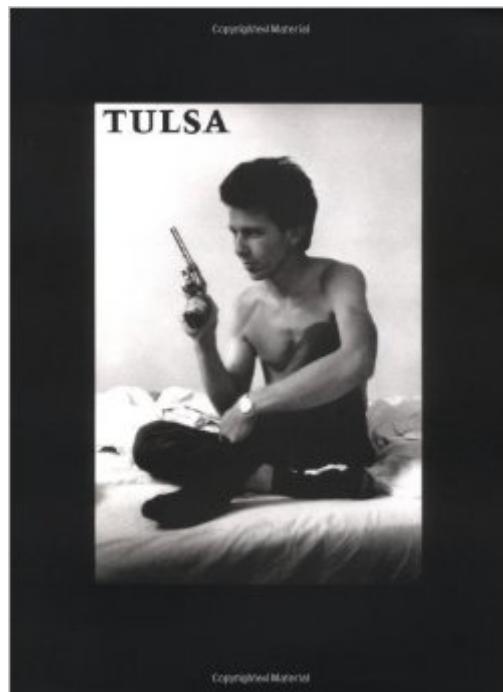


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# Tulsa



## Synopsis

When it first appeared in 1971, Larry Clark's groundbreaking book *Tulsa* sparked immediate controversy across the nation. Its graphic depictions of sex, violence, and drug abuse in the youth culture of Oklahoma were acclaimed by critics for stripping bare the myth that Middle America had been immune to the social convulsions that rocked America in the 1960s. The raw, haunting images taken in 1963, 1968, and 1971 document a youth culture progressively overwhelmed by self-destruction -- and are as moving and disturbing today as when they first appeared. Originally published in a limited paperback version and republished in 1983 as a limited hardcover edition commissioned by the author, rare-book dealers sell copies of this book for more than a thousand dollars. Now in both hardcover and paperback editions from Grove Press, this seminal work of photographic art and social history is once again available to the general public.

## Book Information

Paperback: 64 pages

Publisher: Grove Press; Second edition edition (November 30, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802137482

ISBN-13: 978-0802137487

Product Dimensions: 9 x 0.2 x 12 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ (24 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #110,717 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #79 inÂ Books > Arts & Photography > Photography & Video > Travel #97 inÂ Books > Arts & Photography > Photography & Video > Photojournalism & Essays > Photo Essays #104 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Children's Studies

## Customer Reviews

"*Tulsa*" was Larry Clark's first book of photography. It made him famous instantly. The stark black-and-white visual style proved to be highly influential, and has been cited as an inspiration by such directors as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and Gus Van Sant. But perhaps more importantly, "*Tulsa*" was perceived as an uncommonly honest work, because Clark actually lived the life that he depicted. He was accepted by the world of marginals and drug addicts, he knew all of the characters in the book personally. And furthermore, "*Tulsa*" clearly shows the consequences of the marginal lifestyle, such as accidental gunshot wounds and dead babies. All this gave Clark a lot of

credibility. The book is honest, in the sense that all the photographs truthfully depict what occurred, and Clark probably didn't need to set any of them up. But nonetheless, it is very highly and deliberately stylized. In fact, most of the dramatic effect comes from the stylization, and not the immediate content of the photographs. Let's examine how Clark does this. Consider the opening paragraph: "i was born in tulsa oklahoma in 1943. when i was sixteen i started shooting amphetamine. i shot with my friends everyday for three years and then left town but i've gone back through the years. once the needle goes in it never comes out. L.C." The paragraph is brilliant in its dramatic conciseness. It provides all of the context one needs to understand the photographs. At the same time, it reveals almost nothing about Clark. But this very lack of information already creates a certain sense of mystery and tension. The last sentence evokes an air of inevitable tragedy, and Clark's self-effacing use of initials seems to downplay his personal role and suggest that the tragedy may be universal, not limited to specific names. The only other text in the book consists of a handful of captions. Almost all of the photographs are untitled, so Clark's choice of words for the captions is painstakingly deliberate. One of the few titled photographs is the one on the cover of the book. The caption reads, "dead 1970". The opposite page is blank except for the one line, "death is more perfect than life". If there is a more perfect evocation of gloomy youthful romanticism, I'd like to see it. Probably Billy Mann assumed that pose by himself, and Clark was merely there to photograph it. But in this book and with this caption, Mann becomes a kind of tragic hero. There is nothing natural about his pose. It obviously glamorizes him, along with the self-destructive quote on the opposite page. But the caption's merciless conciseness makes Mann's death seem inevitable, and it also suggests vulnerability and naivete on his part, as if he didn't know that his guns and posturing wouldn't be able to save him. In fact, the best way to read "Tulsa" is not as a Naturalistic document, a social commentary, or an indictment of society, but as a classical tragedy. The opening makes it obvious that something terrible will happen, but the photographs purposefully start early, with the tragedy a long way away. The first two photographs show the two principal characters, David Roper and Billy Mann, whose names are given in the captions. Clark makes them look touchingly young. Roper is squatting down with his chin on his arm and looking directly at the camera. He looks serious and lost in thought. Mann has a worried look on his face. In different ways, they look earnest and vulnerable. Another picture shows Roper hunting in the woods, looking up into a tree with what looks like boyish delight. The first scenes of drug use take place in a well-lit dining room with a white tablecloth and a picture of Jesus. The point is obvious -- Clark is trying to create a sense of innocence that will be lost by the end of the book. He doesn't show how the characters were introduced to drugs or how they obtain them. In some sense, drugs aren't really

