

Susan Sontag on War Photos

Read what Susan Sontag*, one of the leading literary and photography critics wrote about photographs of war. What is her message?

Who can forget the three color pictures by Tyler Hicks that *The New York Times* ran across the upper half of the first page of its daily section devoted to America's new war, "A Nation Challenged," on November 13, 2001? The triptych depicted the fate of a wounded Taliban soldier in uniform who had been found in a ditch by Northern Alliance soldiers advancing toward Kabul. First panel: being dragged on his back by two of his captors – one has grabbed an arm, the other a leg – along a rocky road. Second panel (the camera is very near): surrounded, gazing up in terror as he is being pulled to his feet. Third panel: at the moment of death, supine with arms outstretched and knees bent, naked and bloodied from the waist down, being finished off by the military mob that has gathered to butcher him. An ample reservoir of stoicism is needed to get through the great newspaper of record each morning, given the likelihood of seeing photographs that could make you cry. And the pity and disgust that pictures like Hick's inspire should not distract you from asking what pictures, whose cruelties, whose deaths are *not* being shown.

*In *Regarding the Pain of Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003) p. 13-14

**See images linked to the "Taliban Killing" document.