

What It's Like to Document History: An Interview with Award-winning Photojournalist Evelyn Hockstein

JUL 10, 2020

CAITLYN EDWARDS

Share 32

Tweet

2 COMMENTS



Photojournalist Evelyn Hockstein is no stranger to pivoting from one project to the next. As a freelancer, she thrives when bouncing from story to story. Her colorful career has included coverage of ethnic violence in Nairobi, the devastation of tornados in Alabama, sexual assault on college campuses, South Korean ballerinas, elections, you name it.

She's worked for *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, in addition to countless humanitarian organizations including The World Health Organization and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Evelyn has won two Pictures of the Year International awards, the Days Japan International Photojournalism award, and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.



caucuses, the results, and all of the cruffle with the counting, plus the problems with the new system? That was huge news, but that feels like a year ago.”

As a Washingtonian myself, I've seen Evelyn's photos countless times in The Washington Post. And last week in between her coverage of the protests, we sat down for an interview about her career, what she's seen during her daily coverage of the protests and her experiences as a woman in the field of photojournalism.

(Funny enough, I learned she's also from my hometown of Silver Spring, Maryland. We went to neighboring high schools. We love the same coffee shop and community space [Kefa Café](#). And it's that level of familiarity with the Washington, DC area and its residents that make her photographs of recent events that much more special.)

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and length. Cover photo by Craig Hudson.

When I was browsing through your Instagram, I saw you went from covering the election to the coronavirus, including a socially distanced Seder with your parents, which I loved. And now, obviously, the Black Lives Matter and George Floyd protests in DC. How has all that bouncing around been for you?

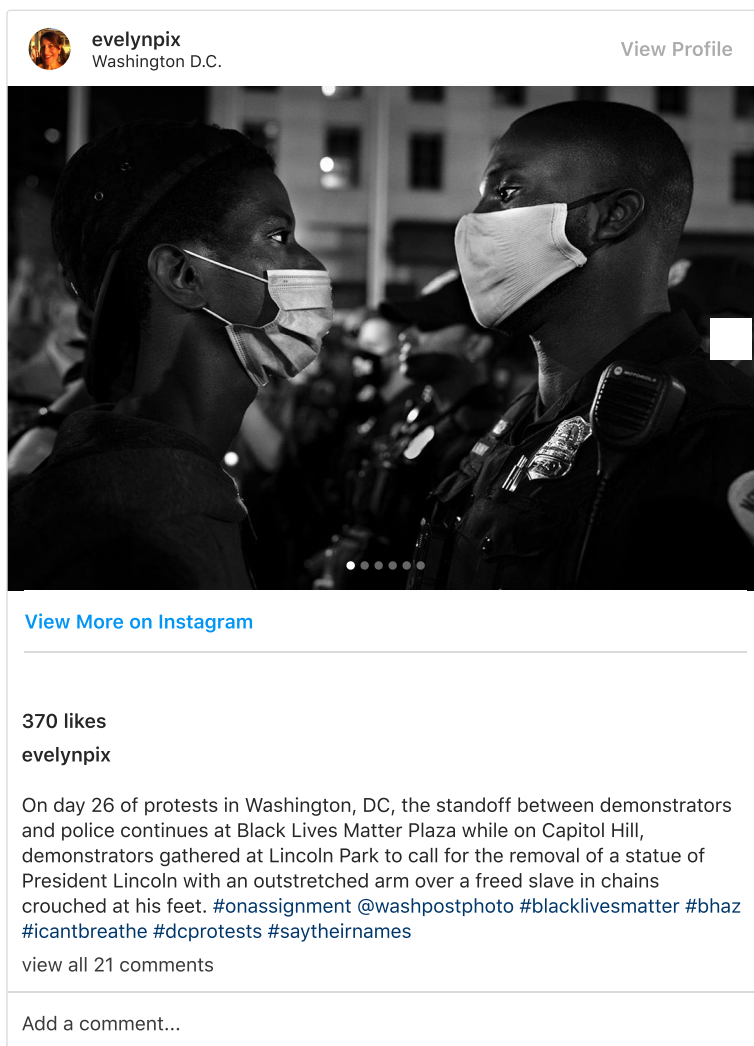
If you work at a newspaper, you get used to going to wherever the action is or wherever you're needed: covering the school system, a protest, or covering Capitol Hill, whatever. It's always different and I thrive on that.

But these have been extremely dramatic pivots of late. I mentioned Iowa, but that really does feel like ages ago. And then, I went from the pandemic pretty much straight into the Black Lives Matter protests.

