in April 2004 was a generally known fact, even to college undergraduates. So a picture of Arabic-looking people in Arabic-looking dress with a Middle Eastern cityscape in the background would probably prompt the most oblivious news consumer to offer, "Something bad was happening in Iraq."

These kinds of responses, however, can themselves be of interest, and I have followed them up in questionnaires, because it is often the case that people may have little or no knowledge about a famous news icon, even though they may have encountered it somewhere — for example, in a high school textbook, or a more contemporary pop cultural reference such as

in a program like "The Simpsons" or "The Daily Show." In surveys of historical icons, for instance, I find between 30 and 40 percent of students responding, when shown the flag-raising at Iwo Jima, that the events took place in Vietnam. This is less a statement concerning the general ignorance about allegedly famous pictures and more an insight into what events comprise the largest surface area in the historical imagination of young people. Even those who had not seen the images nor paid attention to them nor recalled them in any meaningful way still betrayed a vague impression of negativity about the insurgency war. In counter-example, American troops are still stationed in Bosnia, but in terms of news coverage they physically do not exist. It is not surprising that, when I show my students pictures from the American intervention in Bosnia, their recognition and recall is almost zero.

The "contractor killing" pictures themselves were heavily censored by media organizations. Some were digitally edited, cropped, or blurred. In terms of the topography of the icon, there was hardly a single mind's-eye slide that could be deeply imprinted on the synapses. Indeed, much of the controversy about the pictures was on their news value, the propriety of showing such grisly details to the American public and, if they were shown, how and with what contextual framing. Even if one icon emerged from the pack of pictures, it may have been physically as well as contextually distorted.

Moreover, the saturation of the icon's image probably did not assist in its long-term recall, because the events it showed were to be crowded out by so many other images of mayhem in general and Fallujah in particular. A survey of the mention of Fallujah in the context of other fighting — terrorist attacks and such — shows a whole series of nodes of prominence, with accompanying pictures, throughout 2004 and into 2005. Other candidates for photo-icons presented themselves as well in relation to Fallujah. For example, later, American Marines and other elements of the U.S. and British military conducted a city-wide campaign to "retake" the area, crushing pockets of resistance and rooting out insurgents. An image of an American Marine shooting an unarmed and wounded Iraqi civilian achieved sensational notoriety (Perlmutter, 2004). As noted above, however, by March 2005 the mention of Fallujah did not elicit this image from my respondents either.

In addition, when looking at thousands of responses to pictures or to text prompts concerning pictures, it is clear that another phenomenon is at work — what might be called "impression plug-in." Simply put, this means that when we are trying to fill in the details of sketchy images we tend — as gestalt psychologists noted long ago (Köhler, 1947) — to fill

in details that we think *ought* to be present. Hence, in each survey a certain number of respondents "filled in" the images of the contractor killings as being related to "Marines." Such a fill-in makes sense since so many news stories from Iraq and especially from Fallujah are related to America's most prominent combat unit. As a recall mechanism of Fallujah, "civilian contactors" do not readily compute as victims or participants in the violence of the insurgency, whereas the headline "Marines killed in Iraq" has been a common one for the past two years.

Media saturation may also be inferred as influential. Obviously, human beings are trained to receive data at the speed and in the form in which their brain was most accustomed to doing so during the period of maturation. The modern 18-year-old is able to play a video game or watch a music video that would induce a headache in his grandparents. On the other hand, asking today's 18-year-olds to sit quietly for four hours and read St. Thomas Aquinas is an exercise in cruelty. But even if modern younger viewers are able to process hyperdata and saturated panoramas better than their elders, necessarily they will be more likely to have a faster replacement rate for images of importance. Correspondingly, news icons may now be appearing at a faster rate than in previous eras. This in itself may be a subject for greater scrutiny, not just by communication researchers but by historians, psychologists, sociologists and political scientists. If the replacement rate hypothesis is correct, one confirmation may be that the icons of yesterday, not just yester-generation, are more likely to be forgotten, or rather superceded, by newer imagery and icons.

