



THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S GUIDE TO

INCLUSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY



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**This guide features first-hand accounts and insights from industry leaders. To learn more about their expertise and photographic work please review the bios at the end of this document.*

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Cover Image: Amarie Baker, New York, 2018; from the series 'Liminal Space' by Mengwen Cao.

A note from PhotoShelter

In just a few short months, our world has turned upside down. The frameworks and narratives with which we once navigated social and professional experiences have been shaken to their core. And with so much in flux, it's paramount each of us dedicates time and energy to visualizing our eventual return, whenever that may be. The stories we tell with our photographs have always mattered. Right now, we have a unique opportunity to step back, think critically against the backdrop of our trauma, and make choices about the future we want to build together.

The essays in this guide carry their own emotional trauma alongside a completely unique historical context. But are the current frameworks we use as photographers and storytellers still suited to these contexts?

Of course, frameworks are only successful when they're built on context. And frequently, this context is what separates the photographer and the subject from the community being photographed. These essays challenge our preconceived frameworks. They ask us — the visual storytellers — to consider

how to contextualize the story in a way that composites an entire history into the same frame as the community being photographed. But should a new framework be built explicitly by those in that community? Does one framework truly work anymore when we live in a society so rooted in diversity?

There are any number of questions outsiders should ask before they enter into a community that is not their own. Because these pieces are stories, we think that's a good place to start. As photographers, there's a moral obligation to listen to and understand the story first before you try to tell it. A shared meal, a city council meeting, a walk through the red light district; photography is as much about empathy as it is about creating a composite image. Without the connection between the photographer and the story they're telling, there's really no story at all.

– Caitlyn Edwards, Community Marketing Manager
Sarah Pace, Technical Support Specialist



Archie Cruz, 16, participates in the 2nd Subic Bay Pride Parade on Saturday, Dec. 8, 2018, in Olongapo City, Philippines.

Introduction

By: Tara Pixley

Lifting a camera to the eye and pointing it in the direction of a human, a landscape, an object, or any unfolding scene is an act of great power. While general audiences may tend to over rationalize the camera as a technology mostly unfettered by human interference, the truth that every photographer knows is how much choice we wield in how we use light, how we compose, what we leave in and what we leave out. As the shutter clicks, as we advance to the next frame, we have created a snapshot of our perception of a moment. Some of us may take photos as hobbyists, others might be professional photojournalists, portraitists, event/wedding photographers, etc. Whatever our goal in taking pictures, the end result is the same for all photographers in that we present ideas about the world to people who look at our images. This PhotoShelter guide offers ways to think about the power of making ideas as we make images.

Why should we think deeply about our approaches to photographing an Indigenous community's tribal celebration, to taking portraits of Black children, transgender women or Latinx migrant workers? Why does it matter who photographs in these marginalized spaces and how we can all be thoughtful and take care with our image-making in any space?



Maria Suyapa, a Honduran who traveled with a migrant caravan over thousands of miles to get to the United States' border, uses an American flag to shield her from the setting sun on Dec. 2, 2018. She says she acquired the flag during a protest march on the Tijuana/San Diego border earlier that week. Suyapa is one of thousands living in the El Barretal shelter as they await processing to enter the United States.

© Tara Pixley

In this guide, photographers from all over the world offer their experiences and perspectives to PhotoShelter's global community of image-makers, providing answers to these questions and many more like them. Several of the guide's writers specialize in photojournalism, documentary photography and portraiture, however, the knowledge and advice they offer within is applicable to any kind of photography.

Across the five sections in this guide there exists a throughline of recognition that photography has power; that its power has often been used to advance dangerous ideas which encourage oppressive social practices toward certain marginalized groups; and that it is up to each of us to educate ourselves how to move away from that kind of imagery. Some of the terms and ideas you'll encounter in these pieces may be unfamiliar or difficult to grapple with. A few key ideas I want to offer as starting points:

- The **Global South** is a phrase used to refer to low and middle income countries located in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. It's generally preferable to the misleading and derogatory term "Third World."
- "**Othering**" is a term used to describe the practice of framing

people only in relationship to their difference from what we often perceive to be the "norm," which is generally white heterosexual, cisgender, middle class, Christian, and Western cultural traditions. When we say things such as people, places, food or practices are "ethnic" or "exotic," what we're really saying is they aren't white or Western. Othering happens usually unintentionally because it is a product of our implicit bias towards our own cultural values and ways of being in the world. It shows up especially in how we photograph non-white people and non-Western places.

- The concept of depicting people as "The Oppressed" helps us recognize our tendency to show marginalized groups as only capable of suffering or being victims, which is ultimately dehumanizing. Instead, we can recognize every person's capacity for joy and experiences beyond marginalization or systemic oppression and reflect that in our photographs.

It's important to note that this guide doesn't privilege an "insider" perspective over an "outsider" perspective. We don't believe that only people from a particular community should photograph within that community. Rather, this guide is a rumination on the necessity of context. When we fail to grasp the context of

certain stories, key elements and histories of people, places and communities, we miss opportunities to tell truly great stories and make incredibly impactful images. You'll encounter personal stories, individual photographic practices, admonishments of what to do and what not to do before embarking on visual projects and a few learned lessons. What matters most is that the knowledge gained from these essays expands your view of photography and perhaps the world, that it carries into your image-making practices. That you apply these lessons the next time you raise the camera to your eye.

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- Teju Cole, "[Getting Others Right](#)"
 - Sonya Childress, "[Beyond Empathy](#)"
 - Video: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "[The danger of a single story](#)"

"The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. Show a people as one thing — as only one thing — over and over again, and that is what they become. How [stories] are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told

— are really dependent on power. Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity." - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

PHOTOGRAPHING

RACE

By: Laylah Amatullah Barrayn

A young woman with microbraids pulled back into a ponytail that balanced on the nape of her neck demanded of me, "No poste!" She couldn't have been more than twenty-five years old. Her hands shielded her face against my lens that was aimed and ready to receive her likeness for my memory. Her dress, an empire-waisted gown sewn from stiff bazin, was the focus of my interest. It was beautiful, distinct and emblematic of Senegalese style. For me, it was a moment worthy of a photograph. Her reply to my gesture, which meant to inquire for permission – "no poste!" was disappointing but her enacting her agency in the face of a camera was not.

