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# Covering Atrocity in Image

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### **Abstract**

Using images to bear witness to atrocity required a different type of representation than did words. Images helped record the horror in memory after its concrete signs had disappeared, and they did so in a way that told a larger story of Nazi atrocity. As the U.S. trade journal *Editor and Publisher* proclaimed, "the peoples of Europe, long subjected to floods of propaganda, no longer believe the written word. Only factual photographs will be accepted."

While words produced a concrete and grounded chronicle of the camps' liberation, photographs were so instrumental to the broader aim of enlightening the world about Nazi actions that when Eisenhower proclaimed "let the world see," he implicitly called upon photography's aura of realism to help accomplish that aim. Through its dual function as carrier of truth-value and symbol, photography thus helped the world bear witness by providing a context for events at the same time as it displayed them.

## IV

## Covering Atrocity in Image

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ATROCITY PHOTOS AS TOOLS  
OF DOCUMENTATION

The photographs that became available on the liberation of the western camps were too numerous and varied to be published together by any one U.S. or British publication. This was because scores of photographers in different capacities—professional, semiprofessional, and amateur photographers as well as soldiers bearing cameras—accompanied the liberating forces into the camps, and most were placed immediately under the aegis of the U.S. Signal Corps, the British Army Film and Photographic Unit, and other military units. Making available numerous atrocity photos already in the first days after the camps' liberation, these photographers displayed horror so wide-ranging and incomprehensible that it enhanced the need to bear witness, forcing an assumption of public responsibility for the brutality being depicted.

How did photographers record the scenes of barbarism that they encountered? Like reporters, photographers accompanying the liberating

forces received few instructions concerning which camps they were entering or what they should do once they arrived; they were given even fewer guidelines about which shots to take or how to take them. This meant that for many the so-called professional response to the event was simply one of "making do," an improvisory reaction to often faulty equipment, bad weather, and uneven training and experience. As one photographer with the British Army Film and Photographic Unit said simply, "we did what [we] saw at the time."<sup>2</sup>

The atrocity photos played a complex role in recording the atrocities. Like words, the images were of limited representativeness, providing only a partial picture of the consequences of years of forced torture, harassment, and eventual death—not the Holocaust per se but a partial depiction of its final phase. As British M.P. Mavis Tate commented, "you can photograph results of suffering but never suffering itself." But photography also offered graphic representations of atrocity that were more difficult to deny than with words. Photographers, one reporter claimed, sent pictures bearing such "irrefutable evidence of Nazi degradation and brutality" that were "so horrible that no newspaper normally would use them, but they were less horrible than the reality." Photographs thus pushed the authenticity of unbelievable camp scenes by pitching depictions closely to the events being described at the same time as they signaled a broader story of Nazi atrocity. It is no surprise, then, that photographs flourished for the press as an effective mode of documenting what was happening.<sup>3</sup>

*Photographing Atrocity*

Like reporters, photographers found the camps a horrifying experience. Photographers struggled with their own necessary intrusion on the dignity of their cameras' targets. Whether depicting victims or survivors, dead or living, perpetrators or traumatized, the photographers' normally prying behavior proceeded with a certain insensitivity to the boundaries between public and private that was intensified by the challenge posed by the scenes of the camps to common standards of decency and civility. Certain photographers associated with recording the camps' liberation—Margaret Bourke-White, George Rodger, John Florea, Lee Miller, Dave Scherman, and William Vandivert of *Life* are among the best known—later claimed that the experience had irrevocably changed them as professionals. Faced with scene after scene of human carnage, they found it difficult to come to terms with their role in its documentation yet forced themselves to continue photographing. Regardless of the continent from which they came, the photographers shared pool arrangements that facilitated the appearance of the same shots in both the United States and Britain. This

created a shared visual record for both countries, somewhat neutralizing the differences between the nearby war in Britain and the more distant one experienced in the United States. The record produced was massive yet uniform.

Margaret Bourke-White was perhaps the most well known of the group, and she accompanied the U.S. liberating forces first into the camp of Erla and then Buchenwald. On assignment for *Life*, she took shots from within a "self-imposed stupor" that veiled her mind: "In photographing the murder camps, the protective veil was so tightly drawn that I hardly knew what I had taken until I saw prints of my own photographs," she later wrote. "It was as though I was seeing these horrors for the first time." Bourke-White knew the limitations and cogency of the camera in normal circumstances, and it was as if the camp survivors had altered those dimensions at will. As one biographer told it, the camera could not be used to force self-consciousness on its subjects, for "Buchenwald had stripped away self-consciousness and ordinary response." Yet Bourke-White forced herself to "map the place with negatives," convinced "that an atrocity like this demanded to be recorded." As "difficult as these things may be to report or to photograph, it is something we must do. . . . Our obligation is to pass it on to others." Bourke-White later admitted that her visit to Buchenwald had changed her to such an extent that it prompted her book on Germany, *"Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly."*<sup>4</sup>

Similar tales of British photographer George Rodger circulated in association with Bergen-Belsen. Rodger, who also worked for *Life*, was so affected by the scenes of the camps that he decided temporarily to abandon photojournalism after he toured Belsen. Thought to have been the first war photographer to enter the camp shortly after the British forces toured the area, he did so totally unprepared for what he would find.

Struck by the mounds of human bodies, piled alongside people eating, washing, and cleansing utensils, Rodger initially reeled from the carnage. But he forced himself to take photos and to his horror soon found himself inspired by the grotesque spectacle he was witnessing. He started to shoot frantically, "subconsciously arranging groups and bodies on the ground into artistic compositions in his viewfinder." That revelation—that he was "treating this pitiful human flotsam as if it were some gigantic still-life"—so disgusted and appalled him that he promised himself "never again to photograph a war." Disillusioned, he later recalled,

It wasn't even a matter of what I was photographing as what had happened to me in the process. When I discovered that I could look at the horror of Belsen. . . . and think only of a nice photographic com-

position, I knew something had happened to me and I had to stop. . . . I said this is where I quit.

Decades later he turned his repulsion for what he had seen at Belsen into a broader mission to visually document atrocities elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

Lee Miller, on assignment with *Vogue*, was one of the first photographers to enter Dachau with the U.S. liberating forces. Ironically, for she produced some of the most memorable shots of the camp, she originally pronounced the atrocities beyond the parameters of her "fine Baedeker tour of Germany." Yet she too forced herself to take pictures, and noted that in the few minutes it took her to do so, "two men were found dead, and were unceremoniously dragged out and thrown on the heap outside the block. Nobody seemed to mind except me." Miller also displayed a toughness that was not always shared by others: while the U.S. soldiers initially had been encouraged to tour the camp, "by midday, only the press and medics were allowed in the buildings, as so many really tough guys had become sick it was interfering with duties."<sup>6</sup>

The photographers of the camps were alike in their will to record the scenes they witnessed—not only for the next day's press but for posterity. Bearing witness thus became part of the mission that captured the photographers recording atrocity. For most, shooting the camps was like "driving uphill with the brakes on," yet few turned away from recording the scenes. As one said, "I took pictures of a soap factory because if man can do it then man must be strong enough to have a look at it. You can't pretend it didn't happen."<sup>7</sup>

### *The Images of Atrocity*

The atrocity photos taken by the U.S. and British photographers streamed in so quickly that the press back home had little time to debate their impact. Turning out roll after roll of black-and-white film, photographers relentlessly depicted the worst of Nazism in stark, naturalistic representations of horror: bodies turned at odd angles to each other, charred skulls, ovens full of ashes, shocked German civilians alongside massive scenes of human carnage. Within days of photographers' arrival in the camps, the wires were flooded with scenes of explicit and gruesome snapshots of horror, the likes of which had never before been presented on the pages of the U.S. and British popular press.

Some of the first atrocity photos appeared on April 9, when three British newspapers—the *London Times*, *News Chronicle*, and *Daily Mirror*—printed pictures of a group of Russian women who had been victimized by the Germans; the *Daily Mirror* explained that its staff "went out on this



Figure 5. U.S. major and corpses in Ohrdruf, April 1945, by NARA (National Archives and Records Administration); Acme Newsphotos/Corbis Bettman Archives.

story deliberately in the belief that our readers ought to see these pictures." Although corpses did not appear in all of these initial shots and the *Daily Express* justified its selection of a general view of the camp without bodies as "the only picture fit to print," a more graphic set of photos nonetheless was made available the following day, when U.S. papers such as the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and *PM* all depicted a stack of corpses in Ohrdruf, discovered when the camp had been liberated on April 4. Those shots also appeared in the British *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Sketch*, and *Daily Mail*.<sup>8</sup>

One particularly memorable shot from this set circulated the first week of April (fig. 5). It showed a U.S. Army major, who looked pained and stiff, hunched in a wooden shed behind a stack of nude, lime-covered corpses, which spread into the camera's field of vision. The corpses spilled out of the frame on one side, suggesting a horror that went beyond the depicted scene. The photo was one of the first showing a graphic portrayal of nude bodies, and it was widely circulated. Interestingly, this series was accompanied over the wires by extensive verbal documentation that provided the army major's name and hometown (fig. 6). That documentation, which was divided into general information about the events leading up to the shed's discovery, more specific information about the bodies and reaction to their discovery, and very particular details about the depicted soldier, was typical of the information accompanying most wire photos. Unlike later photos, most of it was printed in the captions accompanying the photo's initial

OS MURDER CAMP

The swift advance of the Third Army's famous Fourth Armored Division uncovered the horror of a Nazi SS murder camp, at Ohrdruf, entered April 4, 1945, after the fall of eight miles to the north. American soldiers who seized the camp found the courtyard littered with the bodies of Czechoslovakian, Russian, Belgian and French slave laborers, slain because they were too weak to be evacuated. In a shed, they found a stack of 44 naked and lime-covered bodies.

According to survivors, 3,000 to 4,000 prisoners had been killed by SS troops, 70 being slain just before the Americans reached the camp. The 80 survivors had escaped death or removal by hiding in the woods. They reported that an average of 150 died daily, mainly from shooting or clubbing. The Nazi system was to feed prisoners a crust of bread a day, work them on tunnelling until they were too weak to continue, then exterminate them and replace them with another 150 prisoners daily.

led by Colonel Hayden Sears of the Fourth Armored Division, prominent German citizens of the town of Ohrdruf saw with their own eyes the horrors of SS brutality during a conducted tour of the Ohrdruf camp on April 3, 1945. As they stood over the slain prisoners, Colonel Sears said: "This is why Americans cannot be your friends." The unforced tour of the Germans ended with a visit to a wood where 10 bodies lay on a grill, made of railway lines, ready for cremation. Colonel Sears asked a uniformed German medical officer: "Does this meet with your conception of the German master race?" The officer faltered and at last answered: "I cannot believe that Germans did this."

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THIS PHOTO SHOWS Major John Scotti of Brooklyn, New York (left), points out the unmistakable evidence that many of the men died of beating to Colonel Hayden Sears. Major Scotti is a medical officer with the Third U.S. Army's Fourth Armored Division. British Combine - Lone Photo # 15477 from Sport and General. MAR POOL PHOTO, NOT FOR USE IN BRITISH ISLES, FRANCE OR WESTERN HEMISPHERE SERVICED BY LONDON ONT TO LIST B CERTIFIED AS PASSED BY SHARP CENSOR

Figure 6. Signal Corps wirephoto copy, April 1945, by NARA.

appearance. But detailed captions were quickly discontinued with the atrocity images, even though such information routinely arrived with the photos. And in fact as this particular photo continued to surface in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and elsewhere, such information was routinely eliminated from the caption. By the middle of the month, the same picture bore generalized captions such as "Nazi Horrors."<sup>9</sup>

Over the next few days, more and more shots became available, and atrocity photos rapidly proliferated in the press of both countries. As the British trade journal *Newspaper World* observed at the time, "Probably never before has the press set out so deliberately—and although each newspaper made its own decision, so unanimously—to shock the public by the publication of stories and, above all, pictures of atrocities." The first images of Ohrdruf were soon followed by numerous shots of Buchenwald—both within days of its liberation on April 11 and when officials and editors separately visited the camp over the following weeks. In mid-April, images began arriving also from Belsen. And ten days following the display of the Belsen photos, on April 30, pictures from Dachau appeared in the daily and weekly press. Thus, over an approximately three-week period between April 9 and the end of the first week of May, the U.S. and British publics were exposed to an explicit and ongoing photographic display that visually documented the atrocities. Women handling the images in the Office of War Information in London became ill processing the U.S. Signal Corps images into news photographs. Audiences on both continents were "sickened and horrified by [the] pictorial evidence of the iniquities."<sup>10</sup>

From the beginning, the photos appeared in both Britain and the United States without much attention to the content of the stories at their side. While the reporters' narratives had progressed chronologically from camp to camp, photographs were presented with little regard for when they had been taken. Photos that appeared within days of a camp's liberation in one newspaper resurfaced days and weeks later elsewhere; one image of three Dachau survivors appeared on May 2 in the *Washington Post* and reappeared a week later in the *Boston Globe*, one survivor cropped from the frame. While that practice in itself was unusual for the press, even more telling was the failure to mention the time lag. This lack of attentiveness to the actual day on which an image had been taken suggests that time, as referential data, was not particularly relevant to an atrocity photo's presentation. Rather, the story's visualization was primarily nonsequential. That nonsequentiality facilitated the use of visuals to illustrate the broader strokes of the atrocity story rather than the contingent details of one specific instance of violence.<sup>11</sup>

Atrocity photos were similarly presented with little attention to the

place where they had been taken. Photos documenting one camp were appended to stories of another camp. *Time*, for instance, ran one article on the camps that was illustrated with a picture of Nordhausen, which was not discussed. Often, the public was told little or nothing about the place being depicted, leaving the photo to function instead as a generalized spot of Nazi horror. Unlike the narratives of reporters that provided the minute details of the camps' topography of terror and left little doubt as to how the camps were physically set up, the visual representation of the camps left their physical spaces unnamed and void of verbal elaboration. Paradoxically, however, this facilitated the use of visuals in illustrating the broad atrocity story.<sup>12</sup>

What did the photographs portray? "This Is the Enemy," proclaimed the *Daily Telegraph* on April 19 beneath a set of photographs that stretched starkly across the top of one page. Said to depict "Horror Unequaled throughout the Centuries," the shots portrayed German civilians digging trenches, examining a crematorium, and viewing dead corpses at Buchenwald. The accompanying text spoke of how "other pictures, too terrible to reproduce, show bodies lying in the long trenches dug by the Germans."<sup>13</sup>

Those other images—"too terrible to reproduce"—appeared elsewhere. They included piles of human ashes, mounds of corpses, crematoria and hanging pits, dazed looks of barely alive skeletons, faces framed by wire, gaping pits of bodies. One, a long view of hundreds of bodies lining the pavement of Nordhausen in a manner reminiscent of a tidy field of crops, appeared in the *Boston Globe* on April 17, while a closer view of the same scene appeared two days later in the *News Chronicle*, *London Times*, and *Daily Mirror*. Presented in the latter as part of a two-page photographic spread entitled "World Demands Justice," the photo brought the following cautionary note from its editors:

On pages four and five you will see pictures of German civilians being shown the horrors which existed in their midst. And there is one picture which gives some greater realization of the evil inside Nazi Germany. It is one of many terrible pictures from photographers following up the Allied advances. It is by no means the worst.

