

TEACHING MODULE

Flashpoint!

Protest Photography in Print, 1950–Present

Edited by Russet Lederman & Olga Yatskevich

A 2-Class Module

10×10 Photobooks, 2024 • 576 pages • 760 images • 245+ publications surveyed

Suitable for undergraduate and graduate courses in:

Photography • Visual Studies • Media Studies • Art History
Journalism • Social Justice • Documentary Studies • Graphic Design

Module Overview

This two-class module uses *Flashpoint! Protest Photography in Print, 1950–Present* as the primary text to examine how photography in print has served as both a tool and a document of protest and resistance worldwide. The module is designed to help students develop a critical vocabulary for analyzing the relationship between print format, visual aesthetics, and political action.

Flashpoint! is a 576-page anthology surveying more than 245 examples of photography in print—photobooks, zines, posters, pamphlets, independent journals, and alternative newspapers—from over twenty countries. Edited by Russet Lederman and Olga Yatskevich and published by 10×10 Photobooks, the book is organized thematically into seven chapters: Anti, Gender, Displacement, Race & Class, Environment, Political, and War & Violence. Each chapter contains multiple sub-themes addressing specific movements and moments of resistance, from the Anpo protests in 1960s Japan to anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa, from AIDS activism in the United States to environmental resistance globally. Eight commissioned essays by scholars including Arthur Fournier, Marc Feustel, Mark Sealy, Makeda Best, Kerry Manders, Hannah Darabi, Elisa Medde, and Pauline Vermare provide critical frameworks for engaging with the material.

The book’s central inquiry—Is protest photography in print a “tool conceived through an aesthetic of urgency” or “an elegantly designed photobook, published a year or more later”?—provides the organizing question for this module. Across two classes, students will examine how the materiality, design, and distribution context of a photographic publication shapes its political meaning and efficacy.

Learning Objectives

1. Analyze how different print formats—photobooks, magazines, zines, posters, pamphlets, and newspapers—shape the reception, circulation, and political impact of protest photography.
2. Distinguish between an “aesthetic of urgency” (print as tool deployed during events) and retrospective documentation (print as designed record after events), and evaluate how each mode functions within resistance movements.
3. Examine *Flashpoint!*’s thematic structure as an act of canon formation, considering what editorial choices reveal about how protest photography is historicized.
4. Compare protest photography in print across different geographical, political, and historical contexts, identifying both shared visual strategies and locally specific approaches to resistance.
5. Develop critical vocabulary for discussing the materiality of photographic publications—paper, typography, binding, image quality, layout—and their relationship to political content.

Required Text

Flashpoint! Protest Photography in Print, 1950–Present, ed. Russet Lederman & Olga Yatskevich (New York: 10×10 Photobooks, 2024). 576 pp., 760 images. Softcover with dust jacket. ISBN: 979-8-218-45950-5. Available from 10x10photobooks.org. \$85.

Shortlisted for the 2024 Paris Photo–Aperture PhotoBook Awards.

CLASS 1

Tool or Document? The Aesthetics of Urgency in Protest Photography

Duration	75–90 minutes
Assigned Reading	Arthur Fournier’s introductory essay on the democratization of print technology and the “aesthetic of urgency” Marc Feustel’s essay on Japanese protest photography of the 1960s–70s Chapters: “Anti” (complete) and “Race & Class” (complete)
Key Themes	Tool vs. document; the aesthetic of urgency; format as political meaning; the democratization of print; materiality and protest

Pre-Class Preparation

Students should read the two assigned essays and both chapters carefully. While reading, they should select two publications from the “Anti” or “Race & Class” chapters that represent contrasting approaches to protest photography in print: one that appears to have been produced quickly as a tool of protest (a poster, zine, flier, or alternative newspaper), and one that is a more carefully designed photobook documenting resistance after the fact. Students should come to class prepared to describe the material and visual differences between their two selections.