This encounter was among my first visits to Saint-Louis, the former colonial capital of Senegal, many years ago. During subsequent sojourns, readings and conversations with people like local Senegalese archivists and photographers Ibrahima Thiam and Adama Sylla, I've come to learn of the complicated relationship between Black bodies and photography. Saint-Louis, otherwise known by its proper Indigenous name, Ndar, acted as the base for photographers who took up photo-making as a colonial project. That legacy lives on. Nearly one hundred years before I visited Saint-Louis, photographers like [Pierre Tacher](#) and [François-Edmond Fortier](#) documented the burgeoning federation of states then known as Afrique Occidentale Française (French West Africa). [Many images of the Senegalese and adjacent populations were produced,](#)

printed as postcards and distributed in France and other global destinations. This distribution of photographs was done with the very specific agenda of justifying the subjugation of colonialism. There are moments that can trigger a **collective memory of that trauma** — like the sight of a foreigner holding a camera.

As we seek to indigenize or de-colonize our practice in photo-making, archiving, and other forms of documenting, it is imperative to evaluate how we perceive other humans. It is crucial to be honest about how much we have internalized the racist ideologies that have become deeply ingrained in our societies everywhere in the world. Part of uncovering that truth is to be present, to listen and be open to what is revealed during efforts to challenge problematic tropes and projects. It is work to be taken up specifically if one has benefitted from racist structures, policies, and institutions. It's personal work. It's difficult and most importantly, it is a task for the courageous. This work benefits everyone. Racism is violent, limiting, and unnatural. This self-reflection makes all the difference in moving the conversation forward. Believing that one group is the prototype of the human form limits us all. When photographers stand in the space of racial hierarchy and fail to see the humanity in their fellow humans —one can't humanize another human, nor give a voice to someone who already has one— we fail as a society.

Spiritual practices that aren't rooted in Western traditions and theologies are often 'othered.' This image was from a series that centered on Khadija, a London-based woman who traveled to Zanzibar to consult with a local spiritual guide. I was focused on a collaborative portrait of her experience here because narratives of spirituality from the global south have been flattened, exoticized and decontextualized. Zanzibar, Tanzania, 2017

© Laylah Amatullah Barrayn

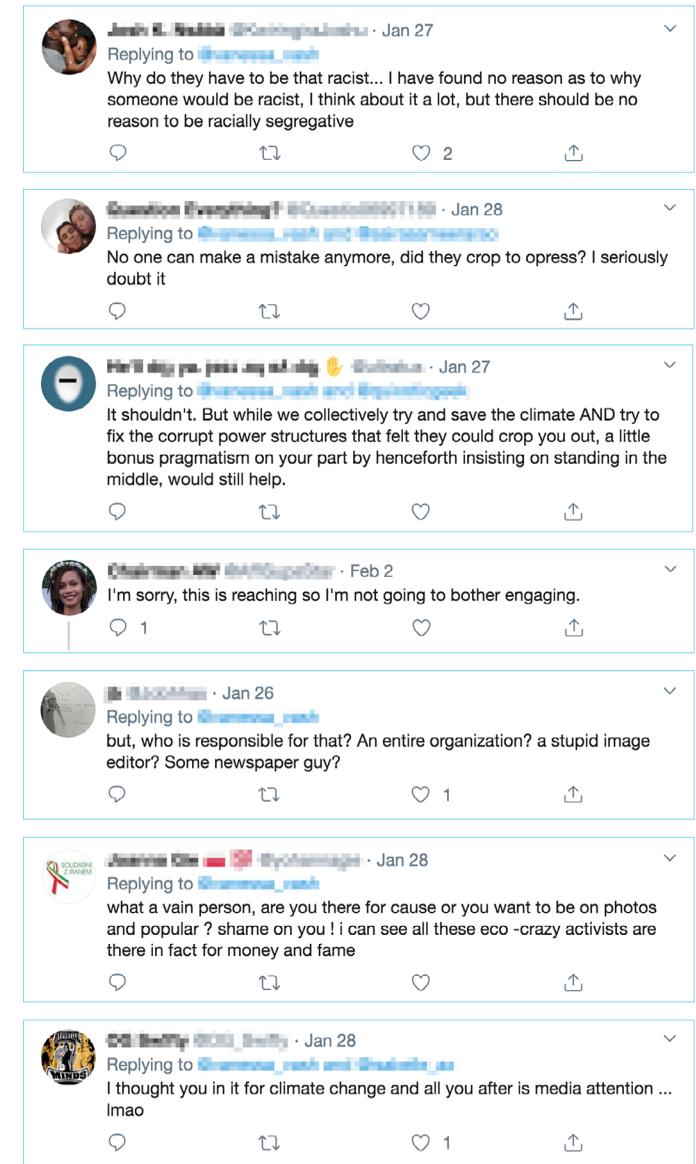
I think of the relatively recent incident where a young Ugandan climate change activist was cropped out of an AP wire photo. Vanessa Nakate posed for a photo with four other young activists, who all were white — Greta Thunberg, Isabelle Axelsson, Luisa Neubauer and Loukina Tille — and she was cut out. It was a devastating act of erasure surely predicated on race. Why else commit such an unethical gesture? The commentary online varied from pointing out the obvious racial undertones to a host of excuses feigning that the cropping was an honest mistake. It all speaks to the idea of *visuality*, meaning what influences our sight, what determines how and what we see. In this case, a photo editor made a decision to promote a one-dimensional narrative of who is allowed to be a champion of climate activism. The inclusion of a Ugandan activist would have disrupted the ongoing narrative of Africans and peoples of African descent as not being agents of change when that narrative is not only false, but dangerously limiting.

I look to the scholarship of Dr. Deborah Willis who has authored over 30 books on Black visual culture and photography. Her seminal book, [Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present](#) was the first comprehensive book published on Black photographers and should be included in all photographic curricula internationally. In this text, Dr. Willis chronicles and offers an analysis of Black photographers such as Jules Lion, James Presley Ball and Augustus Washington who all have had photo practices since

the inception of the first viable photographic process, the daguerreotype by Louis Daguerre in 1840. Not to mention the visual activism of Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth who turned the camera on themselves as an act of liberation.

Sociologist W.E.B Dubois pushed back against the negative imagery of people of African descent and the racist science that was prevalent during the late 1800s and early 1900s through his scholarship and usage of photography. His seminal exhibition at the Paris Exposition in 1900 is a prime example of his efforts. W.E.B Dubois assembled approximately 363 images, graphs and other visual materials, depicting the lives of Black Americans living in and around Atlanta, Georgia. Fifty million visitors viewed the Exposition des Nègres d’Amerique at the fair that ran from April to November. He once asked in the Opinion column of the Crisis magazine, “Why do not more young colored men and women take up photography as a career? He continues, “The average white photographer does not know how to deal with colored skins and having neither sense of the delicate beauty or tone nor will to learn, he makes a horrible botch of portraying them.” W.E.B Dubois understood the power of photography and the importance of authorship and agency. And 100 years later, we are still grappling with doing right in the usage of the camera.