On the same day, the *Daily Mail* featured a graphic midview image of a row of human corpses at Nordhausen under the proclamation, "This Is the Evidence," while *PM* ran a more suggestive picture of a closed coffin with a trapdoor bottom, captioned "Always Efficient, the Germans." The *Illustrated London News* published its first two of four atrocity supplements already in mid-April. In each case, editorial comments justified the publication of the photos in a way that left little doubt about their relevance as atrocity documentation.<sup>14</sup>

From the beginning, then, images of the camps presented a varied and wide-ranging display of atrocity. That display, however, persuaded both the skeptical and the ignorant with believable evidence. In negating the usual linkages to time and space that were typical of news photos, images were presented differently than were the words of news reports. An individual photo's status as evidence mattered less than the ability to simply document what the Nazis had done. Photography thereby provided a collective body of visual documentation that facilitated the act of bearing witness to Nazi brutality, even if photos were not given specific captions and were not presented in association with the times and places in which they had been taken.

#### *Assessing Atrocity Photos*

Although the atrocity shots appeared in greater numbers and more frequently than did photographs of most other events in contemporary memory, they did produce immediate discussion among those who processed them. As the first atrocity photos flooded the Office of War Information, the British and U.S. trade press recognized their immanent power as tools of persuasion. Showing an unusual degree of cooperation with Eisenhower's instructions to "let the world see," most editors did not entertain the idea of *not* publishing any photos at all. Rather, they began to debate how, when, and which pictures to publish, and with which types of editorial rejoinders.

Taking the lead in the United States, the trade journal *Editor and Publisher* immediately declared that "a good strong measure of pictures of the Nazi atrocities is good for the American public. Newspapers should print all that space will allow." *Popular Photography* declared that "because photographs have shown, people believe. . . . Yet the larger fact is that we already [know] these things to be true. The photographs just [remind] us with a horrible impact." The British trade journal *Newspaper World* ran a series of brief articles entitled "To Print or Not to Print?" just as images of the camps at Ohrdruf and Nordhausen began to circulate. Firmly advocating in favor of printing the images, it ran the following editorial:

A spate of horror or atrocity pictures dealing with German crimes against humanity have reached London newspapers from the Western front during the past week and editors have once more been faced with the problem of to print or not to print. . . . There was the conflict of bringing home the realism of German brutality and sadism with the desire not to offend against the standards of good taste and cause offense to readers.

The journal admonished those who hesitated about publication: "Shocking readers on certain occasions into the realization of some outrage by the publication of pictures which in the more normal way would be withheld is justifiable," it argued, "so long as such a step is taken with a full sense of the responsibility involved."<sup>15</sup>

Members of certain editorial staffs voiced discomfort with the fact that children would be able to see the images. *Vogue* at first refused to publish Lee Miller's images of Dachau but then relented and did so under the title "Believe It." The *Illustrated London News* solved the dilemma by printing its main presentation of atrocity photos in a four-page detachable supplement, which it told readers was "intended for our adult readers only." Subscribers with young families, it counseled, could remove the shots. Others were more direct about the need to see. In a leader, the *Daily Mirror* proclaimed how glad it was that the pictures were being published. "One reason for publishing is to *protect* the children. It is better that they should be 'nauseated' now than mutilated later on" (emphasis added).<sup>16</sup>

As with words, the press positioned the atrocity photos in ways that proclaimed their significance. Using captions, headlines, boxed-in notes from the editor, and accompanying articles, the press played up the role of images in proving Nazi brutality. Alongside verbal accounts of Belsen, the *London Times* reminded readers that "Pictures taken in the camps at Nordhausen, Buchenwald, and Ohrdruf, which confirm the published accounts of German brutality, appear on page 6." Similarly, the *Daily Telegraph* accompanied a photo of Nazi torture methods with this comment:

The weight of pictorial evidence of the ghastly conditions in the German concentration camps continues to mount. More than a dozen photographs, each giving indisputable testimony of the bestial cruelties inflicted on civilians, reached the *Daily Telegraph* yesterday; but they are of such a revolting nature that it has been decided not to reproduce them. Here, however, is one that can be printed.

Midway through a story of Belsen, the *Daily Mail* italicized its proclamation that "a full photographic record of the terrible sights has been made for historical record and future evidence." The *Philadelphia Inquirer* told its readers that "these are pictures made inside German concentration camps where thousands died under almost unbelievable Nazi cruelty," and the *News Chronicle* caught the attention of its readers with an editorial statement entitled "Indisputable Proof":

Here, and in pictures on the back page today, the eyes of British men and women may behold for the first time some of the more revolting

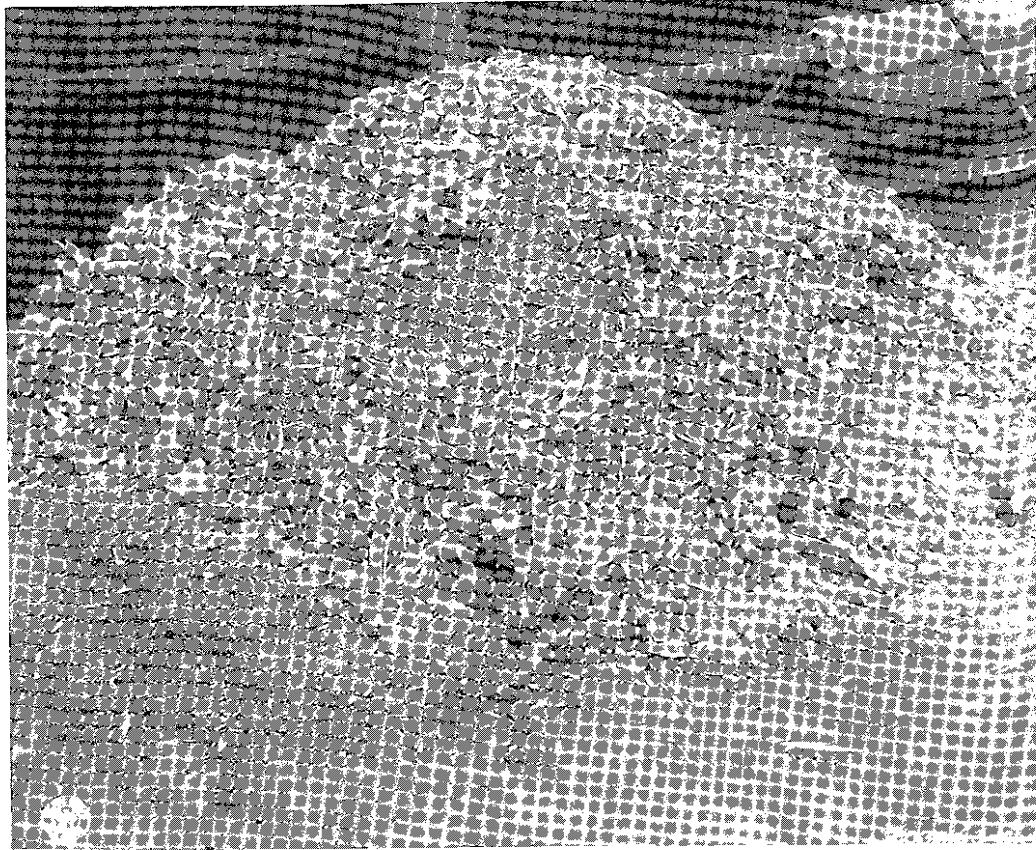


Figure 7. Heap of ashes and bones in Buchenwald, April 18, 1945, by NARA, courtesy of USHMM.

features of Nazi guilt. These are official pictures and the *News Chronicle* has decided to print them, because it is right that the world should see at close quarters indisputable proof of Germany's crimes against the human race.

It went on to say that "other pictures, still more horrible in detail than these, have been circulated by the military authorities, but the selection here published tell their own story plainly enough."<sup>17</sup> The *Daily Mirror* devoted a full quarter-page to a close-up shot of a pile of incinerated bones. "Heaped Evidence . . ." read the headline, and the caption underneath the image told readers to "Look Well at This Picture—and Remember" (fig. 7). As with other pictures, the frame cut off the sides of the picture, making it appear as if the bones went on forever.

Comments such as these were important because they called on read-

ers to attend to the atrocities. But they also contextualized the scenes presented against the scenes that had been edited from public view. Atrocity photos were presented as a subset of images that did *not* make it into print. And instead of presenting the camps in a way that claimed to be complete and comprehensive, readers received a continuous inventory in words of what they were *not* seeing. While such a presentational mode resonated with the nature of the story and the fact that no one image could really capture its core, it went against journalistic standards for presenting information as fully as possible. Instead, it repaired to an alternative mode of cooperative journalism, already seen with reporters, by which photographers joined forces in documenting the atrocities. That alternative mode suited the aim of collectively bearing witness.

As already suggested, bearing witness implied that there was no single way to depict atrocity. Rather, the very fact of depiction was sufficient because it documented the act of witnessing, even in cases where the atrocities were not portrayed. It was not surprising, then, that no one image emerged as the best way to depict atrocity. Nor was it unusual that even when photographs earlier looked over by the press turned up later, disparaging remarks were rarely made about the delayed display. Bearing witness therefore made allowances for unusual judgments by which the press selected images for presentation.

#### *Displacing the Eyewitness Report*

The atrocity photos accommodated a broader story about atrocity through a wide range of presentational strategies. Primary among them was photography's ability to supersede reporters' preferred chronicle of documentation—the eyewitness report. That ability made the atrocity photos more effective than words in shaping the act of bearing witness.

Images addressed the territory and witnessing activity that had been so central to the eyewitness report, but they did so via visual equivalents that at times appeared to supplant the verbal cues supplied by reporters. The most frequent early objects of depiction were among those that later resurfaced as Holocaust iconography—skulls and corpses, barbed-wire fences separating survivors and victims from the outside world, camp courtyards, accoutrements of atrocity such as crematorium chimneys and furnaces, the victimized mother and child, and abandoned possessions.<sup>18</sup> But there were other types of photos that disappeared from view, even though they initially filled the pages of the press.

**IMAGES OF TERRITORY.** Images captured the camps' territory in a way that had not been possible with words. While reporters' narratives had



squeezed the territory into plausible, chronological word-tours, photographers visualized territory in a way that simultaneously accommodated its details, magnitude, and scope of horror. Camps were visually presented as general sites of suffering, without the definitive detail that marked them as a portrayal of one location. This helped the images stand in for German war atrocity at its broadest level.

