

For its front-page photo on May 8, 1945 – the day of Nazi Germany’s surrender – The Globe chose this portrait of Wilfred Nottelman, writing that ‘his features lend themselves best to the concept of a characteristic Canadian soldier.’ But the editors’ methods for getting the photo, and the way they framed it in print, likely wouldn’t pass journalistic muster today. Learn more below about why. ROSEBOROUGH & RICE/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

This is an excerpt from [A Nation’s Paper: The Globe and Mail in the Life of Canada](#), a collection of history essays from Globe writers past and present, coming this fall from Signal/McClelland & Stewart.

At first light on March 23, 1988, Globe and Mail foreign correspondent Paul Koring stepped off a helicopter outside Halabja, Iraq, and into the scene of a nightmare. Once home to 60,000 people, the city was now silent but for the artillery fire echoing from a valley a kilometre away. The buildings were battered by gunfire and bombs. At every corner, Koring saw death, the result of a gas attack ordered five days earlier by then-president Saddam Hussein against his own people after Kurdish rebels seized the city. The bloated bodies of women, children and elderly citizens lay on the ground, as if they had fallen where they stood. A crowd of corpses rested in the dirt by a stone wall. An old man slumped in a doorway, half-embracing a baby.

The trip had been rushed. A dozen or so journalists piled into two helicopters flown from Tehran and were left to wander the streets of Halabja. Koring, working as both writer and photographer, had half a roll of film in his Pentax Spotmatic camera – 18 exposures to record evidence of a war crime for Canadians back home. “I could have taken 2,000 pictures,” he says, “and not duplicated a body.”

He snapped pictures carefully and tried not to dwell on the fact that their ride had flown off, with no guarantee of returning. By the time the helicopters came back, it was nearly dark and Koring, his film spent, was hiding in a ditch with several other journalists and a dying goat.

He had his story. But taking the pictures was one challenge. Getting them in the paper was another.

Over many decades, the decisions around what photos run in The Globe have been influenced by technology, changing cultural values, editorial responsibility and, of course, the always looming deadline. Especially for crime and conflict photography, the line between what editors decide a reader needs to see and what not to show them has shifted back and forth. What might be cropped in 1948 could have run columns wide on the front page in 1975 and perhaps not at all in 2023. Images merit careful consideration: Someone opening The Globe at the breakfast table could stop at the headline. But the most powerful photos cannot be unseen.



A dead man and child were among many horrific sights that The Globe's Paul Koring captured in Halabja in 1988, when journalists were brought from Tehran to see the aftermath of an Iraqi chemical attack. He met burned survivors and an elder who showed him an unexploded bomb. The worst images never made it to print, Koring says.
PAUL KORING/THE GLOBE AND MAIL



In the years before Photoshop and deepfakes turned us all into visual skeptics, photos were seen as objective reality. A writer could make stuff up, but a newspaper photographer captured what was truly there, or so many people thought.

Of course, as The Globe's historical preponderance of photos of middle-aged white men clearly shows, pictures are just as good as words at embellishing certain people and communities and disappearing others.

A newspaper reader never sees the photo not taken. They see the image that a journalist in a war zone snaps before his handlers arrive or his film runs out. The ones an editor decides readers can digest over breakfast at the kitchen table. The photo that's picked from a finite pile, burned in a darkroom, cropped on a light table, debated in a newsroom, defined by a headline, described by a cutline.

The war photographer who has to count exposures and wait for a darkroom will never capture the same scene as a peer who can catch a dozen frames per second and see them instantly on a screen. A white male photographer will not approach subjects with the same perspective as a female or Indigenous or Black colleague. Different editors will make different judgment calls. Readers will experience the image differently.

"Photography is the product of humans, not machines," says Thierry Gervais, a professor at the School of Image Arts at Toronto Metropolitan University. "It can only be historically anchored."



The Globe's first staff photographer was John H. Boyd, shown at left on assignment with reporter Bruce West. Compact, foldable cameras like this one were an innovation of the early 20th century that made it easier for journalists to capture news events in the field.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

In the early 20th century, as art historians Sarah Bassnett and Sarah Parsons write in their 2023 book *Photography in Canada: 1839-1989*, pictures influenced how Canadians understood the country and the world.