In order to create a new world, one must first be able to envision it. It is imperative to think about the ethics around producing and





disseminating photographs. We must be truthful about the harm caused by the hierarchical relationship between photographer and sitter, by the intersection of that relationship with racism and sexism. We must recognize the social effects of our photographs. Only then can we begin to use photography as a tool for empowerment rather than a tool that enacts its own violence.

Photographer Ibrahim Thiam holding a photograph of his mother and aunt. I spent a significant amount of time in Senegal working on several projects. I've learned a lot about the country's history and cultures through photographs. Ibrahim and I would often discuss archives, which he has an extensive collection. We would ponder about how photographs were being saved and from whom and for whom? Saint-Louis, Senegal, 2013

© Laylah Amatullah Barrayn

- Christopher Capozzola, "Photography & Power in the Colonial Philippines"
- Teju Cole, "When the Camera Was a Weapon of Imperialism. (And When It Still Is.)"
- Whitney Richardson, "Who Is Telling Africa's Stories?"
- M Neelika Jayawardane, "The problem with photojournalism and Africa"
- Will Matsuda, "Why Aren't There Any Famous Asian American Photographers?"
- Sarah Lewis, "The Racial Bias Built Into Photography"

- Susan Goldberg, "For Decades, Our Coverage Was Racist. To Rise Above Our Past, We Must Acknowledge It"
- Shaminder Dulai, "Blind spots: The dangers of unchecked social bias in race and media"
- *Defining and explaining structural racism* (Aspen Institute on Community Change & Applied Research Center at UC Berkeley)
- *Structural Racism in America: Features & Research* (The Urban Institute)

- *Photography, Colonialism & Racism* (International Affairs Review)
- *Of colonial photographs and cultural resources: The photographic archive of the S arawak Museum* (TransAsia Photography Review)
- *Colonial Photography Across Empires and Islands* (Journal of Transnational American Studies)

PHOTOGRAPHING

THE GLOBAL SOUTH

By: Hannah Reyes Morales

In 1904, the World's Fair was held in St. Louis, Missouri. A pamphlet for the "Philippine Exposition" advertised 47 acres displaying 1200 natives from 40 different tribes. As part of the fair, Americans could take photographs with these natives: souvenirs from a human zoo. "Better than a trip through the Philippine Islands," the advertisement reads.

Tears of anger still well up when I look at those pictures.

Photography has drawn me in since early childhood. I would scour history books, looking for early images of Filipinos. But archival images of my country were almost always taken by colonizers or foreigners. We often look at historical images as fact and artifact, forgetting what is not present in the frame: the photographer. So when I was looking at images from my history, I was looking through the eyes of people who would have seen me as savage had I lived in their time.

Representations of the Global South and its people, such as the images from the 1904 World's Fair, have always been problematic – and their downstream effects persist today.

Even as photographers from marginalized communities, we often visually mimic aesthetic and stylistic norms created by white men and geared toward Western, white consumption. We exoticize our own Indigenous brothers and sisters. We romanticize poverty just outside our own doors. We recreate a fantasy not written by us.

Images made today, however, have the power to change that; to redirect how our next of kin might see their own history, and how we might perceive ourselves in the present. It requires change both from ourselves as insiders and from outsiders who seek to portray communities, cultures and experiences beyond their own. It requires change from a flawed system that profits off of envisioning people who have no voice in how they're portrayed.

Historically, the mainstream documentary photography canon has featured people from the Global South as 'subjects.' We have rarely enjoyed the privilege of being the canon's author. This work involves redefining what the canons are in photography — redefining standards that were made by people who will never experience the world as we do.

We need to be valued in telling our own communities' stories as well as applying that diversity of perspectives to communities outside of our own.

Today, when I take photographs, I often ask myself, why not us? Why not be part of those who can reshape our gaze of the world? Why stop at our own communities? What if we go beyond?

We are accountable for the images we take and put out into the world. But we should go further and hold ourselves accountable for the images we hold with high distinction. As photographers, we need to do the work of seeking out perspectives that differ

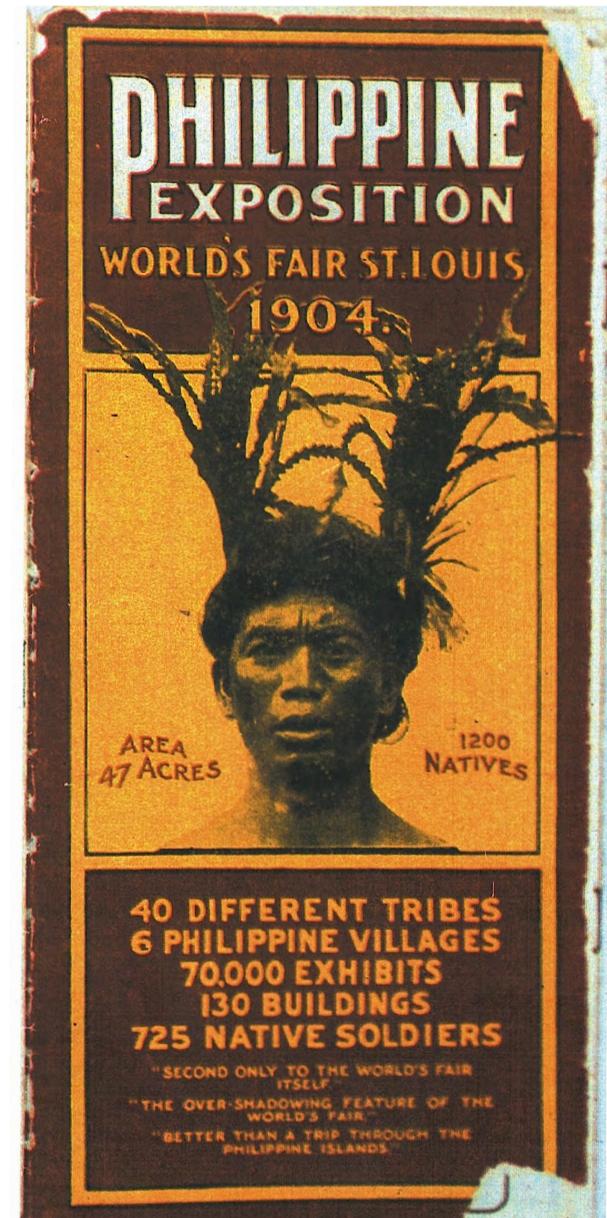
from ours. As the resources become more available for a connected world, as practitioners we can be more intentional with the work we look at, share and learn from.