Textual interfaces gave the press a way to achieve this kind of interpretation. Even when images focused on specific scenes—such as an entry to a building, a stack of bodies, or a string of ovens—accompanying texts characterized images as more general than the scenes they depicted. At times, the press augmented stories about certain locales and atrocities by providing images of other locales and atrocities: a Belsen photo accompanied a Buchenwald article, or a Buchenwald picture illustrated a Mauthausen story. Often images of a camp were simply left out of chronicles about that camp, such as one Buchenwald story whose accompanying images—of emaciated American soldiers at Marktredwitz, carnage at Gardelegen, and Soviet infantrymen storming a German position—bore no particular connection to Buchenwald but fit together in a broader discourse about Nazi atrocity. The press also used specific visual markers—such as one picture each from Buchenwald, Ohrdruf, and Belsen—to illustrate general atrocity stories, even if the photos had little to do with the accompanying textual discussion: *Newsweek* ran a full-page story about the Nazi policy of mass extermination and appended four photos, all of which portrayed German civilians in activities around unidentified mounds of bodies, whose relation to the story was never made clear. And finally, the press neglected to identify a photo's location: photos commonly bore generalized place-markers, like "Inside Conquered Germany," "In a German Labor Camp," or "German Concentration Camp."<sup>19</sup>

One early photo of the Nordhausen courtyard, published in both the United States and Britain, displayed the press's idiosyncratic use of photos. The photo offered a long view of what were reported to be nearly three thousand bodies awaiting burial at the camp; the bodies lay in long corridors across the camp's courtyard, like apparel laid out to dry in the sun. Bounded on three sides by a white sky and large, crumbling buildings, the bodies were spread neatly across the photo's midsection, stretching from foreground to background. The image in effect had more than one life. It was not always identified as being from Nordhausen, and in at least one case it illustrated an article about another camp altogether. Though published by the *London Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Boston Globe* over an eight-day period in April, the time differential was not mentioned by the press. The same scene also reappeared in an unexplained second round of print-

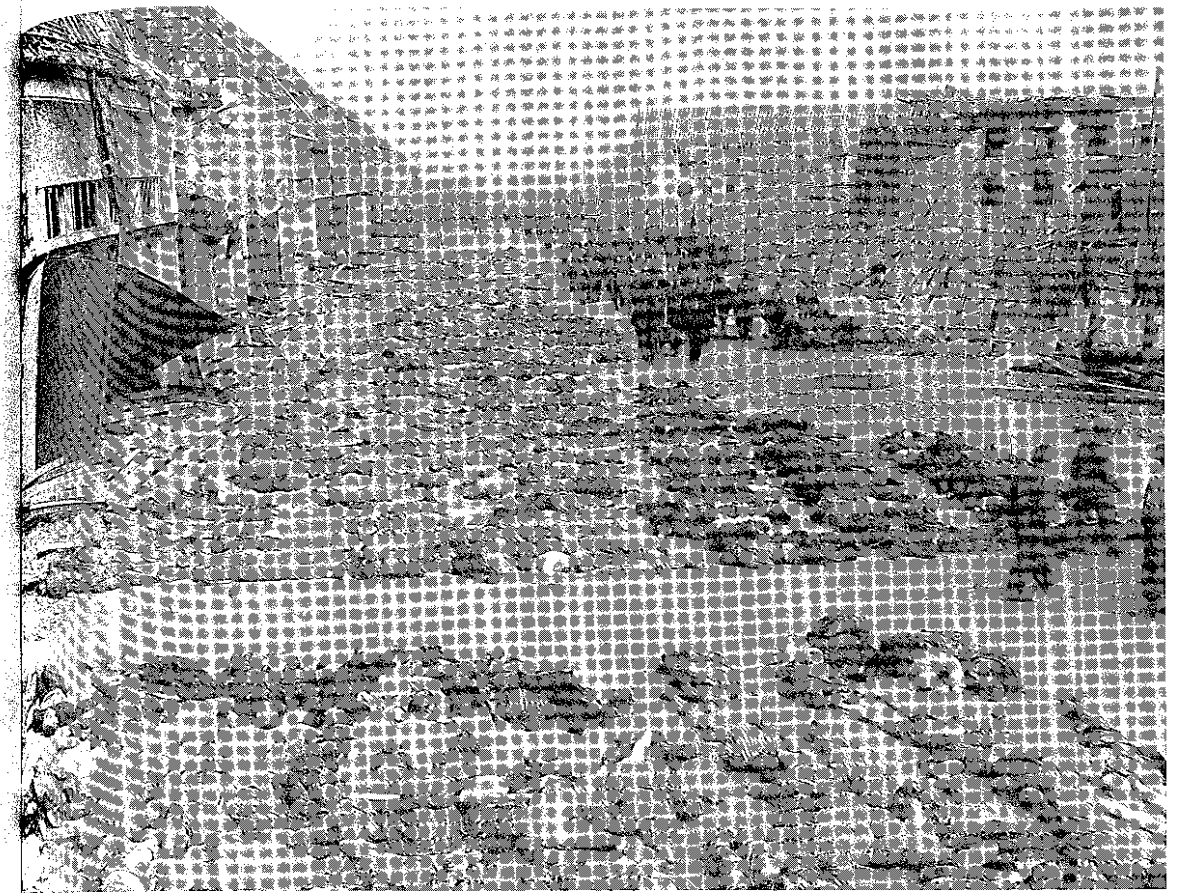


Figure 8. Nordhausen courtyard, April 12, 1945, by NARA.

ing at the end of April, when the same bodies, still strewn across the courtyard, were now interspersed with U.S. soldiers and German civilians who walked among them (fig. 8). Many of the figures walked away from the bodies, not looking at them, making the courtyard in the photo's center with its thousands of corpses seem almost inconsequential, a visual reflection of their lack of status within the Nazi belief system. Such idiosyncrasies suggested how irrelevant was the referential data surrounding the photo's time and space and revealed a leap to its use as symbol. The courtyard at Nordhausen stood in for the larger terrain of suffering under the Nazis, where images of mass death brought home the scope of atrocity in a way accomplished less effectively by words.<sup>20</sup>

Scenes of outdoor horror were particularly effective in capturing the

scope of atrocity, and they surfaced to this end frequently. Each camp produced its own degradation of public space—the wagons of Buchenwald, the pits of Belsen, the train tracks of Dachau. Dachau was represented by numerous views of corpses spilling out of train cars outside the camp, under striking captions like “Death Measured by the Carload.” The legend to one such image in the *Washington Post* made an unusual lapse of news language into second-person address: “At first glance,” it stated, “the cars seemed to be loaded with dirty clothing. Then you saw feet, hands, and bony fingers.”<sup>21</sup>

Territory appeared to work most effectively when its visualization was unnamed, and the press provided scores of shots of unidentified camps. In one rare attempt to repair the generalized presentation of Dachau’s liberation, *Time* appended the legend “At Dachau, 32,000 still survived” to a photo showing a dead victim of the camps alongside interred Nazis. The legend suggested that the image had been taken at Dachau. Yet a small asterisk guided readers to the bottom of the page, where they were told that the photograph had been taken “At Belsen, near Stuttgart.” This kind of disclosure, however, was problematic, not only because Belsen was nowhere near Stuttgart and had little to do with a story of Dachau, but because it showed how common were the questionable linkages connecting images and texts.<sup>22</sup>

In each of these ways, specific depictions of one camp were made to stand in for the larger terrain the Nazis had occupied. Each concentration camp was interchanged with other localized sites to tell a broader story about suffering under the Nazis. Depictions of the camps’ territory thus moved the atrocity story onto a different level of telling, which suggested not only the detail of human suffering but also its magnitude and scope.

**IMAGES OF WITNESSING.** Images also generalized the witnessing that had been recounted with precision in the verbal narratives of reporters. Photos provided an array of representations of witnessing—different practices of witnessing, targets of witnessing, and types of witnesses. Each kind of depiction generalized witnessing beyond the actual circumstances in which it took place, and the many forms of depiction coaxed the world to take responsibility for what was being witnessed. In that vein, a caption to a picture of one emaciated man told of his request to be photographed so that “the free peoples of the world would know what a German prison-camp does to a man.”<sup>23</sup>

More so than with words, the images of witnessing became a separate category of atrocity representation. First, witnessing itself was depicted in stages, with the press initially featuring photos of official delegations on

their way to the camps: The *Los Angeles Times* ran a shot of a departing editors’ delegation on the steps of a plane, captioned “Editors, Publishers on Way to Reich”; the *New York Times* showed the U.S. congressional delegation landing in France; the *Daily Mail* featured a front-page panel of head shots under the caption “M.P.s Who Will See Horror Camp Secrets”; and the *Saturday Evening Post* portrayed U.S. newspaper editors being briefed by General Eisenhower at his Rheims headquarters. Such pictures provided a frame for contemplating the act of bearing witness before it actually began.<sup>24</sup>

Different targets of witnessing were also depicted: witnesses were shown examining dead bodies, torture settings, and the tools used to bring about death. In what would emerge as a central feature of these photographs, many photos showed witnesses to the atrocities but no atrocities themselves. One such *Newsweek* photo portrayed three U.S. congressional representatives in a somewhat stupefied posture in one of the camps, looking beyond the photographer at an unknown, unpictured horror (fig. 9). The picture, which portrayed Clare Boothe Luce and others gingerly stepping around some unseen tragedy, curiously situated in between them and the photographer, was not identified by place or date, and the caption conveyed in only the most general terms that “Congress Views the Atrocities.” No more definitive detail was provided.<sup>25</sup> Yet depicting witnesses to the atrocities without the atrocities was a patterned way of visualizing the activities, and pictures of groups of witnesses—civilians, officials, and editors—proliferated with no visual depiction of the target of their vision. This act of framing made sense primarily because it helped achieve the broader aim of bearing witness.

Depictions of different kinds of witnesses also proliferated. The most frequent depictions were the prisoners and victims, portrayed anonymously and in general terms: for instance, one caption to three glassy-eyed Dachau inmates explained, “They witnessed Nazi culture.” Another Buchenwald photo showed worn, emaciated men staring out from four rows of crowded bunks (fig. 10). Originally taken by the Signal Corps in late April, the photo showed bunk beds stuffed with malnourished male survivors, an image whose uniformity was broken only by one male who propped himself up against a post and clutched a piece of prison garb to his nude body. The photo appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* in early May under the caption “Crowded Bunks in the Prison Camp at Buchenwald.” Haunting because of the men’s pained faces, images such as this one were often used as foils for other pictures—well-fed Germans, civilian witnesses, and even corpses. In most cases, the depicted were not identified, and that anonymity helped to convey powerful nonverbal messages of the effects of depravity.<sup>26</sup>



Congress views the atrocities: In addition to the official 12-man mission, the horror camps were visited by Reps. Clare Luce, John Kunkel, and Leonard Hall

Figure 9. U.S. Congress viewing atrocities in Buchenwald, May 1945, by AP/Wide World Photos.

German nationals were also frequently depicted, and primary here were German perpetrators. Generally depicted with other collectives, such as victims or survivors, the press showed them digging graves, staring down survivors, or walking across camp courtyards. One such picture portrayed the notorious Fritz Klein, wading through a pit of bodies at Bergen-Belsen (fig. 11). Again, the bodies spilled out of the frame, and his upright posture in their midst underscored the macabre nature of Nazi deeds. Perpetrators were generally shown at odd angles to the camera, which showed large uniform bodies—angry stares, colorless prison garb, and, in the case of women, tightly bound hair. German civilians were also frequently



Figure 10. Former prisoners of Buchenwald, April 16, 1945, by NARA.

depicted witnesses, and they too were photographed in various encounters with the atrocities: reburying the bodies of Nazi victims, looking at cremation ovens, or “being forced to gaze” at stacks of corpses. One frequently circulated shot showed women and young boys from Weimar being forced to look upon the bodies of Buchenwald (fig. 12). The civilians were in various stages of emotional disarray. One clutched a handkerchief to her chin, another looked as if she were about to cry, still another wore an expression of disbelief. Each individual conformed on one point: they looked to the left of the picture, staring at evidence of the atrocities, which were beyond the frame of the camera lens. Taken by the Signal Corps on April 16, the



Figure 11. Fritz Klein in Belsen, April 1945, courtesy of The Imperial War Museum, London.

photo surfaced in numerous newspapers and newsmagazines.<sup>27</sup> This aesthetic—showing witnesses without evidence of the atrocities—forced attention on the act of bearing witness. It froze the act of bearing witness in time and space, inviting readers to attend to what was being witnessed even if it was not shown. By extension, this implied a recognition of the other atrocity photos to make this particular shot understandable, supporting a mutual cross-referentiality across all the shots.

Most shots of German civilians seemed to pronounce a confusion, shock, or bewilderment that complicated the act of bearing witness, as when German children were portrayed in a refusal to bear witness: one shot showed a small boy looking straight at the camera and away from the bodies that took up the majority of photographic space, his glance com-



Figure 12. German civilians in Buchenwald, April 16, 1945, by NARA.

municating an act of witnessing that was in essence not-witnessing; in another photo a boy walked down a road lined with dead bodies in Belsen, his head too averted—again, a refusal to bear witness.<sup>28</sup> Other shots of civilians mirrored the complexity of the German response to atrocity. One such photo showed eight civilians, seemingly aghast at the sight of a dead body, walking gingerly around it. The first woman looked at it and clutched her throat; the second put her hand over her mouth and looked directly at the camera; the woman behind her also looked at the photographer but in a way that suggested she was blinded by the camera. The varying responses not only mirrored Germany's collective discomfort as a nation but complicated the act of bearing witness in the public imagination. Yet they also paradoxically bolstered the authority of the photograph. Looking at the dead body at the same time as readers did, and looking not at the body but at the camera, fit well with the difficulty in forcing the Germans to see the evidence at their doorstep.<sup>29</sup>

Soldiers as witnesses were not featured very prominently in images, perhaps because security made photographing soldiers imprudent. In fact, one of the first atrocity pictures to appear was exceptional, because it showed a U.S. medical officer behind a stack of bodies in Ohrdruf who was identified by name and hometown in the documentation that accompanied the series of photos (see fig. 5, on p. 90). Yet other exceptions involved well-known military figures: a frontal image of Eisenhower topped off the *Illustrated London News's* detachable supplement on the atrocities, while the *Daily Telegraph* superimposed black arrows with names on an image of Ohrdruf so as to identify the key figures of Generals Eisenhower, Patton, and Bradley. Significantly, each photo offered the same basic shot—dead bodies in the foreground, soldier-as-witness in the background, looking both at the camera and at the bodies. The camera connected with the living across the bodies of the dead.<sup>30</sup>

A final round of witnesses came with the official delegations to the camps, both politicians and editors. One extensively recycled photo depicted the editors' delegation to the camps (fig. 13). The photo portrayed a group of editors in the act of covering the uncovering of corpses in Buchenwald. The editors—all white and male—scribbled into notepads while seeming to avoid looking at the bodies at their feet. A few soldiers at the corner of the frame looked at the bodies, standing in for the act of bearing witness. Released over the wires on May 3, a week after it was taken, the photo appeared in both the *Boston Globe* under the caption "American Editors View Buchenwald Victims" and in the *Los Angeles Times* as "Buchenwald." While the wire service caption identified the editors in the shot by name and newspaper affiliation, that degree of identification was reproduced in neither newspaper. Other photos showed both officials and editors examining the camps' terrain or looking at dead bodies. In fact, authenticity was often established by photographing this version of the act of bearing witness—soldiers, officials, and politicians in front of heaps of bodies. The women officials pictured in these images appeared to play a slightly different role than did the men, in that they supported a gendered expectation of women in the role of consolers, and they were portrayed not only looking at dead victims but talking to survivors.<sup>31</sup>

What did these elaborated portrayals of witnessing accomplish? They provided a representational frame that words could not: they froze witnessing in place. Images prolonged witnessing by separating it from the scenes of horror. Depicting different practices of witnessing, targets of witnessing, and kinds of witnesses, these images underscored the centrality of bearing witness as a response to Nazi terror. Unlike verbal narratives, where bearing witness was only implied in the grounded accounts of lib-



Figure 13. American editors visiting Buchenwald, April, 1945, by NARA.

eration, witnessing here was seen as sufficiently important to merit its own category of representation. While this may not have fit the cadences or aims of daily news, it was well suited to the larger frame of contemplating what had happened in the camps.