An illustrated insert in a 1910 *Saturday Globe*, headlined “Types of New Canadians,” showed immigrants at work and school, in keeping with the paper’s economic leanings, Bassnett says. “The *Globe* was trying to convince its readers that a kind of benevolence towards new immigrants was their responsibility,” she says. “That’s what’s so fascinating about photographs. They’re emotional and persuasive, and yet there’s this sense that they’re real.”

The images that began to fill the pages of *The Globe* focused on industry and politics – men in suits shaking hands in Parliament or on the steps of newly opened factories. The *Globe* hired its first full-time photographer, John H. Boyd, in 1922, but many of the paper’s pictures were little more than glowing advertisements provided by companies themselves.



The *Globe* has long relied on wire photographers and freelancers for foreign coverage, including during the Second World War. This likely explains the choice of photo that ran above the fold on the front page on May 8, 1945, the morning of Germany’s official surrender. “This is Victory,” the headline trumpets. In the photo, an unidentified Canadian soldier holds his helmet over his heart, his eyes looking off in the distance, his face and hands smeared with dirt as if he’d crawled out of a trench on the front lines.

Only inside, on page 3, does the reader learn that the man in the picture is Wilfred Nottelman, a soldier recently returned from overseas, who was found at the local YMCA and posed over a two hour-photo session at a Toronto studio down the street from The Globe newsroom. The brief paragraph offers no details of his service or background, no quotes from the subject himself.

He was chosen, the blurb explains, because “his features lend themselves best to the concept of a characteristic Canadian soldier.” The front page has long hung in a frame in the Toronto newsroom. For Globe photo editors, it is a classic reminder of what never to do.

Deadlines and resources put a soldier in a studio in 1945; three years later, editors were prepared to crop the truth out of a Globe photo to protect readers’ sensibilities. While interrupting a break-in at the Toronto Florist Co-operative, police fatally shot the robber, William Poole. The Globe’s photographer arrived at the crime scene in time to capture the full story. But what readers saw in the paper was the black safe and an overturned bottle in a warehouse room. The photo was cropped in half and airbrushed, erasing the sprawled and bleeding body of the burglar.



When Toronto police shot and killed William Poole in 1948, The Globe cropped out the bottom half of this photo to avoid showing readers the corpse. THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Roger Hargreaves, curator at the Archive of Modern Conflict, oversaw Cutline, a 2016 exhibit taken from 20,000 Globe archive photographs donated to the National Gallery of Canada. Compared with the artful photo alterations of other

publications, which might actually paint a face to change the expression, Hargreaves says that Globe editors in the 1940s to 1960s were “very restrained” in their edits. “They might enhance an eyebrow, but they wouldn’t raise an eyebrow to change the expression.”

They were, however, still far more liberal with cuts and cropping than the modern photo desk would permit. Moe Doiron, a former Globe photo editor, remembers going through the newspaper’s photo archives from the 1950s and sixties and finding prints where people had been cut out with scissors or two photos that had been glued together to make a single image. “We found many more fake pictures before there were computers,” Doiron says. Now, rules prohibiting that kind of image doctoring is “built into our Code of Conduct.”

Having the near-unlimited ability to alter pictures afforded by modern technology led professional photographers and newsrooms to set clear guidelines. At The Globe, photos must not be digitally altered beyond minor corrections, such as removing dust or scratches, and photo illustrations must be clearly labelled for the reader.

Even using respected wire sources, a photo editor needs to be careful. Doiron describes a picture that went viral online that appeared to show Prime Minister Justin Trudeau rejecting a handshake from then-president Donald Trump during a visit to Washington.

“That just didn’t happen,” Doiron says. He compared pictures to the scene broadcast on TV. “It was just one second of one person being quicker to put their hand out than the other.”



