Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire. By Jane Lydon. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Pp. 187. A\$39.59 paper.

Focussed on ‘the role of photography in shaping debates about Aboriginal Australians,’ Jane Lydon’s work is fundamental to our visual-cultural history (p.xiii). Not only has she done the hard yards in the archive, as demonstrated by the seminal *Eye Contact* (2005), but she has also done the harder yards of working with Indigenous scholars, elders and communities to produce meaningful ‘bothways’ accounts of Australian photographs, as in *Calling the Shots* (2014), which places equal weight on production, reception and transformation.

In *Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire* she ventures further into abstraction, building on recent scholarship in the history of human rights, the theory of visibility and the politics of affect to situate Australian photographs within the global history of humanitarian thought and practice.

The book therefore has much broader reach than her previous publications, but in extending from the nineteenth into the twentieth century and from the self-contained photograph to multivalent public opinion and policy, Lydon drifts perhaps a little too far from her historical specialisation and methodological roots. While the inductive method – the curator’s method, the anthropological fieldwork method – depends on long experience and close observation, here she moves from visual verities into the more ambiguous arena of deduction and discourse analysis, where empirical truths and the compelling haecceity of the object have lesser functions, simply providing tests and illustrations for hypotheses determined elsewhere.

The book comprises seven chapters, and while there is a clear continuity of theme, each treats a discrete subject. The opening chapter, a broad editorial view of empire, humanitarianism, ‘the affective turn’ and the politics of seeing, is followed by: an account of evangelism at Poonindie Mission, and photographic personifications of Aboriginal ‘improvement’; an examination of Darwinism and taxonomy in the 1860s, through the lens of scientist Enrico Giglioli; a comparison of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with Arthur Vogan’s *The Black Police*, introducing questions of Aboriginal ‘slavery’ and frontier violence; Elsie Masson’s account of pre-WWI life in Darwin, and the crucial intersection of anthropology and jurisprudence; a chapter on the temporal coincidence and political disjunction of the 1904 Roth Royal Commission into the treatment of Aboriginal people in West Australia and public debates in Britain about Chinese labourers in the Transvaal and Belgian atrocities in the Congo (as well as the publication of H.G. Wells’s *A Modern Utopia*); and the final chapter brings us up to the middle of the twentieth century with Edward Steichen’s *Family of Man* and the display in Australia of the UNESCO Human Rights exhibition of 1951.

All of these essays make useful and often insightful contributions to photographic history, highlighting the medium’s place in the history of liberal ideology, but the last three, the last two in particular seem somehow methodologically muddled, perhaps because the author is outside her primary historical field. More substantially and more generally (if understandably), all the essays emphasise race at the expense of class, which was equally an early focus of photographic endeavour and a fulcrum of humanitarian thought. (It is worth remembering that the British Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 was followed just a year later by the New Poor Law.) So, for example, although Lydon discusses the ‘manipulations’ of engraved reproductions of portrait photographs in Giglioli’s *Voyage around the globe...*, she

does not cross-reference the wood engravings after Richard Beard's daguerreotypes in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851), and while she highlights Charles Darwin's 1872 *Expressions of the Emotions...* as 'the first book to include photographs' (p.47) she fails to mention those in John Thompson's social documentary *Street Life in London* (1877).

Lydon is undoubtedly a humanist herself. In a curious confessional passage, she describes 'the worst experience I have had as an academic' when, during a public lecture, she showed an anthropometric photograph from South Australia (one of T.H. Huxley's series recording the races of the British Empire), and 'a Victorian Aboriginal woman expressed her outrage and shock at seeing an image of this kind displayed, shaming me and reminding me of the powerful identification photography affords across time and place' (p.45) Throughout, *Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire* thrums with just this sense of personal responsibility, of the author as actor, and this is what ultimately holds together the book's gallimaufry of history and art history, anthropology and Indigenous studies, politics and psychology: the individual life, the individual witness. Lydon is here (as always) at her best with biography, enlivening ritual academic discourse with the immediacy of first-hand accounts, real voices, real flesh and blood.

In a world awash with photographs, a relentless celebrity selfie-feed only occasionally, momentarily interrupted by flashes of pathos, atrocity and injustice, the impact and the limits of the medium and its messages require constant renegotiation and recalibration. We should be grateful for academic work such as this, which is as convincing as it is (in all ways) conscientious.

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