I think the hardest shift was to go from almost total isolation, little work, and limited physical or in-person contact during quarantine to going out on the street every day and being side by side in physical contact with thousands of protestors. It also went from being a sort of quiet, almost paranoid story about illness to this explosive, inspirational and at times scary story of massive protest.

That was a little bit jarring and scary and I just thought, “I have to make a decision now. Do I want to put myself at risk? Is it important to put myself at risk?” And for me, that was clear. I could not not cover what was going on. It's so historic. I felt that was a risk worth taking.





[View More on Instagram](#)

370 likes

evelynpix

On day 26 of protests in Washington, DC, the standoff between demonstrators and police continues at Black Lives Matter Plaza while on Capitol Hill, demonstrators gathered at Lincoln Park to call for the removal of a statue of President Lincoln with an outstretched arm over a freed slave in chains crouched at his feet. #onassignment @washpostphoto #blacklivesmatter #bhaz #icantbreathe #dcprotests #saytheirnames

[view all 21 comments](#)

Add a comment...

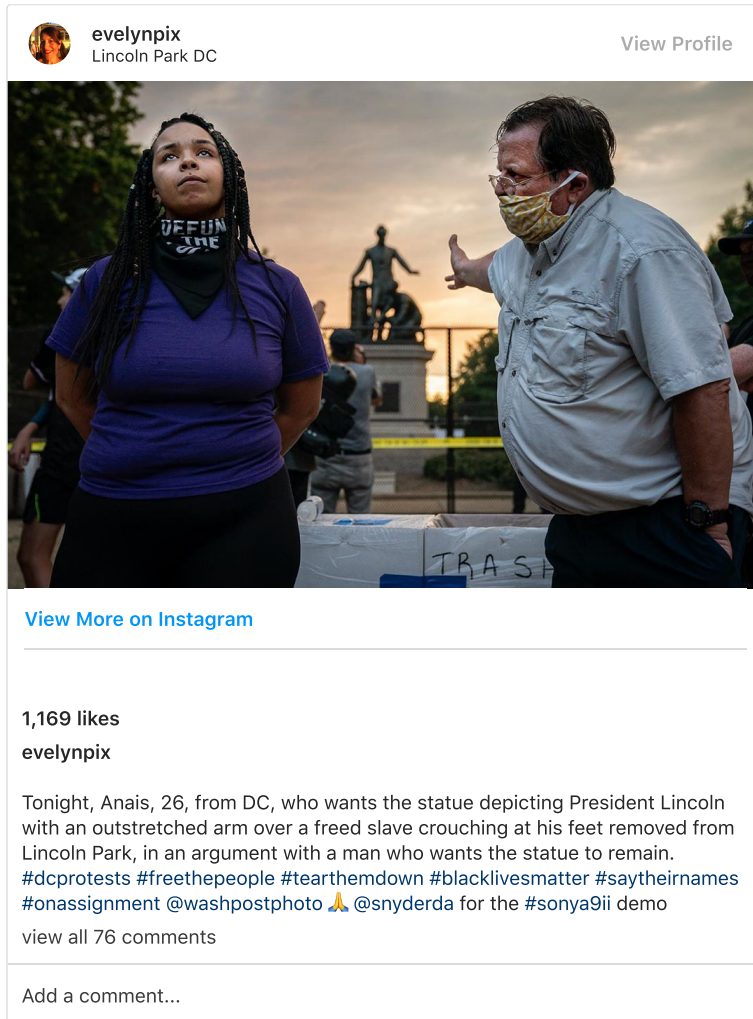
Oh, I can't imagine. We've recently talked a lot about the difference between being a staff photographer and some of the protections that are put in place for them versus all of these freelancers who are out there shooting, just like you said, risking their health. At the same time, either way both groups are also putting themselves at risk because of the documented violence against members of the press. It's been amazing to just see people say, "You know what? This is worth it. This is historical." And thankfully, I think a lot of freelancers have been able to get some of their photos picked up, which is encouraging to see.

Yeah, definitely. The Post was definitely concerned and asked that I be very careful. They wanted me to get a vest, but there just weren't any vests available at the moment because of everything going on there was a run on that kind of stuff. I was so surprised, but it's another reflection of the mood at this moment in time. I was worried they might tell me I couldn't go out and shoot but then they relented and just asked that I stay on the periphery. I'm not sure I could really stay on the periphery of anything, but I am cautious and try to gauge the scene and figure out how to be safe. My editors were concerned about my safety and we were in constant contact, which is reassuring. But does a freelancer really know what that means if something goes south?