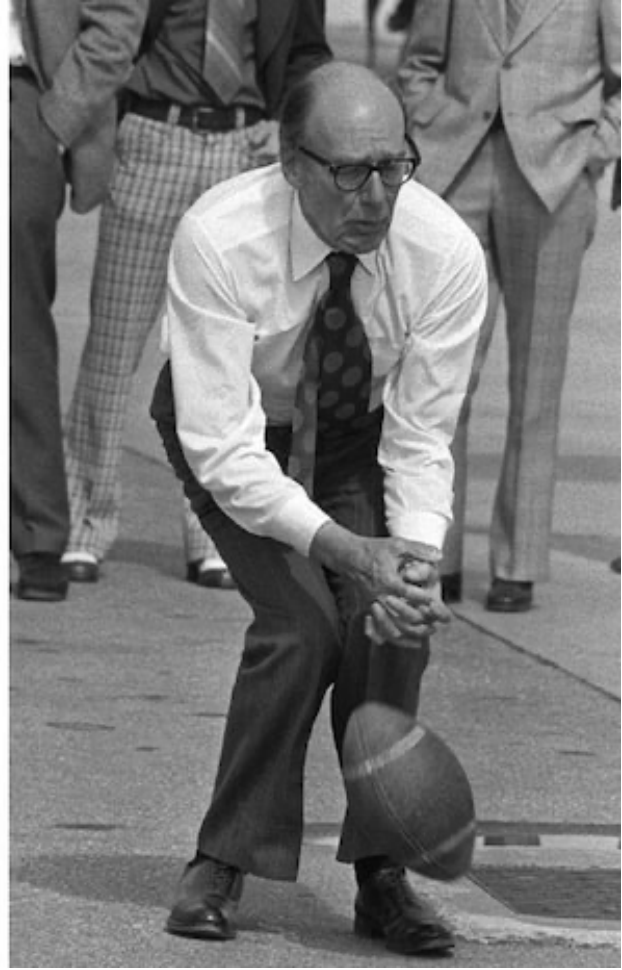
Donald Trump extends his hand to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the White House in 2017. Some commentators incorrectly stated that Trudeau refused to shake Trump's hand, but Trudeau reached out his hand a moment later. POOL/GETTY IMAGES



Pierre Trudeau pirouettes in Buckingham Palace in 1977, in what seems to be an act of lèse-majesté when the Queen's back is turned – but years later the photographer said it was Princess Margaret in the photo, not the Queen. DOUG BALL/THE CANADIAN PRESS

History is full of famous pictures that captured a single moment and became the story. For years, an infamous photo of then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau performing a cheeky pirouette at Buckingham Palace in 1977 was said to show the Queen walking away, bolstering its symbolism as a rejection of royal deference. Yet, as Canadian Press photographer Doug Ball later confirmed, the photograph actually showed Princess Margaret walking away.

Three years earlier, Ball snapped an iconic image that is often said to have altered history after it was published in *The Globe* – an action shot of Progressive Conservative leader Robert Stanfield fumbling a football. Ball explains he had taken a roll of 36 frames, including the candidate catching and throwing the ball with staff during a campaign stop in North Bay, Ont. A photo editor picked the fumble for the front page. The next day, Ball says, veteran political reporter Charles Lynch sat down in front of him on the Conservative bus and announced, “Trudeau just won the election.” The picture was not the sole explanation, but Lynch was right about his election call.



Progressive Conservative leader Robert Stanfield makes one successful and one unsuccessful catch at a campaign stop in North Bay, Ont., in 1974. The Globe published the fumble on its front-page. DOUG BALL/THE CANADIAN PRESS

It's hard to imagine the 21st-century Globe reader letting this kind of editorial choice pass without comment – as Sylvia Stead learned during her tenure as public editor from 2012 until she retired in 2023. Stead had her own experience with subjective photo choices. In her first summer at the paper in the mid-1970s, she wrote a story about the controversy around a nude beach in Toronto (“Nudes scare families,” the headline read). While the story says the swimmers were “mostly men” – Stead sheepishly admits she failed to recognize the spot as a gay beach – the paper ran a photo of an unnamed topless woman in the water.

That kind of editorial decision, says Stead, would have prompted a blistering reaction from contemporary readers, who have easy e-mail access to send both compliments and complaints.