the cause of the characters' downfall. Like in classical tragedy, it's more like fate. The rest of the book achieves its power through contrast with these early scenes. Towards the end, Roper is portrayed as a big, shaggy junkie with a cynical grin. If this part is shocking, it's because one can't help but compare this image with the thoughtful boy on the first page. The settings also get progressively seedier, with much heavier use of darkness and shadow, underscoring the book's sense of inexorability. Then, of course, there's a picture showing a pregnant woman shooting speed, shortly followed by a picture of a dead baby in a coffin. These events are like a sign that redemption has become impossible. But the characters don't seem to really want it, anyway. And, in the very end, there's a photograph of three naked teenagers preparing to shoot speed. They're much younger than the other characters in this part of the book, so there's a hint of that innocence shown in the very beginning. But the implication is that the same conclusion is equally inevitable, and in fact will arrive much faster this time around. And yet the photograph is undeniably sensual, creating a feeling of subtle regret. Clark's later work doesn't read in the same way. His second book "Teenage Lust," for example, reprises many of the scenes from "Tulsa," but contains much more text and information, and ends with a very long stream-of-consciousness autobiographical narrative. In some sense this decreases the power of the images. "Teenage Lust" is still worth seeking out (as of this writing, it has not yet been reprinted in an affordable edition), but "Tulsa" has a fatalistic mystique that stands apart from anything else Clark has ever made.

After seeing the recent Larry Clark collection at the International Center of Photography in New York, I decided I needed this collection. I had never experienced this side of Tulsa (the city) before. I make frequent trips there for daily outings (it's only 2 hours away), but I've never experienced the harsh reality of the meth addict lifestyle that was portrayed in this book. Of course, that was 40 years ago, times change, and the drug is more commonplace in this area now. What I've always liked about Larry Clark's work is that it doesn't set out to glorify situations such as those portrayed in "Tulsa". It's more about cause and effect. The reality that your actions bring about some other action. Playing with guns can lead to accidental gunshot wounds. Pregnant? Shooting up may kill the baby. The photographs here are grim, disturbing, yet beautiful. Something which isn't the subject of much glamourized photography. I just wish his other books were re-released.

The collection of photographs in Larry Clark's *Tulsa* are undisputedly one of the most important and compelling photo essays executed. The book itself, the soft cover version, was a disappointment when received. It felt more like a coloring book. Pay the extra money and buy this in hard cover.

A very disturbing series of photographs that tells an interesting story of depraved behavior. I enjoyed the selection of photos that I saw at the Denver art museum so I ordered the whole book. I thought I knew what I was in for but some of the photos are still hard for me to look at. While there are a lot of photos that are just plain creepy there are some that are also just plain interesting and even clever. I'm glad I bought it, but I sure don't leaf through it everyday.

I was married to one of the children depicted in this book - yes her parents were 'speed freaks' and there are 2 conflicting stories -- (1) it was a murder-suicide and (2) a bad drug deal gone wrong. Knowing both of the children involved in this, I feel for them. They went to live with an uncaring, selfish 'aunt' who did god knows what to them. Suffice it to say, hence a divorce from one of the daughters. This book is the REAL DEAL -- as my ex has the news clippings to prove it. Meth was a big deal in the south at that time; then crack took over and now meth again. It's worth reading, and getting and understanding of drugs --then and now - have an impact BTW I am a paramedic, and my ex (who I will not ID from the book) also is a paramedic. So we seen it. Her more than me.

Very disturbing but a true glimpse into that reality. The images will forever haunt me.

captivating, disturbing, alluring, haunting. This work is powerful in its capture of youthfulness at its "edgiest." If you enjoy photography that captures all of the uncensored elements of life, then this work is a must.

I bought this book because I'm from Tulsa. I had no clue what it was about. It is a photography book. The book is full of pictures of drug use, guns and nudity, so if that offends you then this book is a no no.

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