To be honest, I didn't think I needed a vest of any kind. Sure, anything can change at any time, but I haven't felt that I've needed something like that here in Washington, DC. I wear a helmet. That was the most important thing, and eye protection and a mask.

to work when the pandemic ended, or it was safer. But I also would be starving as a freelancer. So that's the challenge of it.

I had a question about a particular image of yours. The image is of a woman, Anais who is standing by the Emancipation Memorial in Lincoln Park, and a man is yelling at her. You note in your caption that he wanted to keep the memorial. What did you make of that exchange when you were photographing it?



That was really a dynamic moment because when I captured Anais and that expression, it spoke of her frustration and exhaustion with not only this person but also the weight of everyone who was trying to tell her to think about something differently that she disagreed with and she just wasn't having it.

There are other images of her engaging with that man but they weren't as powerful. When I saw this frame and other images while I was editing, I knew "This is the shot." I usually over-file and can't decide which frame is best and send my editors way too many images, but I actually took a screen grab of the back of my camera and texted my editor that I was sending this image. I never do that. I just knew. It was late and I wanted him to know this was coming. They changed the front of the metro section to get it in the late edition of the paper.

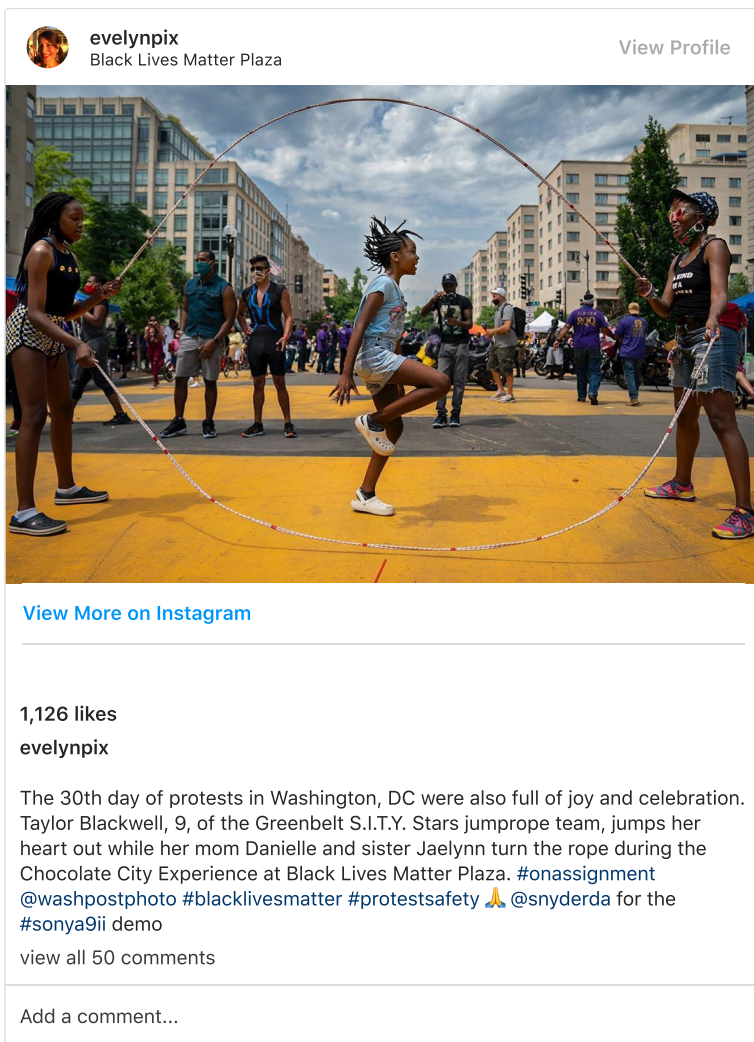
You know, I don't need to see her arguing back. It's all there in her expression. "There's no more to be said. I'm tired of listening. Things need to change. I've had enough of this." And I think that's why it



riding a big wave of anger, frustration, yelling, debating, arguing, calm, the whole human spectrum of emotion.

On the flip side of that, one of the things that I've also really enjoyed with your coverage is you've been able to capture plenty of tender and joyful moments. Even before Juneteenth, I think there was this perception that a lot of what was happening with the protests was violent. Do you have any favorite moments of joy or tenderness?

I'm completely smitten with Taylor in the jump rope photo. I mean, the joy and delight on her face is — and her mom is smiling at her in that frame as well — she's just having a blast. That's definitely my favorite.



People kept saying things like, “Be safe,” or “Take care out there,” but it’s really been extremely peaceful since the first few days of clashes with a few exceptions — like when protestors tried to take down the Andrew Jackson statue. There was another day of tear gassing and fighting with the police, and of course there was that day when peaceful protestors were gassed and forced out of Lafayette Park so President Trump could take his photo holding the Bible outside St. John’s Church.