When we look at the world, perspectives of both insiders and outsiders are important —and yet perspectives from insiders are often pushed aside. The current landscape holds Western perspectives as more valuable. When we photograph as outsiders we need to be aware of the privileges we hold when we are photographing outside of our contexts. What is accessible to you because of your passport? What is accessible to you because of your gender? What is accessible to you because of your accent? What is accessible to you because of your ethnicity? What freedoms do you enjoy when you depart?

Recognizing these privileges is recognizing that they come with both responsibility and accountability. Recognizing these privileges changes how we approach work and how we ask questions. We cannot have an inclusive photographic landscape when we do not hold ourselves to account.

When I first saw the ad for the Philippine exposition in the human zoo, it was visually overwhelming. I looked through one of the photos' red and yellow letters in bold large text where an ornate headdress of feathers was prominently displayed.

St Louis Public Library via the Theodore Roosevelt Center. Artist unknown but piece created in 1904 for the St. Louis Exposition.





It wasn't until my gaze landed on the centre of the image that my eyes finally found rest. Lost in the poster's garishness, my fellow Filipino's defiant eyes lock with mine. In photographing, the act of looking at others must be taken further – towards looking at others eye to eye, as equals.

Emilia sits on a swing outside her home in Pampanga, Philippines. She is part of the group called 'Malaya Lolos,' or 'Free Grandmothers,' a group of survivors of mass rape during the second world war. Seven decades since their assault, the surviving women remain in the same vicinity of the house where they were held and repeatedly assaulted. Though a majority of the women who formed the group have now passed away, those who are still alive continue to seek reparations from the Japanese government.

© Hannah Reyes Morales



A young boy touches a gumamela flower that his sister picked from the ground. They live in a tenement in Manila, Philippines, among the communities most affected by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's bloody war on drugs, which has taken thousands of lives since he took office. Here, life goes on amid the violence it bears witness to.

© Hannah Reyes Morales

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PHOTOGRAPHING

INDIGENEITY

By: Tailyr Irvine

Indigenous communities and tribal nations are incredibly diverse. Native Americans are not monolithic, meaning each tribe and every individual within that tribe have complex identities. While I do not speak for every Native American—and this article should serve as only one piece of your own research on how to report in these communities—I hope my experience as a Salish and Kootenai photojournalist working in these communities will help guide you as you begin your assignment or project.

First, it's important to recognize your role in this community: you are an outsider. You will always be an outsider, no matter how long you are embedded. Native American stories and lives have historically been portrayed only by the outsider gaze, so it's important to consider if your story is new and worth pursuing. Has it been done before? How will it be different? Why do you want to tell this story? What is the goal of this work and why is it important that you do it? Are you the best person to tell this story?

If you don't feel you can effectively convey an accurate and complete story, one option is to pass on assignments or collaborate on projects with Indigenous photographers. To do so, you can connect with affinity groups such as Natives Photograph, a community of Indigenous visual storytellers.

If you determine your piece will add value to the community and publications you work for, keep in mind that this is not "your" story. You are a conduit. Above all, honoring that recognition



There are ways to photograph culture without falling into stereotypes. My work focuses on what it means to be a contemporary Native in America. This ceremony happens annually and though there are some members of the tribe dressed in regalia, a majority are not. It would be inaccurate and lazy to have only the members in regalia be represented in the photographs. If you feel you need to portray exotic regalia to make a good photo, you should reassess your storytelling approach.

© Tailyr Irvine

means working closely with those whose stories you seek to tell and listening to their feedback. If you're told something is inaccurate in your reporting, listen to that. Outsiders have a history of extracting sensationalized quotes or photos without context from Indigenous Peoples, resulting in damaging and inaccurate narratives. It's a privilege to have someone from any community open up and tell their story; to have someone from a community that has been burned by the media for centuries still be willing to work with you is a small miracle. They are trusting you with their story and that demands respect. How you proceed will affect the way future journalists are regarded.

Indigenous communities have historically been underrepresented in mainstream media and when they are represented, the work tends to convey damaging stereotypes. If you're working as a professional journalist, it is your duty to follow an ethical code (such as the [SPJ Code of Ethics](#), which insists we avoid stereotypes). Beyond photojournalism specifically, it's still imperative to understand the communities you photograph to avoid reproducing tired and typical visual rhetoric. [The Native American Journalist Association's](#) (NAJA) website has an excellent tool for recognizing stereotypes in your work. The [NAJA Bingo card](#) presents squares depicting media stereotypes such as casinos, horses, drumming, poverty, vanishing culture, dying languages and more. If the story you're working on gets a "bingo," you should consider killing the piece or find ways to expand well beyond harmful and lazy

reporting to tell a compelling, new and productive story about Indigenous communities.

As photographers and storytellers, we produce ideas about the world through our images. It is our moral duty to provide context and take care not to oversimplify in our storytelling. This is especially true with all kinds of photographic approaches. Feathers, regalia, sweating ceremonies and powwows are beautiful but they are also a small part of many Indigenous peoples' lives. Some Natives dance; many do not. Some are traditional, some are not. None of these things make any individual more or less Native. Do your photos attempt to reflect the entirety of a person's experience? If you showed your photos or story to someone who has never seen a Native before would they get an accurate picture of what Indian Country looks like in 2020? Or would that person think that all Natives wore feathers, rode horses and lived in tepees? You have to think like this because when larger publications run stories from Indian Country, it is often the first time those audiences are learning about contemporary Native Americans. How you tell the story can shape what audiences will think of a community they've never experienced and may never have access to or knowledge of beyond what you portray.

Here are other resources you should check out before you begin photographing in Native communities: [NAJA.com has a list of resources available](#), including what terminology to



use and how to refer to Natives—for example, the preferable terminology is to refer to an individual by their tribe instead of the blanket statement Native American. There are also primers for approaching stories around the Indian Child Welfare Act and tribal provisions of the Violence Against Women Act. You can learn this and so much more on the website. Another great way to learn how to report and photograph in Indian Country is to follow Indigenous writers and photographers on social media, simultaneously expanding your knowledge and expanding their reach and social impact.