Thus, photographs contextualized Nazi atrocity by broadening the two features of the eyewitness report—territory and the activities of witnessing—beyond the contingent instance of violence. Photographs of territory created strong links between one locale and the rest of the depraved Nazi world, links that were denied in reporters' concrete word-tours. Similarly, visual representations underscored variations in the act of bearing witness—stages of the act itself, different targets of bearing witness, different kinds of witnesses, and different kinds of witnessing practices—that not only offered an array of representations but also conveyed a prolonged moment of witnessing that was lost in reporters' narratives. This variance highlighted far more effectively than did words the complications sur-

rounding the act of bearing witness and simultaneously linked the act of witnessing with broader interpretive schema by which it was possible to generalize, contextualize, and symbolize what had happened.

This suggests that the very act of interpretation took shape differently in words and images. With words, the press restricted the act of bearing witness by closing off interpretation and grounding the narratives in the here-and-now. With photos, the press helped the world bear witness more effectively by opening the documents to interpretation.

#### ATROCITY PHOTOS AS SYMBOLS

The press also provided links between each photo and the larger atrocity story through practices of composition and presentation. Each set of practices helped consolidate the images of the camps as symbols of atrocity.

##### *Practices of Composition: Placement, Number, and Gaze*

Though numerous and wide-ranging in their depictions of horror, the atrocity photos were somewhat unusual due to the repetitive scenes reproduced by different photographers, regardless of their degree of professional training. While varying the depiction—by changing the camera position, camera angle, focal length of the lens, light, and length of exposure—might have lent an individualized signature to the photos, this was generally not characteristic of these photos. Instead, near identical images arrived over the wires within hours and days of each other, differing only slightly in focus, distance, exposure, and perspective.

**PLACEMENT.** The decision of where to place evidence of atrocity in a photo created a layering between the atrocity photos' foreground and background, for the two often communicated different levels of specificity about what was being depicted. Witnesses and bodies were depicted in many of the images, and one was used as context for the other.

Evidence of atrocity usually meant pictures of corpses, and it often alternated with witnesses in either the shot's foreground or background. One widely circulated image portrayed General Eisenhower and other ranking generals at Ohrdruf viewing corpses strewn across the camp's forecourt (fig. 14). Eisenhower and company faced the camera from the back of the shot while they overlooked the dead bodies in its foreground that spilled into the camera. Taken by an unidentified photographer, the photograph appeared in the *Washington Post* on April 16 and resurfaced frequently over the next two weeks. It played in the *Illustrated London News* as a full front-page photo whose legend told readers that "the usually genial General Eisenhower shows by his grim aspect his horror of German bru-



Figure 14. General Eisenhower and other officers examine corpses at Ohrdruf, April 12, 1945, by NARA.

tality." The photo not only heightened the role of the American GI as witness to atrocity but juxtaposed the reader with the GI across the space of the bodies. It was impossible to contemplate the GI's act of witnessing without first contemplating the corpses.<sup>32</sup>

Elsewhere the foreground and background were switched, with the corpses positioned in the back of the shot. The *British News Chronicle* ran a front-page picture of Belsen that showed women cooking and peeling potatoes in the foreground and heaps of dead bodies in the background. Another frequently circulated triangular shot of the Buchenwald courtyard depicted a visual confrontation juxtaposing U.S. soldiers, a stack of dead bodies on a wagon, and the backs of German civilians (fig. 15). The bodies occupied the back right-hand corner of the shot, soldiers the back left-

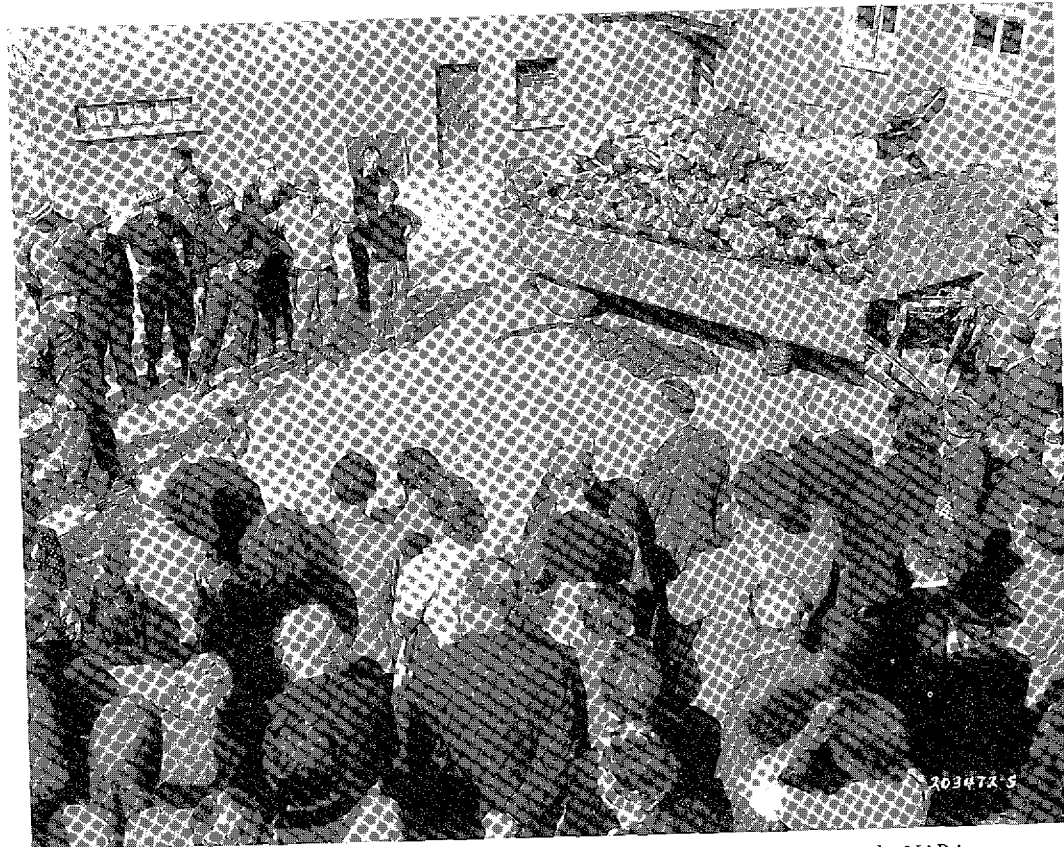


Figure 15. German civilians view corpses at Buchenwald, April 16, 1945, by NARA.

hand corner, and civilians the foreground. In viewing the shot, the reader had to look over the shoulders of the German civilians in order to see the bodies, creating a layering between the shot's foreground (where the Germans were standing) and the background (where the victims and liberators stood). The effect was magnified by the middle of the shot, where a seemingly impassable white space kept the groups at a distance from each other. That aesthetic was reproduced in other atrocity photos.<sup>33</sup>

**NUMBER.** A second practice of composition had to do with the numbers of people who were depicted in atrocity photos. The photos oscillated between pictures of the many and pictures of the few. Pictures of the many portrayed mass graves, where bodies had been thrown together so indiscriminately that it was difficult, if not impossible, to discern which appendage belonged to which body; pictures of the few portrayed single



Figure 16. Corpses of civilians killed at Buchenwald, April–May 1945, by NARA.

individual bodies frozen in particularly horrific poses—a starved man stretched out in rigor mortis on the grounds of one of the camps. Taken together, the images portrayed both individual agony and the far-reaching nature of mass atrocity, suggesting that the depiction of each individual instance of horror represented thousands more who had met the same fate. The photos functioned not only referentially but as symbolic markers of atrocity in its broadest form.<sup>34</sup>

On the whole, the press presented collective images of atrocity more frequently than it did those of individuals. Perhaps because the group shots suggested a collective status that helped offset public disbelief, group shots appeared frequently regardless of the type of collective represented—groups of victims, survivors, or witnesses. Group images tended to be less graphic than those of individuals, partly because the rarely visible eyes and faces worked against the possibility of identifying the victims being depict-



Figure 17. Women SS guards at Belsen, April 17, 1945, courtesy of The Imperial War Museum, London.

ed. Foremost here was a famous shot by Margaret Bourke-White, captioned simply “Victims of the Buchenwald Concentration Camp.” Uncredited at the time it originally appeared, the photo portrayed piles of human feet and heads angled away from the camera; the pile gave viewers the impression that it was about to spill over onto the photographer, and that it was barred from doing so only by a length of chain at the bottom of the picture (fig. 16). Other photographs, less renowned than Bourke-White’s, showed the same pile of bodies from a long shot, a perspective that revealed them to be stacked atop a wagon in the camp’s courtyard. That same wagon, portrayed from an even further distance, was featured in the aforementioned triangular shot of the Buchenwald courtyard.<sup>35</sup>

Images of other kinds of groups—survivors, German civilians, German perpetrators, and official witnesses—also proliferated, each displayed with repeated visual characteristics. Groups of witnesses were nearly always portrayed at one side of the frame, looking sideways at corpses that were either inside or outside the field of the camera. Groups of German perpetrators, for instance, were almost always portrayed at harsh angles to the camera and in rigid and upright postures (fig. 17). These individuals looked

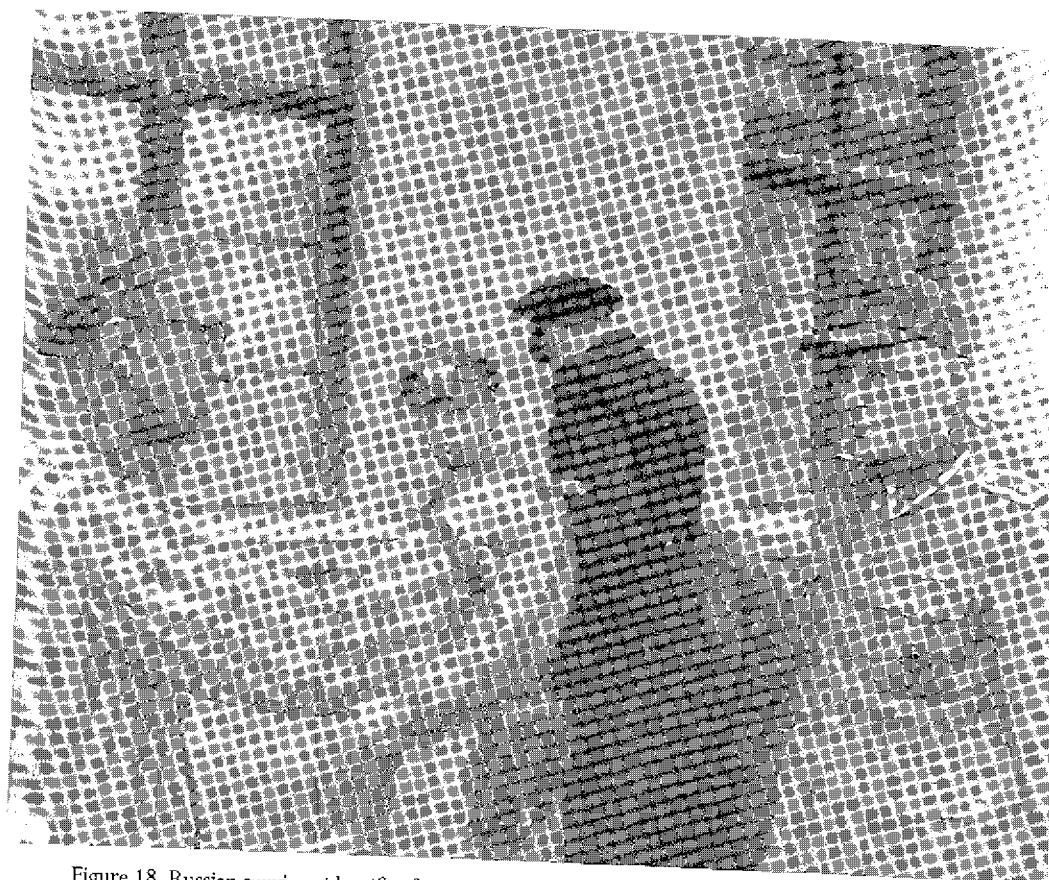


Figure 18. Russian survivor identifies former camp guard at Buchenwald, April 14, 1945, by NARA.

angry and cruel, almost maniacal. That perception was upheld in the captions that accompanied images of this type, as when the *Illustrated London News* labeled a group of perpetrators “The Female Fiends.”<sup>36</sup>

Often the shots depicted confrontations between groups—German civilians and victims or news editors and survivors. One image—which circulated under the caption “Slave Laborer Points Finger of Guilt”—depicted a survivor of an unidentified camp pointing at a German guard (fig. 18). The guard stood at the right-hand corner of the image, his contorted face twisting away from both the camera lens and the accusing, outstretched finger of the former prisoner. Although the prisoner was portrayed sideways to the camera, the photographer’s empathy with him was clear.<sup>37</sup> Behind the two figures stood other officials, one of whom was witnessing the confrontation.





