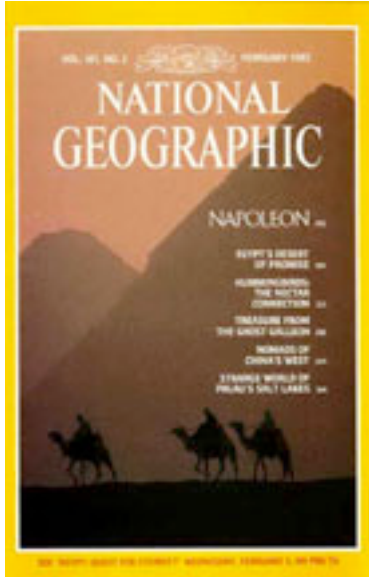


ETHICS IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY



There have been many cases of digital manipulation over the past 20 years or so, the first of note being the famous pyramids cover of National Geographic in 1982. National Geographic had a horizontal photo of the pyramids in Egypt and wanted to make a vertical cover from it. They put the photo in a computer and squeezed the pyramids together - a difficult task in real life but an easy task for the computer. They referred to it as the "retroactive repositioning of the photographer," (one of the great euphemisms of our age) saying that if the photographer had been a little to one side or the other, this is what he

would have gotten. The photographer was not 10 feet to the right and he did not get the photo they wanted so they created a visual lie. They damaged their credibility and (as I said before) taste issues have a short life span, ethics issues do not go away. Here we are almost 20 years later and we are still talking about what Geographic did.

Sports Illustrated recently produced a special edition for Connecticut on the UConn National Championship basketball season. In one photo, they showed a star player, Ricky Moore, going up for a lay up with another player, Kevin Freeman, in the frame. They also used the same photo on the cover of the regular edition of the magazine, cropped tighter but with Kevin Freeman removed. I guess he cluttered up the cover, so he was expendable.

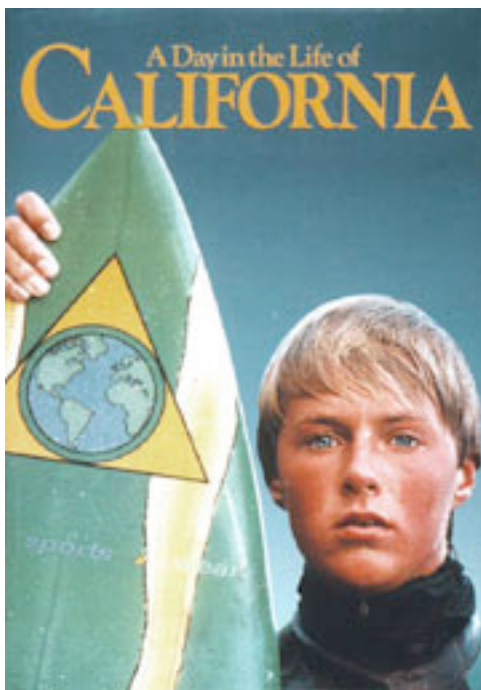
The point I want to make here is that, if Sports Illustrated had not used the same



photo twice, they would not have been caught. The computer allows for seamless changes that are impossible to see and, if you shoot with an electronic camera, you do not even have film to act as a referent. How many times has Sports Illustrated or TIME or NEWSWEEK or any of a long list of newspapers and magazines changed a photo and we the reading public not known about it? This is the Pandora's Box of the computer age.

It is not just in the computer that photographers and editors can lie. We can lie by setting up photos or by being willing partners to photo ops. These things are as big, if not bigger, threats to our profession as the computers. The L. A. TIMES ran a photo of a fireman dousing his head with water from a swimming pool as a house burned in the background. In doing preparations for contest entries, they discovered that the photographer had said to the fireman something along the lines of, "You know what would make a good photo? If you went over by the pool and poured water on your head." The photo was a set up. It was withdrawn from competition and the photographer was disciplined severely.

This is as much a lie as what can be done in PhotoShop. Neither is acceptable.



"A Day in the Life" series of books has a long history of manipulated covers. In A Day in the Life of California, for example, the photo was shot on a gray day as a horizontal. The hand came from another frame; the surfboard was moved closer to the surfer's head and the sky was made blue to match his eyes. They had about 30,000 images to pick from and could not find one that looked like California to them, so they had to create an image- an image of what they wanted California to look like.

The list can go on for pages: NEWSWEEK straightened the teeth of Bobbi McCaughey, the mother of the

sextuplets; NEWSDAY ran a photo supposedly showing Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding skating together a day before the event really happened; PEOPLE ran a photo of famous breast cancer survivors made from five separate negatives; The St. Louis Post Dispatch removed a Coke can from a photo of their Pulitzer Prize winner. This just scratches the surface. How many cases have not become known? The cumulative effect is the gradual erosion of the credibility of entire profession and I am not sure we can win this war. We are being bombarded from all sides, from movies, television, advertisements, the Internet, with images that are not real, that are created in computers and documentary photojournalism is the victim.