The most important thing to remember is that Indigenous people are people, real humans with agency. Treat the community and individuals with the same respect and consideration as you would any person you engage with in your work or life. Put in the work, find experts, and give yourself the time to get it right. Ask questions and listen to the answers. Check in with the community before you publish to make sure you're correctly understanding what they are saying. Leave your preconceived ideas at the door and dig deeper to find stories that have purpose.

Focus on how you're representing a community. Although this takes place at a powwow, it's not a powwow photo. A daughter getting her hair fixed is universal and tells part of a story that is deeply relatable; regardless of race.

© Tailyr Irvine

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- James Estrin, "[Native American Photographers Unite to Challenge Inaccurate Narratives](#)"
 - John Anderson, "[Respect the Feathers': Who Tells Standing Rock's Story?](#)"
 - LISTEN: Tailyr Irvine, "[Shooting past stereotypes: Photojournalist challenges expectations with contemporary images](#)"
 - Kainaz Amaria, "[National Geographic's November cover falls back on a racist cliché](#)"
 - Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "[Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples](#)"

Other articles to read:

- "[7 Tips for non-Native Journalists Covering Indigenous Communities](#)"
- "[Drawing Breath](#)"
- "[8 of the Biggest Misconceptions about Native Americans](#)"
- "[NAJA Reporting Guides](#)"

PHOTOGRAPHING

GENDER

By: Danielle Villasana

In 2011, through a personal project on LGBTQIA families in Texas, I met Nikki Araguz Lloyd, a person whose courageous and dynamic energy moved mountains. Nikki, a transgender widow who lost her husband in a fire, made history when she won an appeals case in a Texas court that validated their marriage and secured her spousal death benefits. A self-described “accidental activist,” Nikki fearlessly fought for the trans community and though she recently passed away in a tragedy that shook hundreds of people across the world, the paths she paved will be forever impactful. On a personal level, the passion she inspired in me is what continues to drive my documentary work.

Since meeting Nikki, I’ve photographed communities of transgender women throughout Latin America—the region with the highest rate of trans homicides in the world—from Argentina and Peru to Central America and Mexico. As an outsider not only among trans women but also in Latin America, I began my work by first reading research on the causes and consequences of the life-threatening challenges trans women face in this region. When I was ready to start the chapter of my project in Lima, Peru, where I lived, I didn’t take pictures for the first few months despite my eagerness. Rather, I spent time getting to know people and letting them get to know me and slowly, I was welcomed by the community. Eventually I moved to their neighborhood and grew very close to several people, such as Tamara and Piojo. Investing time and sharing space is an important part of building any relationship and the connections I formed with women in this community are ones that still stand strong today.

Mutual trust is essential to any healthy relationship and the same goes for photography. Building and maintaining trust is paramount and being trusted by someone to photograph them is sacred and should be honored and respected. Therefore, throughout the photographic practice, it's incredibly important to abide by people's wishes and clearly communicate your intentions. And, sharing your work with people you photograph can be a productive and enriching experience for everyone. Looking at photographs together with the women I've documented and listening to their opinions and feedback have been incredibly important for how I think about and approach my work. Because photography can so easily be a form of taking, one must also give as much as possible, even if it's something so simple as sharing information and knowledge or moments together without picking up your camera.

Another factor in my motivation for starting this long-term project was the realization that the majority of photo stories about trans women in the media narrowly and often superficially portray their lives by relying on stereotypes, such as sex work and pride parades. As a way to counteract these narratives and provide more context, I've tried to ensure balanced storytelling by documenting both the issues trans women face as a result of systemic transphobia, discrimination, and stigmatization as well as the joys, triumphs, and the connections with friends and family in their daily lives. I continuously check back in with myself and have removed photos from my project in the past because



Tamara, a trans woman from Peru, often said she wouldn't live past 30. Why would she, she defiantly asked, when society treats her as less than human? Trans women are extremely marginalized and discriminated against in Peruvian society. As sex workers with no legal protections, they're at greater risk of violence and sexual and substance abuse. Less than a month after Tamara's 30th birthday, she passed away from pneumonia and tuberculosis as her immune system was compromised due to HIV.

© Danielle Villasana

Oftentimes trans women play volleyball or other games such as Bingo before work to earn extra money. Here, women play volleyball inside a building complex where many live together in Lima, Peru.

© Danielle Villasana



of the potential to cause more harm than good if taken out of context. My hope is that by showing a more complete view of these communities, outsiders like me will have a more complete understanding of not only the obstacles trans women face—which are mostly caused by society and directly threaten their well-being—but also their resilience, strength, and perseverance in spite of these injustices.

Though I pursued photojournalism because of a belief that one picture can change the world, I came to understand that by reiterating tropes of people and places, the media often contributes to the very problems we aim to bring attention to. In 2018, I published my first photo book, “A Light Inside,” which is the culmination of my years-long work documenting a community of trans women in Lima, Peru. My goal with “A Light Inside” was to use it as an educational tool that could be distributed free-of-charge to people who have a direct impact on trans women’s lives in Lima. Partnering with Leyla Huerta, a prominent trans activist in Peru, founder of Féminas, and author of an essay in “A Light Inside,” we reached universities and health care facilities with a very simple message: that trans women deserve human rights. And, if their human rights continue to be denied by people who are meant to protect everyone—lawmakers, health care workers,

law enforcement, and religious leaders to name a few—they will continue to incur harm at an alarming rate, as most trans women in Latin America do not live past 35 years old.

“If people are dying, I’m not doing my job right,” said Dr. Eduardo Matos, an infectologist at one of Lima’s most important hospitals, during one of our interviews. The same year “A Light Inside” was published, Dr. Matos told me that Hospital Loayza was inaugurating the country’s first—and, to date, only—consultation area for trans women. This is a huge step in ensuring trans women in Lima receive healthcare with dignity and respect. The moment was bittersweet because the hospital was also where Tamara and Piojo passed away at a very young age from AIDS. For both Tamara and Piojo, acts of discrimination and utter fear of health care professionals played a part in either why they waited to receive care or why they stopped treatment. When I thanked Dr. Matos, he thanked me instead, explaining that it was only after learning about my work that he became aware of the dire conditions trans women endure. Knowing that photography has helped create positive pathways for a community that courageously shared their stories with the world is the type of impact and measures of success we should seek as storytellers.

