
Synopsis:
Zelizer discussed the way visual images, particularly those connected to past tragic events, serve as memory vehicles through which a group can engage in the construction of collective memories. She noted that these images are often disconnected from the original event and are reappropriated by different sources and imbued with alternate meanings. She also discussed the idea of bearing witness, a process by which present day people “attend not so much to events as to their representation in memory” (p. 171). Photographic images in particular are tools through which people can bear witness to events of the past; however, bearing witness is a process through which different people construct different interpretations of the past and use those interpretations to understand present situations differently. Atrocity photos in particular allow individuals to collectively bear witness to events they neither participated in nor have direct memories of; this kind of collective memory, constructed by those who do not know all the facts of an event, can be problematic in some ways. Zelizer discussed reappropriations of The Holocaust, an event that has come to symbolize large-scale human suffering, the effects of perverse evil, and atrocity itself. Zelizer noted that when people reappropriate this specific event, it becomes a symbol used to explain all tragic events and human suffering. She suggested that this kind of reappropriation condenses all tragic events into a single original atrocity, thereby devaluing each individual event and the experiences of the people in it.

Key Concepts
- Event-Driven Memory: “Memory attached to the commemoration of certain events” (p. 180).
- Rupture-Driven Memory: “Memory that involved ruptures in the ongoing consensus about the atrocity story” (p. 180).
- Memory Pegs: “The visual information that photographs conveyed tended to remain the same, while its verbal contextualization changed over time” (p. 180).

Key Quotes
- “The thrust to remember was ignited by events that both increased public self-reflection and facilitated the ability to mourn the past” (p.172).
- Ellie Wiesel: “Memory is a passion no less powerful or persuasive than love…What does it mean to remember? It is to live in more than one world, to prevent the past from fading and to call upon the future to illuminate it” (p. 174).
- “Bearing witness, then, took on a retrospective quality that allowed publics to move back and forth in time, attending both to the atrocities and to contemporary agendas: people were remembering to remember” (p. 175).

Essential Question
- Who should be allowed to remember and who is invited to join in or is denied access to the process of collective memory formation?