Obviously, several complicating factors may be in operation. The icon of Tiananmen lingers — although not, as I have seen, in the minds of my students — not only because of its immense celebrity and repetition as the first sketch of history but also because no new icon of Tiananmen has replaced it. Since 1989, there have been no copious news stories emanating from the geographic location described by the word "Tiananmen." One may say the same thing of Oklahoma City, Iwo Jima, and Kent State.

I argue, then, that the Fallujah contractor killings did not stay famous, at least among this demographic of audience, because they were relatively unconnected to their major concerns, especially among students in a part of the country where proportionally more friends, family, and neighbors tend to be in the military. Although further research is necessary, I hope this study points out that we need to investigate how modern technology, with which it is so easy to convert war into an instant replay of itself, may, because of the exigencies of the IDS era — a 24-hour, 500-channel, 50 million-blog wall of imagery that any curious news seeker may confront

— result in what might be called an *"instant deplay."* That is, while an image may be famous for 15 minutes, the implication of that instant fame is that a new sensational image is yearned for by the maw of the image industry as well as the independents, and thus will naturally supercede those pictures that came before. Even more, as the "id" of IDS implies, in an era of podcasting, personalized media, niche communication, and targeted media market segmentation, we face a time where individuals can literally make (or select) their own media world and, by fiat, put their own icons in a pantheon of their own choosing. The inner will (id) becomes the outer reality.

The project of studying the icons of photojournalism as well as independent image production for the global visual marketplace, thus, is greatly complicated by new and convergent technology and perhaps a new *psychology* of viewing. Certain basic questions remain, however, for political scientists, communication researchers, psychologists, sociologists, and historians to answer: How are big pictures made and maintained, and how do they affect our world and us?

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Discussion Questions

1. It is said that some men and women are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them. How would you apply to same processes to a given news icon?
2. Think of some famous new events in your lifetime: What pictures do you associate with them? Why do you think they "define" the event?
3. Why did the "Fallujah" images, so famous in their time, fade away in memory?

4. Do you think news icons are "powerful," and, if so, in what ways can they affect public opinion or policy-making?
5. What, if any, lasting effects do news icons have on public opinion formation? Give examples.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

CHANGING FACES: THE FIRST FIVE WEEKS OF THE IRAQ WAR

CAROL B. SCHWALBE

Those of us who have never heard the scream of an incoming missile or cradled a dying comrade in our arms learn about actual war mainly through images and stories in newspapers and magazines, on TV, and, lately, on the Internet (Sontag, 2002, p. 87). Photos can provide evidence that can't be denied. Many people didn't believe eyewitness accounts of Nazi concentration camps until they saw photos of the skeleton-like survivors (Wheeler, 2002, p. 6). After the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird wanted "to sweep it under the rug." Photos prevented a government cover-up (Becker, 2004, p. A1). More recently, pictures put the Abu Ghraib prison abuse directly in the public eye.

Photos can sway public opinion at home and abroad. The Abu Ghraib images tarnished America's stature as a superpower. In 1992 shots of starving children were credited with pushing the United States into Somalia. Less than a year later, a Pulitzer Prize-winning picture of a dead GI being dragged through Mogadishu was said to have hastened U.S. withdrawal from Somalia (Sharkey, 1993).

Americans have seen many faces of war since the U.S.-led coalition invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003. But there are many others they haven't seen — of war protesters and the Iraqi resistance, of women and coalition troops, of the injured and dead. This chapter looks at how mainstream U.S. news Web sites portrayed the first five weeks of the Iraq War. Whose faces did we see? Whose were seldom seen or even invisible? How have those images helped shape our perceptions of this war?

LIMITED SCOPE OF WAR IMAGES

In some ways, the images of war we do not see can be as important as those we do see. The mainstream U.S. media rarely publish gory photos