In her time as The Globe's public editor, Sylvia Stead fielded many reader queries and concerns about photo choices. DELLA ROLLINS/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Readers are especially vocal around issues of gender and race. One reader called out The Globe for a 2013 picture that focused on then-B.C. premier Christy Clark's legs while she spoke at a podium. That same winter, another counted up the faces that appeared in a Saturday edition of The Globe and found that only two weren't white. "This seems ridiculous, and certainly doesn't reflect the Canadian population," the reader wrote.

Along with others, Stead began tracking gender and race in the paper's photos, breaking it down into statistics over several years, showing progress as concerted efforts in the newsroom addressed the issue of diversity.

By the 1970s – in the wake of the sexual revolution, the in-your-face photojournalism of the Vietnam War and civil unrest in American cities –

newspapers were willing to print photographs that would have shocked editors of previous generations.

“When I started, it was no-holds-barred,” says Stead. “If you had it, you ran it. You didn’t really think about the sensitivities of your audience.”

Today, says Liz Sullivan, the paper’s deputy visuals editor, decisions are framed against a new understanding of trauma, a higher bar for privacy and the care taken not to exploit people who cannot give their permission to be photographed. A photo, especially one on the front page, no longer remains on a printed page, crumpled and tossed the next day. Whatever images The Globe publishes now wander the internet, given legitimacy by the newspaper brand.

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FEDERAL ELECTION 2015
Liberals planning to repeal balanced budget law
BILL CERRY OTTAWA
Justin Trudeau's Liberals are planning, if elected, to scrap a law entrenching federal balanced budgets in order to run deficits to finance a spike in infrastructure spending. The party confirmed its policy on the Conservative legislation after recently making the continuous deficit-busting pledge the centerpiece of its campaign in the run-up to the Oct. 19 vote, drawing criticism from both the Conservatives and the NDP. The issue of whether to balance the books is shaping up as a key dividing line in the federal campaign. Liberal candidate John McCallum said the Conservative balanced-budget law needs to be replaced. "If we have to get rid of a gimmick to do what is right, then it's what we would have to do," he said Wednesday in an interview with The Globe and Mail. "We do not think this is a serious piece of legislation and so we are determined to implement our plan." The NDP isn't going that far, insisting it has no plans to drop the law even though it opposes it — and may have to live by it — should the party form government and the current fiscal year's books slip into deficit. *Liberals, Page 4*

POLICE
Ontario moves to allow chiefs to dock suspended officers' pay
PATRICK WHITE
The Ontario government is close to hammering out a new law that would grant police chiefs the power to halt pay for suspended officers, which currently costs municipalities about \$6.4 million a year and drenches a toll on public trust in local law enforcement. Currently, Ontario is the sole province mandating police bosses to maintain pay for any suspended officers, even those facing charges. Chiefs can revoke a suspended officer's salary only if the officer is sentenced to prison. But that outlier status is set to change under a provincial push to reform the Police Services Act that follows the revelation one officer, who was paid hundreds of thousands of dollars during his suspension, boasted he was enjoying the time off. "I think we've come 80 per cent of the way towards a solution," said Ian Gorm, director of government relations for the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, which has been working directly with the province on reforms. *Police, Page 8*

A moral crisis In a world filled with graphic horrors, the Western media have become increasingly squeamish about showing what war, famine or death actually look like. There is an understandable fear of upsetting the audience, and a well-founded reluctance to be seen making a market out of the suffering of others. But some upsetting images demand to be seen, precisely because they are a true representation of reality. They show us the world as it is, its cruelties exposed, and not the world as we would wish it to be. And by the shock to our eyes, our conscience may be stirred. **FULL EDITORIAL, PAGE 10**

The scale of the problem
A look at the swelling numbers that define the harrowing scope of the migrant crisis
FOLIO, PAGES 6-7

A call for compassion
Rather than scaling themselves off, affluent countries should give more to alleviate suffering
COMMENT, PAGE 12

On Sept. 3, 2015, The Globe showed Canadians the grim fate of Syrian child refugee Alan Kurdi. The caption, provided by a wire service, included mistakes in his age and the spelling of his name, details corrected later by his aunt in Canada.

