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# Iconographies of Suffering, Wars, and the Empire's Media

Fri, October 9, 10:00 to 11:45am, Sheraton Centre, Pine

**Session Submission Type:** Paper Session: Traditional Format

## Abstract

The iconography of suffering, in particular the representation of human suffering as a “product of wrath, divine or human,” has a long tradition in art according to the critic Susan Sontag. Paintings and sculptures were the earliest representations of human bodies in pain. In the late 19th century, white American photographers captured the violent take-over of Native land by photographing Native corpses after a massacre. But such photographs of genocide were not visual texts of Native or human suffering, but were in fact celebrations of the culture of Anglo Saxon supremacy over “red savagery,” and the romance of the American Empire. With these contradictory meanings in mind, our panel considers different media texts about American wars in South Asia (i.e. the War on Terror), Southeast Asia (i.e. the Philippine-American War and the Vietnam War), and the Middle East. We consider the representation of human suffering and resistance in different texts: protest music from the late 1960s (Gonzalves); travel essays by Sontag (Aguilar-San Juan); photographs from the Philippines (Balce); and theories on cultural globalization, digital media and empire in the 21st century (Chakravartty). Our multi-disciplinary panel on media and empire asks the following: What is at stake when human suffering or political resistance are rendered visible? Or under what conditions are suffering or protest understandable and acceptable in the era of surveillance, drone deaths and the carceral state? To paraphrase Anne McClintock, if scholars live in a time of “a crisis of violence and the visible,” how do we see or understand “the violence that the imperial state attempts to render invisible,” while also seeing/ understanding the ordinary, “the spectral, disfigured people,” who live in actual sites of war, torture and destruction?

## Sub Unit

American Studies Association Annual Meeting

## Chair

*Shirley Jennifer Lim*, State University of New York, Stony Brook (NY)

## Individual Submissions

**Protest Music in the Belly of the Beast: Paredon Records in Europe** - *Theodore S. Gonzalves*, University of Maryland, Baltimore County (MD)

**What Vietnam Did for Susan Sontag** - *Karin Aguilar-San Juan*, Macalester College (MN)

**Philippine Photographs and the Tsunami of History: Seeing Leyte and Samar** - *Nerissa Balce*, State University of New York, Stony Brook (NY)

**The Infrastructures of the Empire of Liberty** - *Paula Chakravarty*, New York University (NY)

## Comment

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Session Submission Summary