

FAIR WITNESS

Street Photography for the 21st Century
Photographs by David Lykes Keenan
A Photography Book Proposal (v5)

It is one thing to photograph people. It is another to make others care about them by revealing the core of their humanness. -- photographer Paul Strand.

Street photography has been a part of the human experience for over a century. In the beginning, it was literally photographs of city streets, as technology had not yet created cameras portable enough or films sensitive enough to capture life on the go. The French photographer Eugene Atget typified this with his expansive study of Paris.

With the advent of small, discrete cameras in the 1920s, particularly Leica by the German manufacturer Ernst Leitz, the notion of street photography (and reportage photography, in general) made “instant” photographs possible. Not instant as we think of digital photography today, of course, but instant in the sense that it became increasingly possible to capture life’s “decisive moments”, a term made famous by Henri Cartier-Bresson, another Frenchman who many recognize as the father of modern-day street photography.

Street photography became less about place and more about those who occupied it. In the hands of a master, these photographs presented moments frozen in time that are rarely if ever really seen or appreciated by subjects as they come and go too quickly to be perceived – unless they are captured by the snap of a camera’s shutter.

Every decade has produced a handful of truly great street photographers who wandered photographing the cities of their time. Henri Cartier-Bresson owned the 1930s and 40s along with Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Russell Lee; Robert Frank defined the photography book in the 1950s; Garry Winogrand, Diane Arbus, Elliott Erwitt, and Lee Friedlander recorded the 1960s and 70s with their particular styles and wit; Martin Parr and Jeff Wall came into their own in the 1980s; Wall, Parr, Erwitt, and Friedlander continue to work to this day along with other greats such as Bruce Gilden, Joel Meyerowitz, and Richard Kalvar, each of whom has produced vast bodies of work but who also defined street photography for the remainder of the 20th century.

The work of the late Vivian Maier, a Chicago-based nanny, who photographed life around her in complete obscurity, is now displayed in prestigious NYC and other galleries and was published in a 2011 monograph entitled *Vivian Maier: Street Photographer*. This is proof of the enduring appeal of traditional black and white street photography.

The publication of *Unposed* by Craig Semetko by teNeues in October 2010 further attests to the viability of books featuring street photography. Semetko was virtually unknown as a photographer but the strength of his work and the patronage of one of the greats, Elliott Erwitt, produced a notable book appreciated by the connoisseurs of the decisive moment.

Another recent street photography publication of note, *Retrospective* by Harold Feinstein, arrived in fall 2012 after having raised over \$40,000 to ensure its printing and distribution. The arrival of this book coincided with a major exhibition at the Panopticon Gallery in Boston.

In late 2010, with the encouragement of Eli Reed, another photographer of significance and instructor in photography at The University of Texas at Austin, I decided it was time to leave my mark on the 21st century with a book of my street photography. Reed made sure I knew that my work was book-worthy and also a candidate for exhibition in galleries such as the notable Leica Gallery in NYC.

Since the beginning of my return to photography in 2004, my work has been reviewed and encouraged by many other well-known photographers including Mary Ellen Mark. "You know that I think you have a great eye and are a really fine street photographer. I especially like the ones that have humor because you have a wonderful sense of humor and you're able to express that in your photographs," Mark said of my work in 2009. Besides Reed, photographers Norman Mausekopf, Erwitt, David Alan Harvey, Bruce Gilden, Maggie Steber, Harvey Stein, and curator of photography Roy Flukinger of the UT Harry Ransom Center, have helped cull my archives for the best of the best, to edit and sequence my photographs, and, perhaps most importantly, help me believe in myself.

My book will be a collection of approximately 100 black & white photographs taken between 2004 and 2011 in the US and Europe. Some of the photographs will draw the reader into the midst of some unusual situations, some will provoke a laugh, some will give the reader pause and a reason to think about what it means to be human and alive in the 21st century.

I, as the photographer, am a witness to life in our times, a Fair Witness. The title, Fair Witness, comes from the famous science fiction novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* by Robert A. Heinlein. A character in the novel, Mr. Cavendish, sums up what it means to be such by saying, "I am a Fair Witness, sir. Not a participant."

The design of the book will be horizontal in shape roughly 9x12" in size. The photographs will all be on the right-hand pages facing a blank page on the left. There will be no text on the page including no page number. A page number will appear on the facing page. There will be nothing to distract the reader from being absorbed into the spontaneous moment of each photograph. The photographs will be sequenced in such a way as to create a gentle roller coaster ride of emotional response.

I would like Eli Reed to write a six to ten page forward for the book. Eli has been following my progress as a photographer for many years and has been my primary mentor in bringing this book to fruition. And given the connection that the title suggests to Robert Heinlein and literature, I would seek a notable contemporary writer to write a six to ten page essay on witnessing the modern world personally and through photographs. Writers to consider include Colson Whitehead, Cormac McCarthy, David Sedaris, and Christopher Rice.

As mentioned previously, the publication of books of street photography by two newcomers in the past couple of years, not to mention new books by old masters of the genre (Erwit, Stein) and recent reprints of great books of the genre (Frank, Josef Koudelka), clearly show the public's interest in this traditional style of photography.

To market *Fair Witness* efficiently, there are many online avenues to reach photography enthusiasts who are potential buyers of this book.

- My personal online network created over the past seven years includes over 500 contacts.
- There are numerous web sites (e.g., in-public.com, streetphoto.fsnet.co.uk, street-photographers.com, londonstreetphotographyfestival.org), and Facebook pages (e.g., Worldwide Street Photographers, Word on the Street Photography) dedicated to street photography.
- In addition to web sites, there are many online forums (i.e., user groups) with a particular slant toward street photography (e.g., Cosina-Voigtlander User Group, Leica User Group, M-Camera User Group, Rangefinder Forum, Analog Photography User Group)
- Many communities have Meet-Up groups devoted to street photography
- There are a growing number of photo blogs and online magazines seeking fresh content (many of which I have a personal relationship established including Flak Photo, The Online Photographer, Red Dog News, F-Stop Magazine, and David Alan Harvey's Burn Magazine).

Each of these present ready-made opportunities to market *Fair Witness* to literally thousands of potential buyers with clearly identified interest in my book and/or in the genre in general. The above represents the "low-hanging fruit" of the potential marketplace with relatively easy, inexpensive (i.e., free), and recurring access.

Directed marketing campaigns at users of Leica cameras (specifically), rangefinder cameras (in general), to fans of certain class of well-known photographers (particularly those members of Magnum Photos), to lovers of black & white photography (there are at least two international magazines devoted to this) would also reach potential buyers.