Sometimes, however, Globe editors decide the reader shouldn't have the choice to look away.

In 2015, a two-year-old boy named Alan Kurdi drowned with his mother and brother while crossing the Mediterranean Sea. His family were Syrian refugees trying to flee to Europe by boat. While other newspapers chose to run an image that showed a rescuer carrying the partially obscured body, The Globe decided to run an image taken by a Turkish photographer that showed the little boy's body on the beach, his face turned toward the camera.

"I am simply appalled at the front cover of The Globe and Mail," one reader tweeted. "Who publishes pictures of dead bodies nowadays? A child, at that?"

But Globe editors held their ground. An [editorial explaining the decision](#) acknowledged that Western media had become "increasingly squeamish" about showing the horrors of war and famine. "There is an understandable fear of upsetting the audience, and a well-founded reluctance to be seen making a market out of the suffering of others," the editorial said. "But some upsetting images demand to be seen. They show us the world as it is, its cruelties exposed, and not the world as we would wish it to be."

The picture, published in the middle of a federal election, prompted a public debate about the plight of refugees, as well as an outpouring of donations from Canadians. As Jonathan Rose, a Queen's University professor of politics, wrote in an online essay at the time, the unforgettable photo was far more persuasive than any logical argument or statistics. "It's not about the image," he wrote. "It's what the image does to you."



Between 3,200 and 5,000 civilians perished at Halabja, but when Koring went there in 1988, the city was such a ruin that accurate death tolls were impossible. The city 'seems destined to be remembered as the place where chemical warfare was used against civilians by their own government,' Koring wrote. PAUL KORING/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

After landing in the dark in Tehran, Koring and Washington Post reporter Patrick Tyler found an old Telex machine in a cement factory and filed their stories. When Koring returned to London, he developed the photos. “I wired them over,” he says, “and then we had this argument.” Was he certain, an editor asked him, that the picture of the man and the baby had not been posed before he arrived? In the horror of Halabja, Koring argued, that wasn’t likely.

Were the pictures too graphic to run? “Shocking photos of man’s inhumanity against man shouldn’t be suppressed. If it makes people lose their dinner, tough,” Koring believes. In the end, The Globe ran the picture of the man and baby on the lower right-hand corner of the front page of an inside section a week later, accompanied by a longer feature piece on the gas attack. But the worst ones, Koring says, never appeared.

Would The Globe run the picture from Halabja today? It is a decision the paper would consider very carefully, Sullivan says. These are daily conversations, she says, that are informed by history, framed by modern-day values, focused by journalistic rigour and informed by the trauma a photo might inflict on some readers.

The Geneva Conventions, which dictate the treatment of prisoners of war, factor into a debate about whether to run a photo of captured M23 militia soldiers in the back of a truck in the eastern region of Democratic Republic of Congo. A picture of a rescue from a crumbled building after an earthquake in Morocco is selected so it doesn’t show covered bodies lined up on the street. In Nunavut, a place long subject to pictorial stereotypes, Globe photographer Fred Lum considers what images tell the story of overcrowded housing without violating the privacy of the family who allowed a reporter and photographer into their home.

One afternoon in the mid-nineties, Koring returned to Halabja. He found what he believes to be the same doorstep where the man and the baby had died half a dozen years earlier, and snapped an image. In the picture, a boy in a brown shirt and a girl with a pink barrette in her hair are raising their arms above their heads, smiling at the camera.

“In this horrific, God-awful place, there was a new generation,” he says. That picture never ran in The Globe. That picture the photographer took for himself.

Erin Anderssen is a feature writer at The Globe and Mail, based in Ottawa.



The Globe compared Koring's 1988 photo from Halabja with a second one from the 1990s to confirm that they showed the same location. It gave Koring hope to see children playing where there had once been corpses: 'In this horrific, God-awful place, there was a new generation.' PHOTOS BY PAUL KORING/THE GLOBE AND MAIL; ILLUSTRATION BY MURAT YUKSELIR

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-to-capture-history-in-photos-globe-editors-must-make-hard-choices-on/>