So there are many beautiful moments like people praying outside of the African American Museum of History and Culture, or families coming together at the Black Mama’s march, but for me it’s still the jump rope. I think the double dutch resonated with the African American community. I got many



I loved the way Taylor's hair was flying. Everything about this photo felt free; she's enjoying herself and she's having fun in the newly renamed Black Lives Matter Plaza. There is a sense of hope and optimism because it's happening there. The new Black Lives Matter plaza is a significant place for this movement and this historic time period, and so much conflict has occurred in that same plaza. This leaves me with a feeling of optimism for the future.

You might be protesting, or clashing with police, but you can also be celebrating community and family, or feeling exhilaration and joyfulness and hope in that same space. And I think that's what makes it so special.

I read your 2017 op-ed for The Guardian when Nikon came out with their D850. Only male photographers were selected for its promotion, which admittedly, was quite an oversight and not a good move.

What has been your experience as a woman in photojournalism?

I think overall my experience has been... it's been okay. It doesn't diminish from all of the other stories I know about women in this field. I can't speak for women of color, or transgender women, but I can speak for women in general. We have certainly struggled with access to assignments, assumptions about what assignments might be right for women — especially around “dangerous assignments” — a lack of female mentors, and sexual harassment across the industry.

I feel like, for the most part, I've managed to thrive. But it became obvious from the start of my career when I was an intern at Reuters that, although there were female photographers and stringers, it was a male-dominated photography industry and photo unit.

When the Second Intifada flared up in Israel in 2000, this was a time when magazines, and days of the photo agencies, and magazines, every big name photojournalist was there covering these big international stories. It was a different era.

All of the firemen — they were called firemen, the photographers that got sent in from the wires or magazines to cover hot spots — they were all men. There were some women doing it, but I can only think of a couple who dropped in to cover major conflicts. I can name scores of men off the top of my head. We were definitely the exception to the rule.

But I don't think that ever stopped me or made me feel like I couldn't cover something. I was getting assignments and I was succeeding. But we weren't talking about the issues facing women in this industry like we are now.

I was covering King Hussein's funeral in Amman, and you're in crowds of tens of thousands of people, mostly men, and you are constantly being groped. Back then, it didn't even cross my mind to think I was sexually assaulted in any way. I just thought, “Well, I didn't get raped. I survived this. I'm in a crowd of tens of thousands of men in a culture where women are not doing what I'm doing.”

All of the female journalists were getting groped and we just went on doing our jobs. But during the Arab Spring, Lara Logan, was raped, which is so horrific. So I realize that could have happened, and I'm lucky it didn't. But also, at the time, I didn't assess that risk or consider the possibility of being gang-raped in a crowd. That sounds so crazy to me now that I didn't. So women are vulnerable on several fronts: physical risks because of our gender, and an industry that has been male-dominated and plagued with sexual harassment. At least I can raise my voice now.

That kind of unwanted touch — inappropriate isn't even the right word for it: it's a violation. And how



was having a conversation with the reporter about the issues young women are facing on college campuses that I thought about my own experiences and for first time I saw them in a different light and realized I had experienced something similar to these young women.

Thankfully, now, this is a conversation and we can better protect ourselves. It's not perfect, it's still evolving, but it's better.

evelynpix
2,350 followers [View Profile](#)

news / opinion / sport / arts / life
film / books / music / art & design / tv & radio / stage / more

One PR campaign, 32 photographers, no women.
Nikon has an optics problem
Evelyn Hockstein

[View More on Instagram](#)

53 likes
evelynpix

Byline @guardian !! Link to story in bio.
[view all 7 comments](#)

Add a comment...

With the Nikon campaign, that actually really shocked me. I thought, “Really? Am I so naïve for being shocked that this still happens?” It was so galling. The campaign obviously went through a whole series of people like, “Let’s conceive an idea. Okay, this is our concept. Now let’s storyboard it. Let’s think about who we’re going to pick to be in this.” It’s a whole marketing campaign for a multinational corporation. How many eyes did this go through? And not one person raised a hand to say, “Oh, wait



That was a huge wake-up call, that a multinational corporation could be so blind. And I just thought, "Open your eyes, Evelyn. These inequalities still exist." And I got some heat for writing the editorial too, because Nikon USA supports Women Photojournalists of Washington (WPOW), of which I was Vice President of at the time.