- Mengwen Cao, “Coming Out to My Parents in China by Video”
- PhotoShelter, “Exploring Notions of Queerness with Authority Collective at Photoville LA”
- Eloise Blondiau, “Naima Green Captures the Many Faces of the Queer Community”
- Mikael Owunna, “Queer continent: Mikael Owunna’s Limitless Africans – in pictures”
- Gabriel Garcia Roman, “Art has the power to humanize a community”

- Beth Ryan, “Female in Focus: Jess T. Dugan’s empowering portraits of the ageing transgender community”
- Glossary of LGBTQI terms (Human Rights Campaign)
- Understanding Gender (Gender Spectrum)

PHOTOGRAPHING

THE LGBTQAI COMMUNITY

By: Mengwen Cao

On April 11, 2016, I faceted my parents in Hangzhou, China from my bedroom in Brooklyn. I told them I was working on a project and I wanted their feedback. I sent them the link to my video. They clicked play. My heart jumped out of my throat. That video was my coming out letter.

Watching my parents watch me share a deep secret was petrifying but also thrilling. So is my coming-of-age story. The 2000s witnessed a fast expansion of the Internet, which provided me a window to diverse ways of living. I spent countless hours watching queer movies and reading analyses of anime characters' ambiguous (potentially queer) relationships. However, such things were completely hidden from my family because queer content was nowhere to be found in Chinese mainstream media. Instinctually, although I knew there's nothing wrong with being queer, I also knew my consumption of queer content was something I needed to keep quiet.

I am humbled and honored to be an image-maker and culture worker now. I feel privileged to surround myself with diverse and authentic queer communities who care for each other deeply and also hold each other accountable. While I marvel at the surge and depth of queer stories available today, I also want to invite image-makers to think critically and be more tender when approaching queer stories.

Every now and then I open up my laptop to find an email like this from someone I barely know:



Sueann Leung, New York, 2019; from the series 'Liminal Space'

© Mengwen Cao

"Hi. I am working on a project about (insert gender/sexuality topics). I know being queer is not widely accepted in (insert location) and it's hard to be queer. I know you are queer and gender non-binary, and you are in (insert location), can you tell me everything you know, show me your most vulnerable side, give me a list of events you people often go to and connect me to all your friends?"

Don't engage queer folks as mere fodder for your next story. Engage us as humans. Start by showing us who you are, so it feels like a mutual engagement. Introduce yourself as someone who cares deeply for the LGBTQI community and will be thoughtful in your visual approach, before asking others to open up.

An important question for you to understand yourself and to communicate to any potential collaborator on a story about queer communities is why you and why this topic? Show that you're familiar with how people have covered the topic previously (especially other LGBTQI photographers). What is beyond the surface? What will you add to the lexicon of images on this subject and how will your approach be collaborative with the communities whose stories you're asking to tell? We are more than drag performances, vibrant fashionable parties, or being mistreated and even killed for being who we are. Show us you understand that.

Another crucial aspect of working with queer communities is to examine your beliefs and stereotypes before stating them as absolute truths. Yes being queer is still difficult in this patriarchal,



capitalistic and binary system, but being queer also means exploring identities deeply, building alternative communities joyfully, charting collective futures bravely. If you can only imagine us as the Oppressed or the Other, then it's time to change your lens.

We are also unique, multifaceted ever-evolving human beings. Just like you. Gender or sexuality are only layers of our identity. Not all queer-identified people from one area know each other. Not all queers share the same lifestyles, perspectives or experiences. Images should portray us as a vast spectrum of humanity where queerness is only a singular aspect of who we are or might be.

Do your research first, then ask questions that can't be answered by search engines. Respect that intimacy and trust need to be earned with care and over time. The safe space queer communities co-create is sacred. Let us see your heart and we will invite you in.

Tenaya Izu, New York, 2017; from the series 'Liminal Space'
© Mengwen Cao

- Mengwen Cao, *"Coming Out to My Parents in China by Video"*
- PhotoShelter, *"Exploring Notions of Queerness with Authority Collective at Photoville LA"*
- Eloise Blondiau, *"Naima Green Captures the Many Faces of the Queer Community"*

- Mikael Owunna, *"Queer continent: Mikael Owunna's Limitless Africans – in pictures"*
- Gabriel Garcia Roman, *"Art has the power to humanize a community"*
- Beth Ryan, *"Female in Focus: Jess T. Dugan's empowering portraits of the ageing transgender community"*

- *Glossary of LGBTQI terms* (Human Rights Campaign)
- *Understanding Gender* (Gender Spectrum)

Conclusion

By: Tara Pixley

A world of photographs that depict all people with respect, that pushes back against stereotypes and resists Othering aesthetics is a world of much better people and much more interesting images. Who does a diversified approach to photography benefit? Everyone. When we consider the points of view we come from, we become better photographers. Our portraits are made stronger by a deeper connection to those whose faces we reflect in our lens. Our documentary images tell more compelling stories that connect rather than divide people. Every type of photograph benefits from a more knowledgeable, conscientious and thoughtful photographer behind the camera. So too should we **recognize the importance of diverse perspectives and experiences in the roles of photo editor, curator and creative director.** These are spaces that select and determine what images have value, what stories can be told and who gets to tell them. Collectively, the photographer and photo curator have immense control over what vision shapes our world — it is both a huge privilege and incredible responsibility we should all wield with care.

We hope this guide has offered viewpoints you perhaps hadn't considered and provided new ideas with which you can now engage more generously. We also hope you will check out the additional references we've included and share them far and wide. Being educated is the first step toward both meaningful allyship and improved visual storytelling. It is not the responsibility of Indigenous, queer, transgender, nonbinary, black or brown people or anyone from any historically marginalized group to educate those who occupy spaces of privilege. The emotional labor required of such work is often overlooked and rarely understood. So, we hope that the work we've done in writing this guide to make such ideas and our experiences accessible to the PhotoShelter community is merely the start on a path toward your own research and self-education. Just as the camera is a tool of power that produces and amplifies certain ideas about the world, knowledge and shared communal understanding is its own power and value.

Irving helps keep Casa de Luz, a Tijuana shelter that serves families and LGBTQ migrants, running. Trans and queer-identified individuals share space and shelter together with children, single mothers and other migrants, creating community and support across groups not allowed to shelter together elsewhere along the Mexican-American border.