Class Session Plan

Part 1: Opening Exercise — Reading the Object Before the Image (20 minutes)

Begin the session by asking students to set aside the content of the photographs and focus exclusively on the physical and material properties of the publications reproduced in Flashpoint! Project or display reproductions of contrasting entries—for example, an anonymously designed protest poster alongside a publication like Ernest Cole’s *House of Bondage* (1967) or Kikuji Kawada’s *Chizu* (*The Map*, 1965). Ask students to describe what they can observe or infer about each object: What kind of paper would this have been printed on? How was it bound (or not)? What does the typography suggest about production speed and budget? How many copies might have been printed? How would it have been distributed?

The goal of this exercise is to establish a core principle of the module: the material form of a photographic publication is not neutral. A hastily printed flier passed hand-to-hand at a march operates differently as a political object than a 200-page clothbound photobook purchased through a bookshop years later, even when both contain images of the same protest movement. After students share their observations, introduce the framing question that runs through Flashpoint!: Is protest photography in print a “tool conceived through an aesthetic of urgency,” or an elegantly designed document published after the fact? And does this distinction matter?

Part 2: Arthur Fournier and the Democratization of Print (20 minutes)

Transition into a discussion of Arthur Fournier’s introductory essay. Fournier traces how the transfer of print technology from military to civilian use created the conditions for an “epochal

shift in the power dynamics between the masses and those authorities who had previously policed their print media.” Guide students through the implications of this argument:

- How does access to print technology shape the kinds of protest imagery that get produced? Consider the difference between a movement that can afford offset printing versus one limited to photocopied fliers or hand-stenciled posters.
- Fournier identifies an “aesthetic of urgency” as the visual foundation of DIY protest tools. What are the characteristics of this aesthetic? How do we see it across different entries in the “Anti” chapter, from the Anpo protest publications in Japan to anti-globalization zines from the 1990s and 2000s?
- Does the “aesthetic of urgency” travel across cultures and decades? Or does it look different in Buenos Aires than in Tokyo than in New York? Ask students to compare specific examples from the assigned chapters.

Part 3: From Anpo to Apartheid — Protest Photography Across Borders (25 minutes)

This section asks students to work comparatively across the two assigned chapters. The “Anti” chapter opens with Japanese protest photography from the Anpo era—the massive resistance movement against the US-Japan Security Treaty in the 1960s—which Marc Feustel’s essay contextualizes in depth. The “Race & Class” chapter includes publications documenting anti-apartheid resistance in South Africa, the US civil rights movement, anti-colonial struggles, and workers’ rights movements globally.

Divide students into small groups. Each group should select one sub-theme from each chapter and compare the publications featured:

- What print formats are represented? Are there differences in the types of publications produced by different movements (e.g., more zines in one context, more photobooks in another)?
- Marc Feustel’s essay complicates the assumption that the blurred, grainy aesthetic of 1960s Japanese protest photography was a direct expression of political violence. How does this complicate the idea that there is a universal “aesthetic of urgency”? Can a polished, well-designed photobook also carry urgency?
- Consider the publication timeline: how long after the events did each publication appear? Does the delay between event and publication change the political function of the photography?

Groups should report their findings to the full class, with the instructor drawing connections between the presentations.

Part 4: Wrap-Up and Assignment Introduction (10 minutes)

Close by asking students to reflect on something they noticed during the class that complicated their initial assumptions about protest photography. Introduce the between-class assignment.

Between-Class Assignment

Choose one sub-theme from any chapter in *Flashpoint!* that you have not yet examined closely. Read all of the entries within that sub-theme and the associated essay (if applicable).

Write a 500–750 word analysis addressing the following: How do the publications within this sub-theme represent the full spectrum from “tool” to “document”? Select two specific publications and analyze how their format, design, and material properties shape their political message differently, even when addressing the same movement or cause. Come prepared to present a three-minute summary of your findings.

CLASS 2

Canon, Curation, and the Afterlife of Protest Images

Duration	75–90 minutes
Assigned Reading	Mark Sealy’s essay (excerpted in <i>The Nation</i>) Kerry Manders’s essay on AIDS in visual culture Chapters: “Gender” (complete), plus one additional chapter of student’s choice from Environment, Displacement, Political, or War & Violence
Key Themes	The anthology as canon formation; the afterlife and re-contextualization of protest images; editorial voice and political neutrality; the body and photography in gender-based protest; photography’s capacity to sustain or exhaust political attention

Pre-Class Preparation

Students should read the two assigned essays and the complete “Gender” chapter, plus one additional chapter of their choice. They should also complete the between-class assignment and be prepared to present their three-minute summary to the class.