I guess what I'm trying to say is, every time you think things are moving forward, something comes along that is so blatant, it gets you so frustrated and angry so there's a whole ton, a whole hell of a lot more work to be done. And that Nikon campaign was just glaring. It was a slap in the face. There are so many talented women photographers based out of Asia, it was absurd.

Can you share a little bit about WPOW? I'm a huge Cheriss May fan and I see she's the current President.

I'm a fan of Cheriss too. I just saw her covering the Black Mama's March last week.

WPOW is a wonderful organization whose aim is to educate the world about women in photojournalism. There is a mentorship program in WPOW, along with other educational programs and social events.

WPOW wants to promote, support, and foster female photojournalists, both still and video. It's an awesome community of women to be part of.

I was the vice president and co-chair of the portfolio review, which is our biggest event of the year. We bring in editors from all the top magazines, newspapers, radio, TV, news sites, and other visual editors, bring them to Corcoran Museum, and have a seminar and portfolio review that is open to anyone. We sell tickets and offer scholarships.

My co-chair Kara Frame, and I really pushed to bring in editors from outside of D.C. We started to get several New York Times editors to travel in for it, an AP editor from Philadelphia, Reading the Pictures in Chicago, New York based magazine editors, and we've had such prominent women photojournalists and video journalists as our speakers.

As a non-profit we can't cover the costs of editors to travel to DC, but so many of them value the mission of WPOW they make the trip. It's become such a marquee event, I'm very proud of what we've accomplished and how the event has grown over the years. We've created a space for visual journalists to get their work seen, support the mission of WPOW, and strengthen the photojournalism community. It's a really special day.

You can also be a FOWPOW, a friend of WPOW which is for anyone who doesn't identify as a woman. You can't be a member of WPOW unless you identify as a woman, but we have programming for everyone plus happy hours that we host and other social events with photo organizations like White House News photographers, or APA, or NPPA.



And I think that's super valuable.

Follow Evelyn's work on her Instagram [@evelynpix](#) and check out [her recent APA Talk with APA NY's Chairman of the Board Travis Keyes alongside Jamie Rose, owner of Momenta](#). You can also hear her on [Around The Lens](#), a weekly podcast about visual journalism which she co-hosts.

All Instagram posts were embedded with the photographer's permission.

About the author: *Caitlyn Edwards is the Community Marketing Manager at [PhotoShelter](#), which regularly publishes [resources](#) for photographers. She has a degree in Peace & Conflict Resolution and is religious about black coffee and great wine (but never together). This article was also published [here](#).*

TAGS: DOCUMENTARY, EDITORIAL, EVELYNHOCKSTEIN, INTERVIEW, JOURNALISM, PHOTOJOURNALISM, PHOTOJOURNALIST, PULITZERPRIZE

Share 32

Tweet

2 COMMENTS

Promoted Links by Taboola

Alex Morgan's Wild Ride From Unknown To Superstar

SportsChew

Nikon is Sorry That the D850 Sold Out Before It's Even Out

At 54, Elisabeth Shue Leaves Nothing To The Imagination

FinancialAdvisorHeroes


100MP+ and IBIS Coming to a Canon EOS R Camera: Report

Take A Deep Breath Before You See Bridget Fonda At 56

MisterStocks


The Tragic Death of My Nikon D850





evelynpix
Charlottesville, Virginia

[View Profile](#)



[View More on Instagram](#)

77 likes

evelynpix

@evelynpix here -- A torchlight march of of white supremacists across the UVA campus marks the start of 24 hours of hatred and terror in Charlottesville, Virginia. The marchers chanted, "White Lives Matter," "You will not replace us," and "Jews will not replace us." I was #onassignment for The Washington Post. #Charlottesville #documentyourdays #blacklivesmatter #lovetrumpshate #wpowdc #womenphotograph

[view all 14 comments](#)

Add a comment...

Mentorship is something that we personally care a ton about. And I always like to ask if there's any advice that you would give up-and-coming photographers, be it women in photojournalism, or just kind of a younger photographer who's just getting started?

Networking and meeting people is so important as well as shooting and constantly updating your work. Attend events, or get involved with WPOW or another photo organization to which will help build your network and meet editors and other photographers so you can get your name out there and get editors to recognize your work.

I think developing relationships is probably the best way to go about getting into your local photojournalism community and getting assignments.

Did you have a mentor?

I wish. I always wanted one. I still want one! I remember when we were starting our mentee program at WPOW and I was asked to be on the mentor side, I was like, "I think I want to apply and get a mentor." Because it doesn't matter what age you are. You can always use a mentor. And your focus can shift, and your goals, and taking your work to another level.