Figure 19. Two survivors in Bergen-Belsen, April 30, 1945, courtesy of The Imperial War Museum, London.

Thus, in each case framing the depiction as an act of collective, not individual, contemplation reflected a need to collectively address and understand the atrocities. While the emphasis on collective representation may have worked against a recognition of the individual tragedies that lay underneath each photo, the emphasis on groups fit more effectively than did an individual focus on Eisenhower's aim to use the photos as persuasive tools for the war effort. Groups, more than individuals, let the war effort urgency. Understanding the scope and magnitude of atrocity, in this sense, was equally important to recognizing its individual cases.

**GAZE.** Yet a third compositional practice had to do with the gaze of those being depicted. The gaze of emaciated, near-dead survivors, whose eyes seemed not to comprehend the target of vision, tended to be frontal and appeared to signify frankness—though, as one British Army Film and Photographic Unit photographer of Belsen recalled, many of the same people were “incapable of coherent thought. . . . It was a very quiet, silent business. They sat about, very little movement. Some of them were too far



Figure 20. Corpses of mother and two children at Bergen-Belsen, April 17, 1945, courtesy of The Imperial War Museum, London.

gone to move.” The survivors were almost always represented in frontal gazes that stared directly at the camera or at a short distance behind the photographer. In a sense, atrocity survivors appeared to see without seeing. One such photo, which appeared in *PM*, depicted two young adult women in a close shot that echoed their hollowed cheekbones and vacant eyes (fig. 19). “Here’s How Nazis Treat Their Captives . . .,” read the caption to the photo, as it implored readers to look at the “faces of these women.”<sup>38</sup>

Other photos portrayed the unseeing eyes of the dead. One such photograph, which appeared after Belsen’s liberation in *PM* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, portrayed two children, a brother and sister whom readers



Figure 21. Corpse of mother at Bergen-Belsen, April 17, 1945, courtesy of The Imperial War Museum, London.

were told had died of starvation (fig. 20). The children were depicted lying on the ground, simply clothed and huddled together in death. The specter of the dead children was haunting: both faces were gaunt and drawn, and the eyes of one child were open. Yet lying next to them, bundled in a blanket at the left side of the photograph, was an equally powerful figure—that of the children's dead mother. Although she was not depicted clearly in this photo, she was shown in an accompanying image that was published only later in commemorative literature. There, the woman was depicted alone



Figure 22. Former women guards at Bergen-Belsen, April 1945, courtesy of The Imperial War Museum, London.

and without the blanket, where she was revealed to be nude and beautiful, her long, curly hair spread across her shoulders (fig. 21). The fact that the latter image did *not* make it into the press of the time suggests that it perhaps went against the patterned nature of the photos that did appear.<sup>39</sup>

German perpetrators generally were depicted in side views or three-quarter gazes, their eyes averted and narrowed (fig. 22). Often they were depicted looking sideways at a survivor or soldier, who nearly always stared either directly at them or toward the camera. One such widely circulated image was that of Belsen commander Josef Kramer. It portrayed him walking in Belsen, his mouth pursed and features tight, under a guard's watchful eye, who stared at him intently from the right-hand corner of the photograph. The same figures were portrayed from a greater distance in the *Daily Mail*, where Kramer was shown to be accompanied on his stroll not only by a soldier at his side but by another soldier prodding a rifle into his back.<sup>40</sup>

In composition, then, the published photos depicted a level of horror that went beyond one specific instance of brutality so as to present it as a

representative incident. The combination of corpses and witnesses in the photos facilitated both the display of a particular act of barbarism and its more general context of atrocity; the number of individuals depicted in atrocity photos facilitated an emphasis on the collectives involved in atrocity—either as victims, survivors, perpetrators, or witnesses; and the gaze of those associated with atrocity opened the photographic document to the act of bearing witness in different configurations for victims, survivors, and perpetrators. In each case, on the level of composition photographs offered more than just the referential depiction of one specific event, action, or camp. Compositional practices suggested a broader level of the story that went beyond the concrete target of photographic depiction.

*Practices of Presentation:  
Captions, Credits, and Presentational Layout*

A similar movement toward the broader atrocity story was achieved in presentation. Many atrocity photos lacked basic identifying attributes, and they were as patterned in the type of information they neglected to provide as in that which they provided. Captions gave little information about what was being depicted. Horrifying for the visual portrayal they offered about death and suffering, they generally omitted any definitive detail about the victims, about which camp had claimed their lives, or about the circumstances by which they died. Detail about the taking of the photograph itself was also often missing, about who had taken the photos, when, or where. In some cases, no name of photographer or photographic agency was given. Still other times, the images existed in questionable relationship with the texts they accompanied, or pictures were used as pieces of news in themselves, with little or no texts to explain what readers were seeing.

The image's referentiality was thus undermined even as the image's symbolic force was underscored. Images were used more to mark general discourse—about atrocity and war—and less as providers of definitive information about certain actions, camps, or victims.

**CAPTIONS.** Captions were an instrumental way of ensuring that photos invoked the broader atrocity story. Who wrote the captions was not made explicit, despite the fact that captions were typed on the back of nearly all photographs supplied by the U.S. Signal Corps and British Army Film and Photographic Unit. While the press sometimes marked a photo's caption with the phrase "according to caption accompanying this Signal Corps radio photo," more often than not captions were written by people far from the depicted scenes. That distance, rarely made explicit to audiences, generated numerous errors.<sup>41</sup>

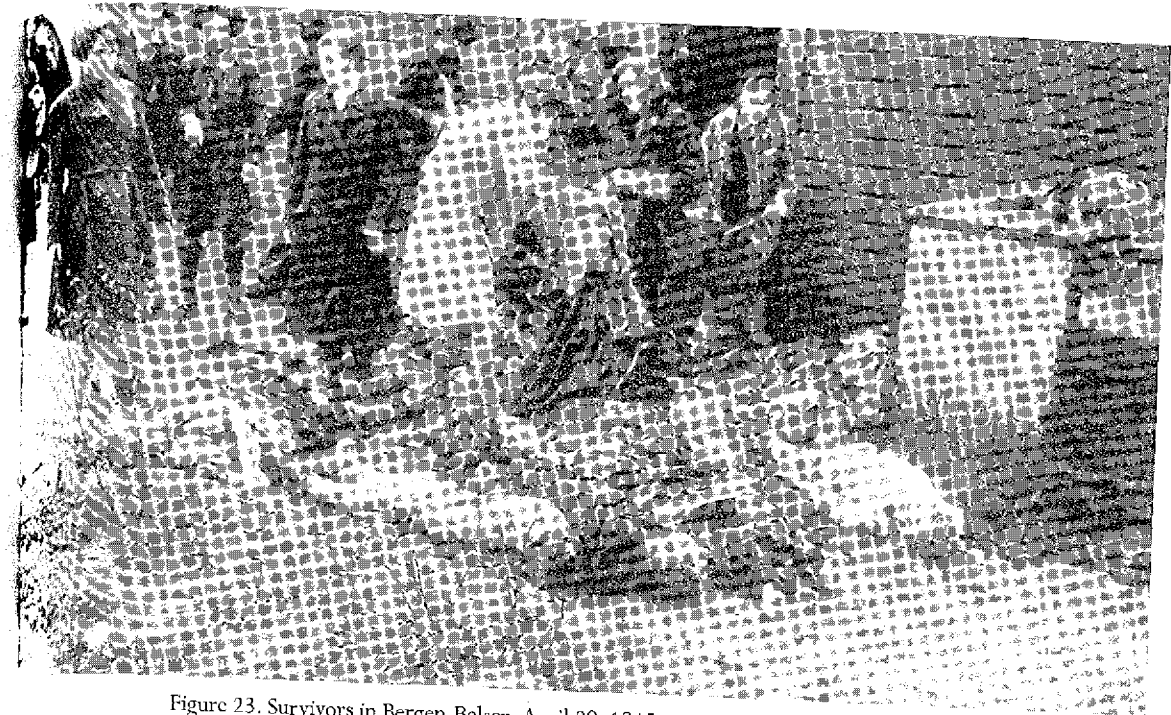


Figure 23. Survivors in Bergen-Belsen, April 29, 1945, courtesy of The Imperial War Museum, London.

For instance, readers were told that the same photo of a group of women hovering over dead bodies in Belsen depicted women either stripping the dead corpses of clothing for fuel, stripping them so as to wear the clothes, cleansing them of lice-infested apparel, or stripping them so as to burn the bodies (fig. 23). While all of the cited reasons might have been relevant, it is significant that already at the time of the photo's presentation, the press set in place differential frames for understanding the depicted activity. Various explanations also accompanied an image of an emaciated man who sat amid a pile of rags (fig. 24). In the photo, he appeared bent over the rags, his bones protruding from his body, and other survivors watched from the background. Though the *Sunday Express* explained that the man was "removing his filthy rags," elsewhere he was said to be "overhauling rags of dead prisoners" or picking lice off of his own clothes.<sup>42</sup>

Differences in explanation were problematic, because they set in place a faulty historical record. One aforementioned image of a U.S. Army major crouching behind a stack of lime-covered bodies appeared during the first days of Ohrdruf's liberation (see fig. 5, on p. 90). The same image was claimed, however, to have been taken in a number of camps, including



Figure 24. Survivor in Bergen-Belsen, April 1945, courtesy of The Imperial War Museum, London.

Ohrdruf, Buchenwald, Nordhausen, and the nearby town of Gotha. *Time* wrongly labeled the image as being at Buchenwald, one week after the same image was displayed by *Newsweek*, where it correctly identified the bodies as being at Ohrdruf. On the level of referentiality, the details in *Time*'s caption were simply wrong. Yet in convincing a skeptical world of the atrocities, it mattered little whether a stack of bodies was at Ohrdruf or Buchenwald. What mattered was that it had happened. The image thus functioned to provide proof of atrocity, even if the location of the atrocities was incorrect.<sup>43</sup>

In writing captions, the press adopted a tone that further stripped the

pictures of their referential power. One five-page article in *Time*, published in April 1945, brought together a number of vignettes about the camps, all of which were illustrated by generalized images—a commandant, a mass burial, a common grave, a charred body, human cordwood. One showed an innocuous portrait of Belsen commandant Josef Kramer, with a caption that read simply: “Commandant Kramer: He loved flowers.” The other five photographs displayed horrific death scenes—a mass burial at Nordhausen, a common grave at Belsen, a charred body at Erla, human cordwood at Buchenwald, and a starved prisoner at Belsen. The images alternated between representing the many and the few, and their captions were particularly instrumental in negotiating a leap from referential to symbolic representation.

Each of *Time*'s pictures was located in place via a set of parentheses. A picture of an open pit of bodies, accredited to both British Official Pictures and the Associated Press, bore the rather curious caption “Common Grave (Belsen).” Setting off the word *Belsen* in parentheses—and similarly framing the words *Nordhausen*, *Erla*, or *Buchenwald* in other captions—signaled to readers that the exact location of the atrocities was secondary, almost an afterthought. Where events took place was not only noninstrumental but possibly irrelevant to the image's more universal meaning. When the pictures were taken was not noted at all. Indeed, the captions seemed to suggest that the events depicted could have taken place anywhere in the Third Reich and anytime under its reign. Thus, instead of using captions to anchor the photographs in a precise time and place, the press employed them to mark the photos as symbols of atrocity.

The legends to many of the photographs further facilitated the use of the photos as symbols. One legend observed that the image of a mass burial was “as irrefutable as death.” Given that the photograph showed scores of dead bodies lined up in one long grave, readers were left to ponder precisely what was irrefutable about the image. In the text of the article, however, readers learned that the phrase referred to *reporters finding* “the evidence of the camps . . . as irrefutable as death.” Comments like these positioned photographs in an uneven balance with text, a balance that worked against the image's referentiality.<sup>44</sup>

**CREDITS.** Another way of turning images of the camps into symbols of a broader atrocity story was to provide them with few accrediting attributes. Readers often did not know who had taken the pictures they were viewing. At times, the photographic credit lines were presented elsewhere in the journal, as when the *New York Times* presented an image of Buchenwald's crowded bunks with little detail about where, how, or by whom it was

taken; readers who skimmed the newspaper learned only on another page that it had been taken by the Associated Press.<sup>45</sup>

The accreditation issue posed numerous problems for British and U.S. photographers. Often, the photographs were printed without credits at all. After the British forces entered Belsen, the *Daily Mail* printed a series of photographs, mostly of camp commandants, and accredited none of them. The *Illustrated London News* printed twenty-two images of the camps in its special supplement on the atrocities, but none of them was accredited. Even photos that are today renowned—such as Margaret Bourke-White's shot of bodies heaped across a wagon—were frequently included without attribution.<sup>46</sup>

When credits were presented, they were brief and tended to include only the name of the official military unit responsible for the image. Thus, the most frequent credit found alongside images of the camps was the phrase, "Photo by U.S. Signal Corps." Names of specific photographic agencies—such as Acme Pictures or Wide World Photos—appeared less frequently. And even less frequently appeared the names of specific photographers. It was only in later years that readers in both the United States and Britain learned which photographers had taken which atrocity photos. And to this day some remain unaccredited.

