



## **Humane Insight: Looking at Images of African American Suffering and Death**

*Courtney R. Baker*

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In the history of black America, the image of the mortal, wounded, and dead black body has long been looked at by others from a safe distance. Courtney Baker questions the relationship between the spectator and victim and urges viewers to move beyond the safety of the "gaze" to cultivate a capacity for humane insight toward representations of human suffering. Utilizing the visual studies concept termed the "look," Baker interrogates how the notion of humanity was articulated and recognized in oft-referenced moments within the African American experience: the graphic brutality of the 1834 Lalaurie affair; the photographic exhibition of lynching, Without Sanctuary ; Emmett Till's murder and funeral; and the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. Contemplating these and other episodes, Baker traces how proponents of black freedom and dignity used the visual display of violence against the black body to galvanize action against racial injustice. An innovative cultural study that connects visual theory to African American history, Humane Insight asserts the importance of ethics in our analysis of race and visual culture, and reveals how representations of pain can become the currency of black liberation from injustice.

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