

**STEVE MCCURRY
LESSON 5 - OTHER INFLUENCES**

**PHOTOGRAPHERS WORK THAT
HELPED SHAPE STEVE'S WORK**

"There are great pictures everywhere, you just have to be attentive"

Find out the books of some of the greatest photographers that influenced Steve at the beginning of his career. He discusses the work of Elliot Erwhitt, W. Eugene Smith and Robert Frank, as he highlights some of their key photographs that influenced him.

"These pictures of Elliott's are so human and tell such great stories...you can make some of the best pictures just working close to home."

He discusses the work of Elliot from his book Photographs and Anti-Photographs, he talks about the beautiful black and white photographs Elliot took of his wife and child at home in the bedroom. Steve also shares with you the lessons he has learnt from watching and observing Elliot create his own photographs.

"he was very passionately against what was happening. And he went there to document that story."

Steve was greatly influenced by the book Minamata by Eugene Smith, this book is about a company in Japan that had been polluting the water which caused a lot of birth defects. Steve shares with you one of Eugene's photographs that he thinks is one of the most amazing photographs of all times. He talks about the emotion and compassion behind this photograph.

"The Americans, again, was a huge influence, not only on myself, but probably every photographer who's looked at it since."

Steve's final influence he discusses in this lesson is The Americans by Robert Frank. Frank took a road trip across America and wanted to tell the story of the people of America through his photographs.

STEVE MCCURRY PROJECT LESSON 5 – USE THE GREATS FOR INSPIRATION

Look at pictures and books by the photographers that's Steve recommends. Their images can be found online as well as in their books.

Think about using these influences to create some of the images in your own way. Study the composition of the light used in these images and adapt these elements to your own situation and see what happens. Expand and investigate the situation. You might find that the process moves and changes to reveal another emotion or story.

Try setting up compositions that approximately echo well-known photographs or some of your own favourite photographs. This is just a starting point for you. Explore the composition further and adapt and move your viewpoint and the subject to create your own versions.

TRANSCRIPT

One of the books, which really influenced me as a young photographer starting out, was a book called Photographs and Anti-photographs by Elliott Erwitt.

Each picture was just magical. Each picture told incredible stories, often with great sense of humor. Since joining Magnum, I've gotten to know Elliott Erwitt, who's an incredible human being. We've traveled together. We were on a book tour in Australia. And he has such a great elegant eye. Tells great stories in a deceptively simple way. And he's just one of the great photographers, I think, of all time. I really recommend looking at his work. He's made probably 20 or 30 books.

Some of Elliott's best photographs are of his family these are two pictures he took of his wife and his child in the bedroom. And you can see the baby and the mother. And again, you don't have to travel far. You can photograph your family, you can photograph in your own neighborhood. These pictures of Elliott's are so human and tell such great stories. And often, people don't photograph their families and sometimes they're the best pictures-- photograph friends and family. You're there, you're close, you're intimate. And you can make some of the best pictures just working close to home.

I think the greatest thing I learned from Elliott was just simply watching him work and seeing things that he would stop and observe and be fascinated by. And you realize that there's great pictures everywhere. You just have to be attentive and you need to be curious and seize the opportunity when it presents itself. So that's what I really learned from Elliott-- just really watching him walk through the airport and photograph things which maybe I missed or not seen. But he had a very keen eye and a great sense of observation.

Another influential book that I looked at early in my career was Minamata by Eugene Smith. And this was a book about how a company in Japan had been polluting the water. And this contamination was creating a lot of birth defects. And he was very passionately against what was happening. And he went there to document that story.

And one of the photographs that he made while covering Minamata was, I think, one of the great photographs of all time. And there's no picture which embodies the quality of

compassion and tells the story of a mother and a child. So this is the picture, which I think is just one of the most amazing pictures I've ever seen.

The love and compassion this mother has for the foreign child is profound.

Unfortunately, when Eugene Smith passed away, the estate went to his wife, who made a promise to the mother and to the family that that picture would never be published again. And to me, it's such a tragedy because that picture really tells an incredible story. Such a sense of compassion between this mother and this deformed child. And to me, it's one of the great travesties in photography that we can't actually see that picture anymore. It's no longer able to be published.

This book, *The Americans*, again, was a huge influence, not only on myself, but probably every photographer who's looked at it since.

He did this road trip across America and it was this really poetic way of looking at the world. It wasn't really about great composition or great light. But it was about great stories and about people and humanity. And this is what makes it so special-- is the way his looking at the US as an outsider and making these kind of wonderful comments. This sort of critique of American society, I think, was really kind of very seminal work in photography that is still today, as you kind of look through the pages, there's so many incredible pictures. In fact, I'd like to pick one.

There was this incredible picture of a black nanny with this white child in Charleston, South Carolina. And you can imagine-- you kind of, in a way, make up your own story about the picture of this child who's privileged, being cared for and loved by this black woman. And the expression on the child's face is so ambiguous, but yet in a way, kind of frightening. It's quite astonishing, this expression.

Let me find another picture.

I think one of my favorite pictures of all time is this elevator operator in Miami Beach. And there's this very pretty young woman who's opening the elevator door. She is an elevator operator and she has this kind of lost, melancholy, lonely kind of despair. It's a very kind of a sad picture in a way, but yet I think it's full of emotion and full of life and full of truth.

And she wishes she could be sort of anywhere or she's imagining something in her life. But one of the great things about photography and art is that you can interpret a picture-- you can make up a story, have some fantasy

**about giving it meaning giving it purpose. And it can be
your own story. And maybe sometimes your story is
better than the actual story itself.**