Most importantly, the press revealed a fundamentally different attitude toward the words and images it used. When *PM* presented a highly referenced and carefully attributed eyewitness report that discussed the Allied War Department's official report on Buchenwald, it did so alongside an unattributed, unaccredited photograph of three ravaged men (fig. 25). In this case the different degree of attribution accorded word and image was striking. The report constituted an indexically powerful narrative that presented verbatim passages from an official report on the camp, including details about camp routines, numbers of prisoners and victims, death counts, and torture procedures. But no attribution accompanied the photograph, no date described when it had been taken, and little identification of the depicted individuals was offered.<sup>47</sup>

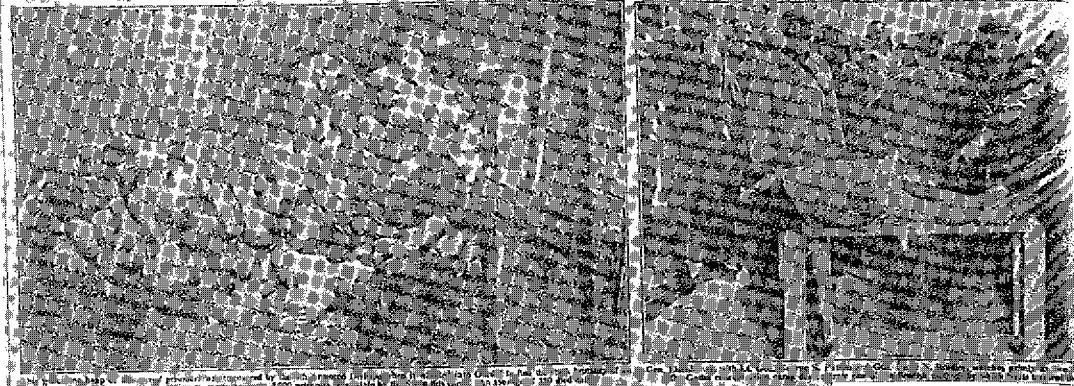
**LAYOUT.** Yet another way of cuing the broader atrocity story through images was via layout. In the press, photos often appeared in photographic spreads or so-called pictorial pages, a presentational format made familiar by the picture-magazine, with four to eight images separated from the verbal text. On April 26, for instance, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* included photographic shots of Buchenwald, Nordhausen, and other locales on its pictorial page.<sup>48</sup>

But because standards then in use for photographic images were inex-



Figure 25. Survivors in Buchenwald barracks, April 16, 1945, by NARA.

# This Was Nazi Germany—Blood, Starvation, the Stench of



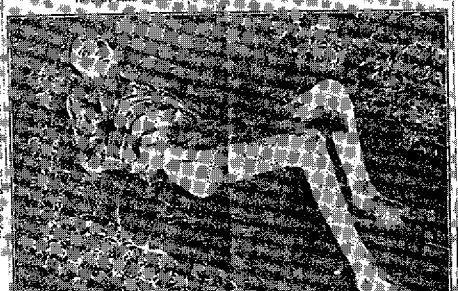
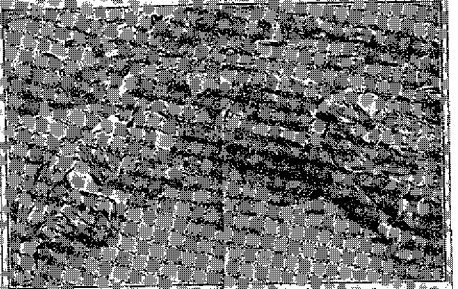
## Yanks Make Germans Dig Up Murdered Prisoners by Hand

By Wade J. Baker

GARDELEGEN, Germany, April 21 (AP)—American soldiers here in this area and in the surrounding area are digging up the bodies of German prisoners of war who were murdered by the Nazis. The bodies have been scattered in the woods and fields of the area.

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placit and undeveloped, the press positioned the atrocity photos unevenly. For instance, the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* regularly printed columns of photographs alongside eyewitness accounts of the camps; one such account described the camps of Gardelegen and Mulhausen, while the accompanying photos presented bodies massacred in Ohrdruf, Nordhausen, and Buchenwald (fig. 26). The images had no specific referential link to the verbal narratives that they were used to illustrate, other than to provide evidence of the same larger story of atrocity, and none of the photographs was dated or attributed to agency or photographer. Similarly, one *Time* column about Germany juxtaposed two photographs—one of three near-naked men under the caption “Buchenwald Survivors: Were They Germany’s Hope?” and the other of a German child under the caption “Children.” While the captions explained that the men were survivors and the children Germany’s future, the accompanying text told of an underground movement at the camp that had planned to build an antifascist Reich. Yet that text was nowhere recognizable in the by-then familiar image of broken, despairing bodies or the less familiar image of the plump, blond German toddler.<sup>49</sup>

This meant that even when the press did not provide precise details about the images it displayed, it was able to link them with the larger atrocity story. This broad interpretive effect of the images made them crucial for underscoring the act of bearing witness as the appropriate response to atrocity. Paradoxically, the usefulness of such images depended on their anonymity. The anonymity through which they made claim to authenticity in fact provided strong visual evidence of atrocity at a generalized level, but uneven documentation of the particular events they were brought in to depict.

One article in *Time* about Belsen illustrates this well. Opposing one picture with another, a small boxed item displayed two photographs: one, without attribution, showed a side view of an angry-looking blonde woman; the other, attributed to Acme Pictures, showed a crowd scene near a spiraling fire and billowing smoke. The caption under both pictures asked, “The End of Belsen?” and in the accompanying text, readers were told that

these pictures are from the Belsen concentration camp. At left is Hilde Lobauer, known to the prisoners she terrified as “the S.S. woman without a uniform.” At right is Belsen burning as the British wiped out the human abattoir by fire.

The descriptive text gave readers definitive information about what they saw—or did not see—in the photographs. Yet the discussion did not end

Figure 26. “This Was Nazi Germany,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 23, 1945. Reprinted courtesy of *The Stars and Stripes*.

with the images' description, for a second paragraph generalized the information just presented:

But more than fire was needed to destroy the causes that produced Belsen. For they lay deeper than any tendency to scientific brutality on the part of the German people. They lay in the political philosophy of totalitarianism, which is not the exclusive property of any people. If this was understood, the thousands of men and women who died in anonymous agony at Belsen would not have died completely in vain. Failure to understand this meant that they would have died for absolutely nothing, that the meaning of Belsen would be dissipated in moral revulsion and invective, that other Belsens could recur in history. The meaning of Belsen was the ultimate meaning of all totalitarianism.

The addition of this second paragraph was crucial, for it showed how *Time* transformed the particular images of Belsen and its commander into symbolic markers of a story about human suffering and totalitarianism. Belsen the concentration camp became representative of wartime atrocity.<sup>50</sup>

All of this suggests that by capitalizing on the symbolic dimensions of images, the press set in place a broader interpretive scheme for comprehending and explaining the atrocities. Playing to the symbolic dimensions of these images had an important effect on publics, not only because they may have been the most effective and least uncomfortable way to comprehend the tragedies of Nazi Europe, but also because they framed events in such a way that all who saw the photos could bear witness to the atrocities. Within that frame, the exact details of the atrocities mattered less than the response of bearing witness. For those inundated with a guilt that came from not having responded earlier, this was no small aim.

As with words, the act of bearing witness made the use of images instrumental for setting in place the atrocity record. But using photographs as symbolic markers of atrocity inverted journalistic modes of news presentation. Rather than provide more cues when the information was most unbelievable, less cues were provided when the information stretched belief. Here the more horrific the image, the less detailed the anchoring of the text that accompanied it. In this regard, images were particularly qualified to provide the message that made the act of bearing witness bearable. They also suited the circumstances for coverage that greeted the press in the camps.

Bearing witness thus justified an alternative use of images in news that relied as much on the photo's symbolic dimensions as on its contingent details. Even if reporters had been earlier remiss about recognizing what

was happening, bearing witness now enhanced the authority of the image and by extension the press's authority on this specific story. While the photo's muted referentiality may have been typical of most war photos, it had particularly great effect here, for the symbolic nature of photos was well suited to explaining Nazi atrocity in memory.

It is worth noting that this happened in contradiction to what the press expected of photography, for a link between the photo's referential and symbolic dimensions had not been anticipated. Not surprisingly, photographers still faced ambivalence from journalists, despite their valued work in the camps. There was virtually no mention in the press about the photographers who shot scenes of the camps, suggesting that the sense of shared responsibility went far enough to include the photographs as documents but not to include photographers. In fact, when the *Illustrated London News* presented pages of photographic images from Belsen, they were likened to a "Doré drawing of Dante's Inferno" (emphasis added). This suggested that the journal's editorial board was still not convinced that photos had done their job of convincing readers of the atrocities. Its solution was to print a series of drawings one week later that depicted many of the camp scenes already shown in photographs, though in the later drawings their details were made less reprehensible. Such ambivalence, which linked to a muted recognition of the value of photographic documents in news, penetrated the core of the record of atrocity.<sup>51</sup>

#### PICTURE-MAGAZINES AND LIBERATORS

The display of the atrocity photos in the U.S. and British press was enhanced by two additional parties interested in photographing the camps—the picture-magazines and the liberators. Each extended photography's role in bearing witness to the atrocities.

By virtue of the centrality that the picture-magazines accorded images in general, it is no surprise that picture-magazines on both continents, particularly *Life*, *Look*, and *Picture Post*, played an important role in bringing the atrocity photos home. But their role was secondary to that of newspapers, magazines, and journals, which had already printed most of the photos by the time that they appeared in the picture-magazines. The picture-magazine's main effect was thereby one of repetition more than information. Via its favored presentational format—the depiction of many collected images as parts of a larger picture-story—the picture-magazines bolstered the effect already created by the daily and weekly press, offering more of what had already been presented.

Each picture-magazine published its own photographic spread on the atrocities during the first week of May 1945. The spreads in both the *Pic-*



Figure 27. "The Problem That Makes All Europe Wonder," *Picture Post*, May 5, 1945, by *Picture Post*/Tony Stone Images.

ture *Post* and *Life* capably wove the horror into picture-essays that were more effective for the combined visual presentation of many images than for the novelty or informative value of any individual picture.

Under the title "The Problem That Makes All Europe Wonder," the *Picture Post* offered a six-page spread of atrocity photos. The first page juxtaposed two images—one of two emaciated, dazed survivors with an image of a plump, well-dressed German woman hugging a blond child (fig. 27). The two sets of figures stared full-faced into the camera's lens, and the captions extended the visual difference between them into verbal cues: one read "Inside the Wire," while the other proclaimed "And Outside." Other images portrayed close-ups of ravaged victims and depictions of a camp roll call, or smaller pictures of drained anonymous faces under a collective caption "These Were Inmates of Prison Camps Set Free in the Allied Advance: For Many We Came Too Late." None of the pictures bore the names of individuals, names of camps, or photographic credits. The photographs were documents of collective authorship, sealed in the anonymity of the photographer and his or her object. Yet another picture in the same article portrayed two men from Nordhausen sitting on a flight of steps staring into the camera. In proclaiming the image to be "The Face, Not of Men, but of Famine," the caption disembodied the image, disconnecting the faces from the men who owned them and rendering them instead symbols of famine.

The spread concluded with a picture that the picture-magazine predicted would be "a picture on which future generations will pass judgment." The picture, which had appeared already ten days earlier in *Stars and Stripes*, showed two dead children, lying at the bottom of a ditch. Their mouths were open, their arms spread-eagled across the dirt on which they rested (fig. 28). A soldier stood at the upper-left-hand corner of the image, looking into the ditch and passing his own judgment. The subhead read, "The Dead Children of Nordhausen Camp." While the subhead offered some degree of explanation for the image, the accompanying text offered little:

It is not enough to be mad with rage. It is no help to shout about "exterminating" Germany. Only one thing helps: the attempt to understand how men have sunk so far, and the firm resolve to face the trouble, the inconvenience and cost of seeing no nation gets the chance to befall the world like this again.<sup>52</sup>

The image, in this context, was taken as a cautionary note about the excesses of Nazism. As with the images in the press, the dead children of Nordhausen were invoked as general markers of a discourse about atrocity.