Class Session Plan

Part 1: Student Presentations and Synthesis (25 minutes)

Begin with student presentations of their between-class analyses. To keep this section dynamic, organize presentations in rounds of three students, followed by five minutes of open discussion after each round. The instructor should listen for and highlight recurring themes: Are students finding that certain protest movements tend to produce certain kinds of print objects? Are there surprises—movements that produced unexpectedly polished publications, or well-funded organizations that used deliberately rough aesthetics?

During the discussion periods, encourage students to draw connections across presentations. The goal is to build toward a collective understanding of how *Flashpoint!*’s thematic organization reveals patterns (and exceptions) in the relationship between format and political content.

Part 2: Bodies, Rights, and the Visual Culture of Gender-Based Protest (20 minutes)

This section focuses on the “Gender” chapter, which addresses women’s rights, AIDS activism, and LGBTQ+ resistance. Kerry Manders’s essay on AIDS in visual culture provides a critical framework for understanding how photography has been used both to advocate for marginalized communities and, at times, to further exploit or objectify them.

Guide discussion through the following:

- The “Gender” chapter includes a wide range of print objects, from the Pro-Choice Public Education Project’s bold typographic posters (“77% of anti-abortion leaders are men. 100% of them will never get pregnant”) to carefully produced photobooks documenting

women’s movements. How does the choice of format reflect the strategic goals of each movement? When is a poster more effective than a book, and vice versa?

- Consider the role of the body in these publications. How is the photographed body used as evidence, as symbol, as provocation? How do design choices—cropping, scale, juxtaposition with text—shape the viewer’s relationship to the bodies depicted?
- Kerry Manders’s essay raises the question of how protest images can simultaneously advocate for a community and risk reducing that community to a set of images of suffering. How do the publications in this chapter navigate that tension? Are some formats better suited to avoiding this trap than others?

Part 3: Flashpoint! as Canon — The Politics of the Anthology (20 minutes)

This section turns the critical lens on Flashpoint! itself. The book is not just a survey of protest photography—it is an act of selection, organization, and institutional framing. The editors organized the material thematically rather than chronologically or geographically, and they chose to maintain what reviewers have described as a politically agnostic stance while including material that overwhelmingly originates from progressive movements.

Pose the following questions:

- What does it mean for a protest poster—originally created to be plastered on a wall or handed out at a march—to be reproduced in a 576-page, \$85 anthology that was shortlisted for the Paris Photo–Aperture Photobook Awards? Does the institutional framing change the political charge of the original object? Does it amplify it, neutralize it, or transform it into something else entirely?
- The editors note that they “recognize that the selection of books, zines, posters, fliers and independent newspapers presented in this project cannot cover every perspective on a given protest topic.” What are the implications of these absences? What kinds of protest photography might be systematically underrepresented in a project like this, and why?
- Consider the book’s design by Huber/Sterzinger and Miloš Gavrić: the bold red cover, the newsprint-like paper, the graphic typography. How does Flashpoint!’s own materiality comment on or participate in the traditions of protest print it documents? Is the book itself a tool or a document?

Part 4: Closing Discussion and Final Assignment (15 minutes)

Return to the module’s central question one final time: What is the relationship between the material form of a photographic publication and its political content? By now, students should be able to articulate a substantially more nuanced answer than they could at the start of Class 1. Ask two or three students to offer a brief statement synthesizing what they’ve learned.

Introduce the final assignment and address questions about scope and expectations.

Final Assignment

Drawing on *Flashpoint!* and at least two additional scholarly sources, write a 1,500–2,000 word essay on one of the following prompts:

Option A: Select one protest movement or sub-theme from Flashpoint! and examine how photography of that movement has been published across different print formats. Analyze how the migration of images from one format to another—from poster to zine to photobook to anthology—transforms their political meaning, audience, and function. Your essay should engage closely with specific publications from Flashpoint! and consider what is gained and lost in each transformation.