© Tara Pixley



RESOURCES

- [Seattle Times' Guidelines for Inclusive Journalism](#)
 - “Am I properly contextualizing sensitive stories for different platforms?”
 - “When selecting photos from other countries and of at-risk populations, am I applying the same standards as I do for photos of my own community?”
 - “In selecting photos and stories on diverse people and communities, am I depicting only stereotypical situations?”
 - “What are the likely consequences of the publication of these images? Who will be harmed? Who will be helped?”
- [Decolonizing Documentary & Journalism Reading List](#) by Ligaiya Romero
- [Women Photograph Byline Data](#)
- [Everyday Africa's Exhibition Guidelines](#)
- [CJR Special Report: Photojournalism's moment of reckoning](#)

Additional Readings

- [Neeta Satam, “The Ethics of Seeing”](#)
- [David Campbell, “Why it's time for visual journalism to include a solutions focus”](#)
- [Edwin Martinez, “Navigating the River: The Hidden Colonialism of Documentary”](#)

“What happens when we swoop into a foreign reality (even one just a train ride away) and bring all our cultural assumptions, value systems and ways of seeing? When witnessing a situation, through whose eyes do we read that situation? To what conclusions do we jump? How does the lens of our unconscious bias inform, bend and determine the stories we tell, and how we tell them?”

- [Clary Estes, “The Colonialism of Photojournalism”](#)
- [Kainaz Amaria, “The moment I knew I wasn't going to be a conflict photographer”](#)
- [Tara Pixley, “Why We Need More Visual Journalists and Editors of Color”](#)
- [Daniella Zalcmán, “Yes, We Can Reach Gender Parity in Photojournalism”](#)
- [April Zhu, “What Would Photography Look Like If It Were Actually Inclusive?”](#)
- [Racist Sandwich, ft. Celeste Noche: “What's So Political About Food Photography?”](#)
- [Allison Stubblebine, “Diversity In Fashion Is Essential—Especially When It Comes To Photographers”](#)
- [Rikki Byrd, “These Photographers Are Ensuring That Diversity Becomes More Than an Industry Trend”](#)
- [Nikki Barron, “Don't Tell Us You Can't Find Diverse Photographers for Your Conference”](#)

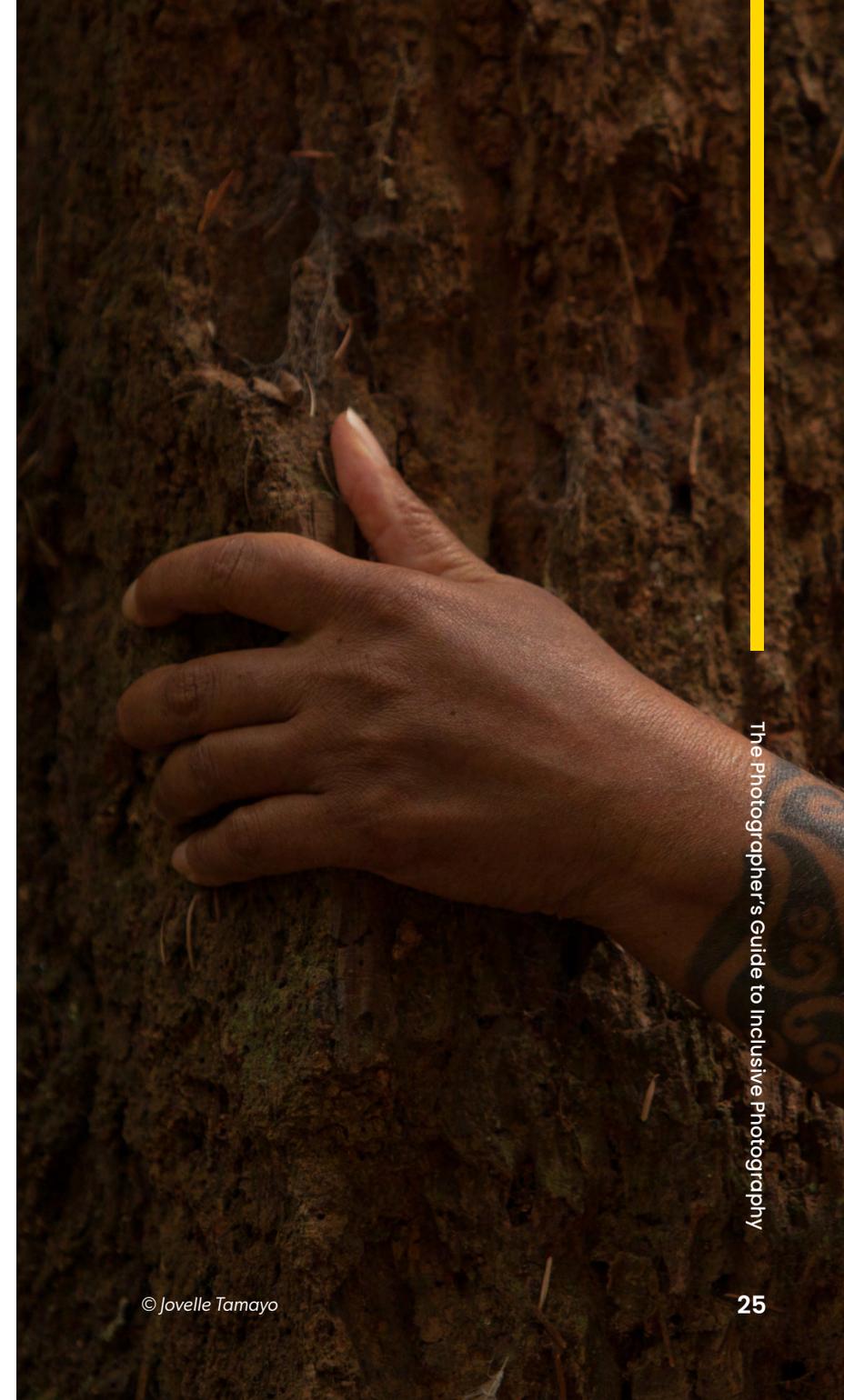
Organizations Working Toward Equity in Photography

- [Authority Collective](#)
- [Color Positive](#)
- [Diversify Photo](#)
- [The Everyday Projects](#)
- [Juntos Photo Coop](#)
- [MFON: Women Photographers of the African Diaspora](#)
- [Natives Photograph](#)
- [Women Photograph](#)

Questions photographers should ask ourselves:

- 1. Am I perpetuating stereotypical narratives with my work?
- 2. Have I considered how my perspective or privilege may affect how I approach photography?
- 3. What are the likely consequences of the publication of my photography? Who will be harmed? Who will be helped?
- 4. When selecting photos from other countries and of at-risk populations, am I applying the same standards as I do for photos of my own community?
- 5. Is my aesthetic approach to **portraits built on tropes used to dehumanize African, Asian and Latin American people?**
- 6. How can I expand the types of people, places and organizations from which I draw story ideas and angles?
- 7. How much time do I spend with people and communities before photographing them? Am I taking the time to do my own research on and ask about underlying issues and context from the community or group I'm photographing?
- 8. Are the photographers I admire or follow on social media mostly white people from Western countries?
- 9. When I travel to a foreign country to take photographs, do I try to find photographers from that country to learn how they see their own communities?
- 10. How many award-winning photographs feature black and brown people from the Global South? How many of the photographers winning the awards are from that demographic?