*Picture Post* ran a second pictorial spread in June, when photographers



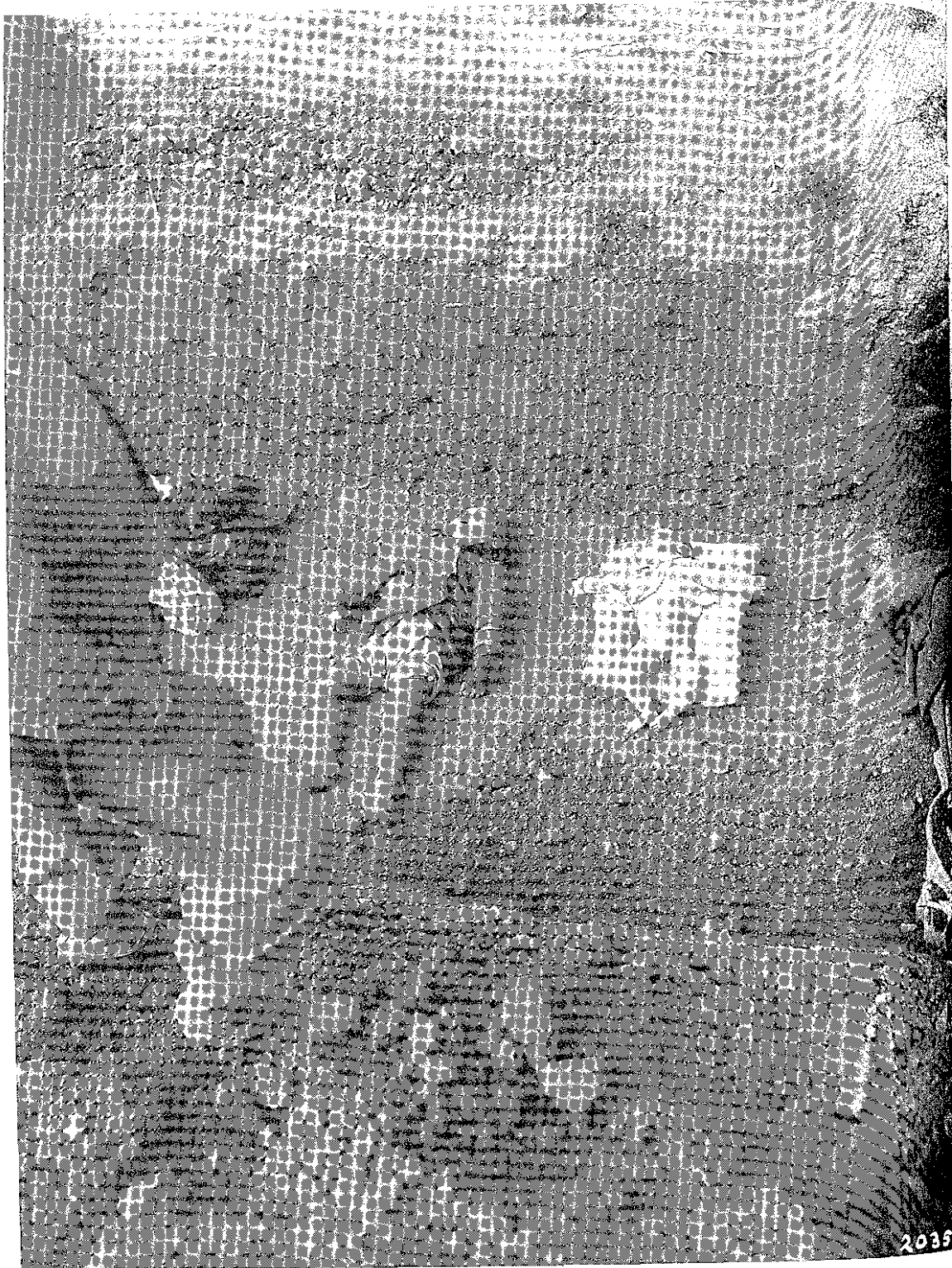


Figure 28. Dead children at Nordhausen, April 1945, by NARA.

depicted German civilians exhuming atrocity victims and digging new graves. Eight pictures, documenting the civilians' forced exhumation of dead prisoners, again raised questions about the symbolic currency of images. While the narrative discussed the wisdom and viability of blaming all of Germany for the Nazi deeds, the pictures wove a theme that was by now familiar—voiceless, nameless, unauthored documents attesting to the atrocities. The final picture, captioned “The Silent Witness at Whose Suffering the Earth Has Cried Out Aloud,” showed a shrouded, faceless body in a newly dug grave. As a concluding statement, the photograph remained devoid of the physical, geographic, and spatial details that facilitated its placement in real life. Rather, its symbolic aura made it almost better suited to a placement in collective memory.<sup>53</sup>

*Life* published its photographic spread on the atrocities the same week as *Picture Post*. As had been its custom surrounding other controversial photos, the picture-magazine shared its justification for why it had elected to publish the images:

Last week Americans could no longer doubt stories of Nazi cruelty. For the first time there was irrefutable evidence as the advancing Allied armies captured camps. . . . With the armies in Germany were four *Life* photographers whose pictures are presented on these pages. The things they show are horrible. They are printed for the reason stated seven years ago when, in publishing early pictures of war's death and destruction in Spain and China, *Life* stated, “Dead men have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them.”<sup>54</sup>

*Life's* defensive posture hinted that audiences were not yet consensual about the need to regard the atrocity photos.

*Life* titled its photographic spread simply “Atrocities.” Atop five pages of graphic photos, the magazine began by declaring that the “capture of the German concentration camps piles up evidence of barbarism that reaches the low point of human degradation.” The images depicted a range of Nazi-inflicted horrors, each presented as a generic category of horror, including dazed prisoners at Buchenwald, dying women at Belsen, and burning bodies at Gardelegen. Most of the pictures had appeared already in the daily press.

The spread ended with three full-page, midrange shots, each of which focused on the ravages of war. One, which had appeared previously in the British and U.S. press, depicted bodies lying in the courtyard of Nordhausen (see fig. 8, on p. 99). The second showed a mass of burned bodies at Gardelegen. In both shots, U.S. soldiers walked among the bodies, signifying life rising from the masses of death and decay. The final photograph of

the series provided the only midview shot of an individual—a German guard, portrayed with his bowed head angled away from the camera. Readers were told that he was “knee-deep in decaying flesh and bones, [hauling] bodies into place in the Belsen mass grave.” Presenting the German guard in mid-distance and using his photograph to conclude the series left a clear message about the irrevocable end of Nazism.<sup>55</sup>

In both *Picture Post* and *Life*, the verbal detail that accompanied the images was sparse. Captions told of unnamed prisoners staring from their bunks or leaning against them. Only sometimes did they inform readers which camp was being depicted. The captions relayed little more than what was made most obvious by the camera. Few images were accredited. This lack of verbal detail, however, mattered little in terms of the broader atrocity story. What was thus initially set in place in the press was bolstered by the picture-magazines.

In using many of the shots already presented in the daily press, the picture-magazines were instrumental in recycling a certain visualization of atrocity. This was central to consolidating the importance of photography, even if picture-magazines played a secondary role. The combined presentation of many familiar images renewed their power. Impact, then, had as much to do with the repeated presentation of certain photographs as with the informative news value of any one image.

If picture-magazines provided one contrast to the photos being printed in the press, images taken by the liberators—that is, amateur photographers—provided another. Members of the liberating forces went in and out of the camps rapidly. Many stopped to take quick snapshots with their private cameras. Photographs constituted a way of extending their fleeting experience in the camps beyond the brief times they spent there. As one soldier recalled, “sometimes we would go in the afternoons and by early morning we had cleared the area and gone on.”<sup>56</sup>

Although chaplains, foot soldiers, and individuals in other military roles documented what they were seeing, sometimes their shots were blurred and unclear. The photographs he had taken at one camp, recalled an American GI, were “dim, for I was not a photographer.” Other times they were eerily similar to the shots taken by professional photographers. For instance, familiar shots of boxcars of dead bodies outside Dachau, pits of bodies in Belsen, and stacks of bodies in Buchenwald were reproduced by soldiers. The images differed only minimally, such as the addition of a soldier in one corner of the picture. Sometimes the amateur photos were printed in the press, though usually at some delay.<sup>57</sup>

The liberators’ photos were important because as amateur documentation they helped secure public belief about what was happening and con-

solidated the need to bear witness. In fact, belief in the photographs was enhanced when soldiers, not professional photographers, took the images: the public appreciated the amateur shots “in which there could be no doctoring of scenes and no faking of film.” But the mission of amateurs in snapping shots of the camps was largely personal, motivated by a desire to record the scenes for posterity. “What I took was there,” offered one soldier. “It was fact.” Photographs were taken by persons on active military duty in German-occupied territory, were retrieved from dead or captured German soldiers, and were taken by company commanders, who later made duplicates for members of their units. Concern for the pictures reflected a desire to record the scenes for history. As one soldier later put it, “we weren’t taking pictures of each other. We were taking pictures of conditions.”<sup>58</sup>

The soldiers’ pictures were both proof of the horrors and testament to the liberators’ presence in the camps. Shots ranging from “skeletons still in the incinerator” to “a pile of bodies still outside” provided depiction of both the atrocities and of soldiers having witnessed them. One chaplain, who photographed the charred bodies still on a pile of wood outside one camp, later said that he “took pictures to make it clear to people at home that the account of German oppression and murder in concentration and labor camps is all too true.” The son of General Eisenhower—Lt. John Eisenhower—took a portable camera into Buchenwald. Seeing a group of survivors kicking the dead body of a German guard, he “snapped a couple of pictures and turned to leave with a mumbled word of thanks. The survivors closed back in and resumed kicking the corpses.” Former liberator Paul Gumz took a photo of corpses spilling out of one of the train cars at Dachau, with GIs standing in the midspace of the photograph, staring at the bodies (fig. 29). The shot’s version of the act of bearing witness also captured the extraordinary length of the train—and hence multiplied the scenes of horror its individual cars contained.<sup>59</sup>

Other shots taken at Buchenwald reproduced the same midview of stacks of corpses that had circulated in the U.S. and British press. One amateur shot differed only with the addition of a soldier in one corner, who stared back at the photographer rather than at the bodies (figs. 30 and 31). On the back of the shot, the liberator had written the following:

If you starve them, when they die you have less to burn, and the more you burn the more healthy your workmen by replacement. This is just another pile of dead people, America. The Nazis have many more at this place—This is typical on a small scale—Burn!—6,000 one day Jew!—Burn—Dead men.<sup>60</sup>

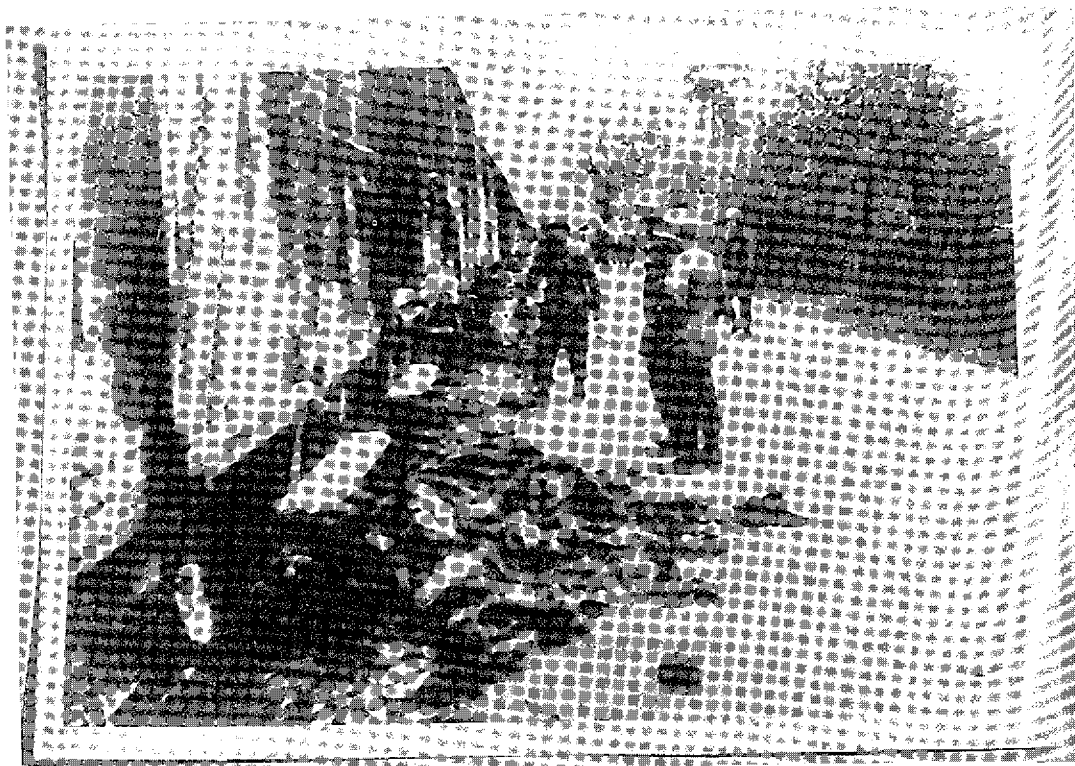
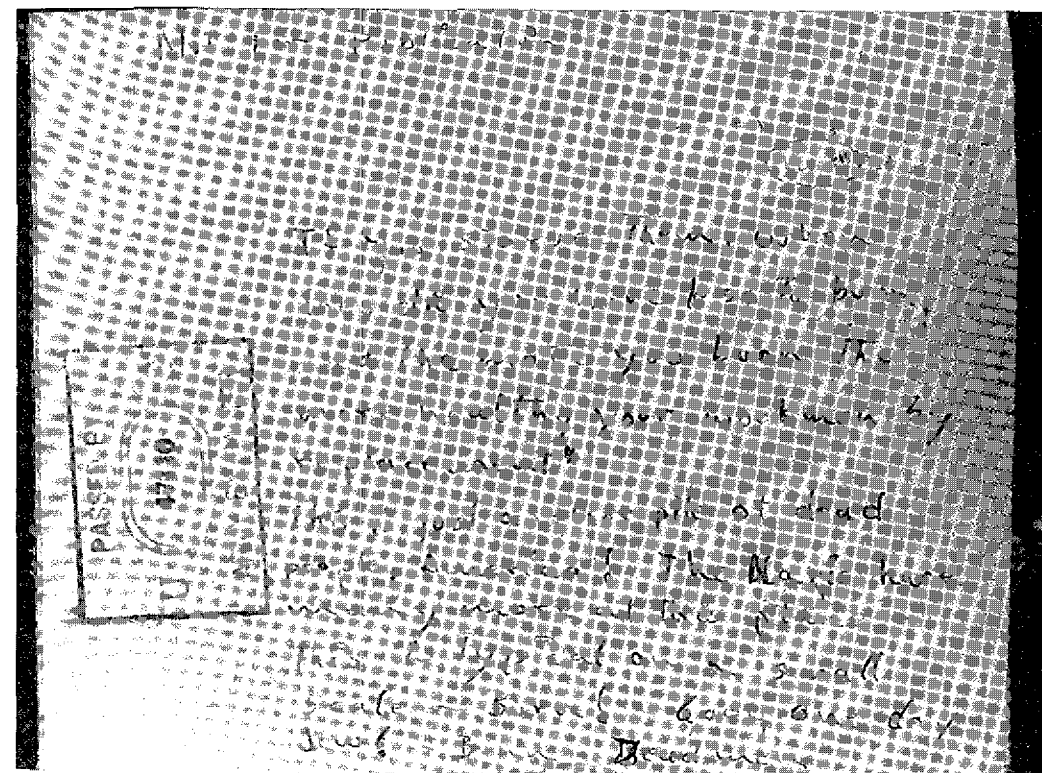
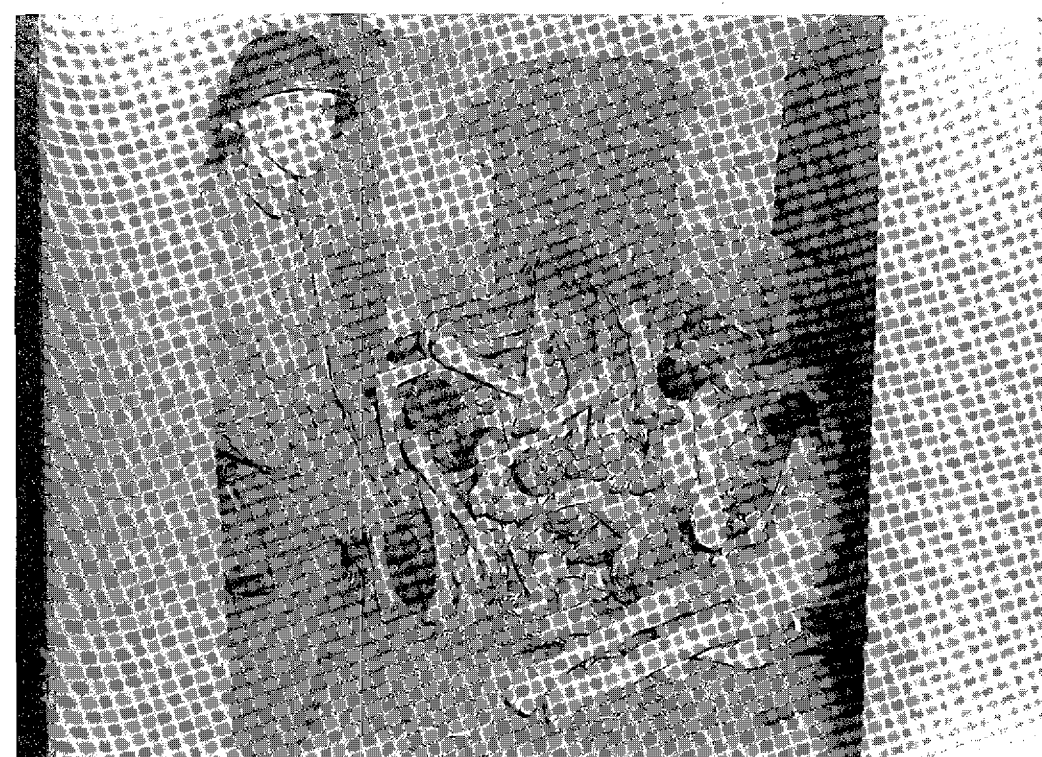