Option B: Examine the role of design and materiality in protest photography in print, comparing publications from at least two different chapters of Flashpoint! Your essay should argue for a specific claim about how format choices—paper, typography, binding, image quality, scale—shape the political efficacy of protest photography. Consider how the “aesthetic of urgency” identified by Arthur Fournier operates (or does not operate) across different cultural and historical contexts.

Option C: Analyze Flashpoint! itself as an editorial and curatorial project. How does the anthology’s thematic structure, design, and institutional positioning shape the reader’s understanding of protest photography in print? What does the book include and exclude, and what are the implications of those choices? Your essay should engage with at least two of the commissioned essays and consider the politics of canon formation in photographic publishing.

Instructor Notes

Adaptability

This module is designed for upper-level undergraduate or graduate seminars. For introductory courses, reduce the reading load to one chapter plus one essay per class and simplify the between-class assignment to a descriptive rather than analytical exercise. For graduate seminars, consider supplementing with Vilém Flusser’s concept of the “apparatus” (referenced in the Brooklyn Rail review of Flashpoint!) or with scholarship on media materiality and the politics of the archive.

Working With or Without the Physical Book

The module works best when students have access to the physical book, whose own materiality—newsprint-like paper, bold red cover, softcover binding—is itself a subject of analysis in Class 2. If institutional budgets allow, a desk copy for the classroom and library reserves is ideal. If physical copies are not available, the 10×10 Photobooks website, press coverage, and projected images of spreads can substitute, though the instructor should explicitly address what is lost when students encounter the material only through digital reproduction.

The Flashpoint! Reading Room

The Flashpoint! touring reading room exhibition launched in May 2025 and will travel through 2027. If the reading room is accessible in your area, scheduling a class visit would provide invaluable hands-on engagement with more than 90 of the original publications discussed in the anthology. Visit 10x10photobooks.org for the current schedule.

Chapter-by-Chapter Guide for Instructors

The seven chapters of Flashpoint! and their sub-themes, for reference when advising students on their between-class and final assignments:

Chapter	Sub-themes
Anti	Anpo, Government, Globalization, Censorship
Gender	Women’s Bodies, Women’s Rights, AIDS, LGBTQ+ Rights
Displacement	Migration, refugees, territorial disputes, borders
Race & Class	Anti-apartheid, civil rights, anti-imperialism, workers’ rights
Environment	Environmental activism, land rights, climate protest
Political	Student protests, national populism, anti-colonialism, revolution
War & Violence	Anti-war, gun violence, conflict documentation

Assessment Rubric for Final Essay

Criterion	Description
Argument (30%)	Clear, original thesis about the relationship between print format and political meaning, sustained and developed throughout the essay.
Close Reading (25%)	Substantive engagement with specific publications from Flashpoint!, demonstrating close attention to images, design, materiality, and editorial context—not just content summary.
Critical Framework (20%)	Effective use of concepts from the Flashpoint! essays (aesthetic of urgency, democratization of print, canon formation) and/or external scholarly sources to frame the analysis.
Research & Sources (15%)	Integration of at least two additional scholarly sources that deepen the analysis beyond the assigned text. Sources are relevant, well-chosen, and properly cited.
Writing Quality (10%)	Clear, well-organized prose. Appropriate academic register. Effective use of visual description when discussing specific publications.

Supplementary Resources

- *Flashpoint! Conversation with Lesley Martin, Russet Lederman and Olga Yatskevich* (video), Printed Matter, NYC, January 2025. Useful for providing students with the editors' own framing of the project.
- *Photography and Text in Protest: A Panel Discussion with Arthur Fournier, Kris Graves and Kyle Canter* (video), Grolier Club, NYC, February 2025. Deepens the discussion of Fournier's essay on the aesthetics of urgency.
- Aaron Peck, review of Flashpoint! in *Aperture* (Winter 2025). Useful critical perspective for graduate-level discussion.
- Brooklyn Rail review by Eric Miles (May 2025). Engages with the media theory implications of the book, including references to Vilém Flusser's concept of the apparatus.
- Flashpoint! Reading Room touring exhibition (2025–2027). Schedule available at 10x10photobooks.org.