• These questions are partly gathered from *The Seattle Times' Guidelines to Inclusive Journalism*



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Tara Pixley

Tara Pixley is an LA-based editorial photographer, writer and professor with 15 years experience as a photojournalist and editor for news media, including *Newsweek*, *New York Times* and *CNN*. Her photography rethinks visual representations of gender, race and sexuality. Tara's documentary film work has screened from LA to Paris and her writing has been published by Photovoice, PDN Magazine, Canon Pro and Black Scholar, among others. Following a 2016 Visiting Fellowship at Harvard's Nieman Foundation for Journalism, her Nieman Reports cover story on photojournalism was awarded a 2017 FOLIO Ozzie Award. She is a co-Founder & Board Member of Authority Collective.

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Laylah Barrayn

Laylah Amatullah Barrayn is a documentary photographer who was born, lives and works in New York City. Her work explores the multiplicity of cultures, identities and cosmologies of the global African diaspora with a focus on women and religion. She is the co-author of *MFON: Women Photographers of the African Diaspora*, the first anthology in nearly 30 years to highlight photography produced by women of African descent. Barrayn is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times* covering the New York City metro area. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, with solo exhibitions at The Museum of the African Diaspora San Francisco, The Taubman Museum of Art (VA), MAK Gallery (Venice + London) and the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporic Arts (NY). She is a member of Kamoinge, a pioneering collective of African American photographers founded in 1963. She was included as one of the Royal Photographic Society's (UK) Hundred Heroines. She is a 2017 African Great Lakes Reporting Fellow with the International Women's Media Foundation, a 2018 finalist for the Dorothea Lange–Paul Taylor Prize at the Center for Documentary Studies, Duke University and included in OkayAfrica's 2019 100 Women. Barrayn is currently working on a book on contemporary Black photographers.

Laylah Amatullah Barrayn Co-Author, *MFON: Women Photographers of the African Diaspora*

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Hannah Reyes Morales

Hannah Reyes Morales is a photographer whose work documents tenderness amidst adversity. Her photography, both visceral and intimate, takes a look at how resilience is embodied in daily life. She grew up in a crowded Manila, witnessing loved ones depart from home each year. These departures, along with the discovery of a shelf of dusty photographic magazines stirred her interest in concerned photography. Through her photography she has reported on forced marriages in Cambodia, documented women’s experiences with assault in the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, and explored the long term effects of colonisation on women’s bodies in the Philippines. She has photographed the toll of Rodrigo Duterte’s war on drugs, and documented the Filipino Diaspora and the effects of it on the island nation where she is from. She contributes work to *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *National Geographic Magazine*, among others. The World Economic Forum named her a cultural leader in their ASEAN forum. In 2019 she participated in the World Press Photo’s Joop Swart Masterclass and received the Tim Hetherington Visionary Award. She is a 2020 National Geographic Explorer. Hannah is currently working on longer term projects, focused on safe-space making and care giving.

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Tailyr Irvine

Tailyr Irvine is an editorial and documentary photojournalist from the Flathead Reservation in Montana. Her work focuses on challenging stereotypical narratives with photos that provide deeper representation of the lives and the complex issues within the diverse communities that make up Native America. Tailyr worked at the Dallas Morning News and Tampa Bay Times before beginning her career as an independent journalist.

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Danielle Villasana

Danielle Villasana is an independent photojournalist based in Istanbul whose documentary work focuses on human rights around the world. She is a National Geographic Explorer, Magnum Foundation awardee, and an International Women's Media Foundation fellow. Danielle's strong belief in the power of photography paired with education and community development has guided her involvement in multiple organizations. In 2019 she co-founded [We, Women](#), an ongoing platform exploring crucial issues across the U.S. through photo-based community engagement projects by women and non binary artists. In 2016, she joined [The Everyday Project](#)'s Community Team where she helps conceive and produce various initiatives, such as [Re-Picture, a mentorship program](#), and collaborative photography projects. In 2018, she joined the [Authority Collective](#) as a board member and is a member of Women Photograph and Diversify Photo. Ultimately, Danielle strives to live and work by the advice of her mentor, Donna De Cesare: "You are a human being first and a journalist second."

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Mengwen Cao

Mengwen Cao is a Chinese photographer, multimedia artist and cultural organizer based in New York. They are the Project Manager at Magnum Foundation and the Visuals Editor at ChinaFile. As a queer immigrant, they use care and tenderness to explore spaces between race, gender, and cultural identity. As a board member of [Authority Collective](#) and a co-founder of [Chinese Storytellers](#), they are fighting to make more space for diverse narratives and perspectives in the media industry.

Their projects have been featured in publications such as The New York Times, The New Yorker, NPR, The Guardian, Vox, the Atlantic, and Tencent. They have participated in international exhibitions like Photoville, Jimei Arles, Lianzhou Foto Festival. Mengwen graduated from the New Media Narratives and Documentary Practice program at the International Center of Photography. They received NLGJA's Excellence in Photojournalism Award in 2019. They were recognized by The Lit List in 2018 and PDN 30 New and Emerging Photographers to Watch in 2019. Previously, Mengwen has worked as an instructional designer and a user experience designer.

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Jovelle Tamayo

Jovelle Tamayo is an independent documentary photographer, visual journalist and media educator. She was born in Olongapo City, Philippines, raised in Central New Jersey and currently based in Seattle, Washington. Her work has been published in *Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Intercept*, *NPR*, *CNN* and other outlets. Jovelle is a co-founder of the Authority Collective, and a member of Diversify Photo and Women Photograph.

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About the Authority Collective

The Authority Collective is a group of womxn, non-binary and gender expansive people of color reclaiming our authority in lens-based visual media. As professionals in the photography, film and VR/AR industries, our mission is to empower marginalized artists with resources and community, and to take action against systemic and individual abuses in the world of lens-based visual work.

 authoritycollective.org

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