Figure 29. Paul Gumz Collection, courtesy of The Witness to the Holocaust Project, Emory University.

Both the similarities and differences between the amateur and professional images highlighted how little professional training was needed visually to capture the atrocities. And by implication, the minimal differences somewhat neutralized the role of professional photography in documenting the camps.

In sum, bearing witness through the camera neutralized tensions across different kinds of photographers. The presence of amateur photographers in the camps and the similarity of many of their shots to those taken by semiprofessionals and professionals also minimized the claims of professionals over amateurs. In a sense, the act of bearing witness made a community out of all those who witnessed the atrocities, regardless of their reasons for being there. And the confirmation of what had already been covered became far more important than the coverage itself.



Figures 30 and 31. Dennis Wile Collection, courtesy of The Witness to the Holocaust Project, Emory University.

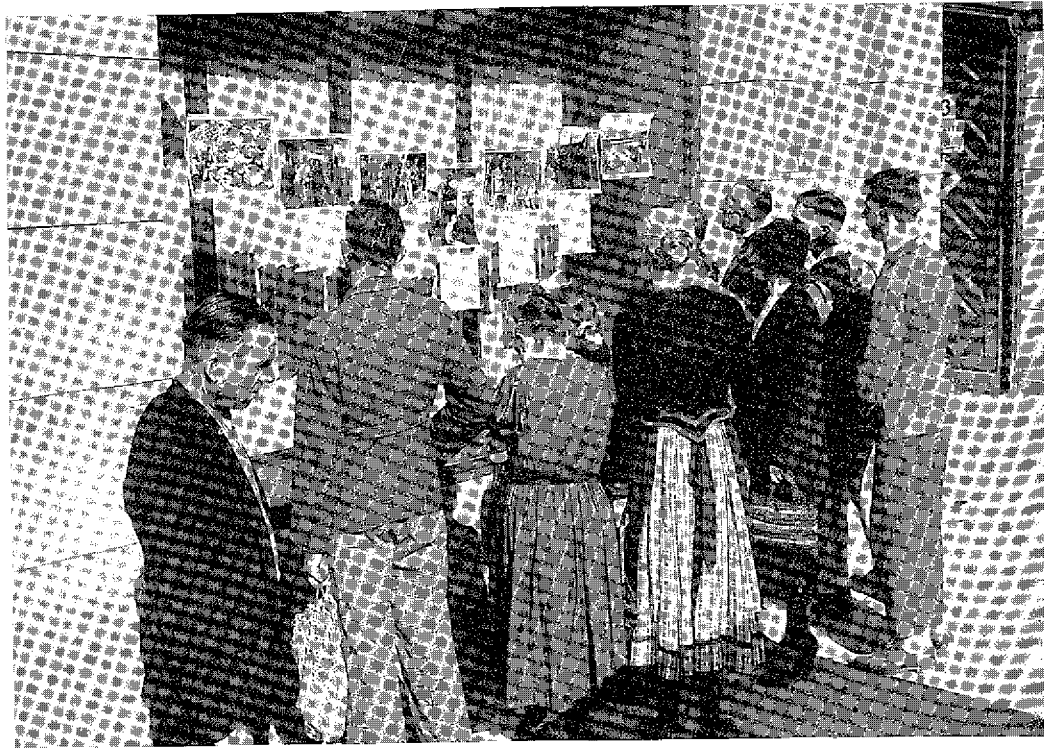


Figure 32. Civilians looking at pictures, April–May 1945, by NARA.

#### THE TRIUMPH OF IMAGES

The atrocity photos' emergence as a viable mode of documenting the camps did not go unnoticed by members of the press. In both Britain and the United States, the public discussed the use of images to authenticate what reporters were seeing: the "flood of news-pictures have set Europe and the world asking one question: How is it possible. . . ."61

Perhaps the most tangible hint of photography's centrality in delineating the horror of atrocity came with one final wave of representations that depicted the act of looking at the photographs themselves. The so-called denazification campaign required the display of photographs and films to the German population. As the *New York Times* told it, "every German will view the picture of unhumanities practiced on the prisoners at the Buchenwald, Belsen and other Nazi torture camps."<sup>62</sup>

In keeping with that campaign, pictures began to appear that depicted people viewing atrocity photos. Soldiers, civilians, and POWs were all portrayed as witnesses to the photos. These photos were significant, for



Figure 33. Civilians looking at pictures, April–May 1945, courtesy of The Imperial War Museum, London.

they showed numerous additional collectives in the act of bearing witness to photographic documentation. The collectives, like those earlier shots that portrayed groups viewing bodies, now focused on viewing photos. These latter collectives tended to be in a uniform pose that was physically angled toward the evidence of atrocity, in this case, the photos (fig. 32). One such image, displayed in the *New York Times* in June 1945, showed a group of civilians looking at a photographic display. Their backs were to the camera, which focused on them scrutinizing atrocity photos, themselves made clear by the camera's lens. The caption and legend read, "Inside Conquered Germany—civilians examine a photographic display of atrocities committed at a concentration camp." The *Daily Mirror* claimed that photographs were a way of "holding the mirror up to the Huns," and it presented a shot of its own middle pages being displayed to Germans living nearby (fig. 33). Here too, the backs of civilians were captured by the camera, with the atrocity pictures clearly within its frame. Though some jour-

nalists and photographers questioned the ease in censorship implied by these officially sanctioned displays of atrocity, the press nonetheless continued to print the photos, prolonging the act of bearing witness beyond its value as a part of news discourse. Thus, photos were set up as a document not only for news but for history too.<sup>63</sup>

In fact, the broader potency of the news photo was strengthened by the response to the atrocity photos. One military newspaper admitted that there "has been no picture story since the invention of photography to match the impact of the layouts now being run on the Nazi atrocities." Soldiers everywhere, it said, know "that within the limits of the printed word and the engraver's art a serious effort is being made to bring home to decent humans the truth of what they found" and that "even the most staid of newspapers are carrying full pages of the brutally grim pictures which came out of the camps."<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to the grounded narratives about the camps, the image-making apparatus in all of its forms thus helped turn collective disbelief into the shock and horror of recognition. Photographic evidence meant that the atrocities of the camps "could not be denied. . . . Buchenwald, Belsen, Dachau—their images were etched in memory forever." Citing "distance, suspicion, what you will," the London-based *World's Press News* said that "something held back full appreciation on the part of the British and American peoples. But these pictures . . ." One newspaper opined that photographic displays of the camps were "revolting and distasteful, but they bring home to a civilized world . . . the cold truth. . . . If anyone ever doubted the animal viciousness of the Nazi mind, he can no longer deny [it]."<sup>65</sup>

More than other types of documentation, photographs offered the certainty needed to appraise the mounting evidence of German atrocities. And both the U.S. and British press were careful to point out the historical role such photographic documentation would play, warning readers of the "photographic evidence of the sadistic brutalities practiced by the Germans. . . . These revelations of coldly calculated massacre and torture are given as a record for all time of German crimes." Even the *Christian Century*, which had stubbornly disbelieved for a longer time than most other journals, admitted that "it will be a long time before our eyes cease to see those pictures of naked corpses piled like firewood or of those mounds of carrion flesh and bones." At least for that journal, "looking at the pictures" became a marker of the experience of Nazism. It was thus no surprise that a full 81 percent of the British population believed the atrocity stories in April 1945, up from a mere 37 percent six months earlier.<sup>66</sup>

Photographs were presented across the Allied front with an authority that underscored their role in muting public skepticism. The black-and-

white photos made everyone into a witness, "even those who had remained safely at home far from the stench of the camps." The press seemed to recognize that images had shown themselves capable of conveying the very horror that had incapacitated words. Such was the reigning assumption of the time—that the photograph had helped freeze the camps within a space of undeniability.<sup>67</sup>

Photography's triumph also had to do with the fact that it helped facilitate the act of bearing witness to the atrocities. Unlike words, which concentrated on the details of liberation, images guided publics in both nations to the heart of a story about Nazi atrocity, directing them to the preferred meaning by the fastest route. They offered a vehicle for seeing evidence of Nazi brutality at the same time as they eased the shock of that evidence by broadening its presentation. In this way not only did images uphold military and political aims of "letting the world see," as Eisenhower had mandated, but they did so in a way that bypassed the details of the story of Nazi brutality. In catering to the linkage between the photograph's referential and symbolic dimensions, the press thereby helped focus world attention on the immediate need for a broad political and military response to Nazism.

In representing atrocity in this fashion, photographs challenged traditional journalistic modes of representation and enhanced an alternative aim—that of bearing witness. The more horrific the image, the less detailed the image's anchoring needed to be. In many cases, the images were so devoid of identifiable detail that it was difficult to anchor them in a given physical or geographic place. Yet the broader the story they were used to invoke, the more effective carriers of the collective memory they would be. The transformation of atrocity photos from definitive indices of certain actions to symbolic markers of the atrocity story had to do with a general and urgent need to make sense of what had happened. When images were particularly graphic, the press needed less to explain them and more to link them with broader interpretive themes that lent meaning to the depictions. Images were thus a more effective means of bearing witness than words. Turning verbal chronicles of liberation into a visual story of atrocity directly affected the shape of the recollection that resulted.

No less important, the use of pictures to depict atrocity constituted a turning point in the history of the popular press. While bearing witness took journalism beyond itself by requiring an alternative mode of journalistic practice—one that emphasized cooperation over professional prowess and competition—the reliance on photographs to do so made images the main event of the camps' coverage. Representations of atrocity that were more explicit and unrequited than in previous wars, the lifting of censor-

ship restrictions concerning the coverage of ongoing events of the war, and the upset of professional expectations about how news photography was thought to function were all evidence of such a turning point. While side-stepping journalists' ambivalence about photographs and inverting their long-standing assumption that images functioned most effectively as referential tools, images emerged as a more powerful tool than words for documenting Nazi atrocity. It was no surprise that photography's triumph would permeate the heart of the atrocity story as it was recycled into collective memory.