

War photography



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Perhaps no event susceptible to being photographed has received more attention than war.

Whether as a record for the events that took place, a logical tool, or a form of propaganda, photography has played a critical part in forming the public's response to global and local conflicts. Photographers report the physical impact and the emotional effects of war; a destroyed building, a dead child or a struggling soldier. However, we ask; should war really be portrayed in this manner? Are pictures really worth a 1000 words? What does it mean to see such images? Firstly, one reason why war should be portrayed in this method is because the public needs to know. The photographs that are taken provide information about the conflicts. A member of the public who is in support for his or her country may want the photo that illustrates victorious and the joyous moments, a family member of a soldier at war might want to observe where and in what conditions the soldier is in. generally, human beings are curious.

They always want to know. The press takes advantage of this curiosity and publishes the images in newspapers and magazines. A photographer's duty is to describe his surroundings by using his camera; it is up to the viewer to judge the rights and wrongs. A photographer cannot be held responsible if an image is unsuitable.

Because photographers are merely artists with a camera, they should be allowed their own artistic freedom. This statement, however, does not change the fact that altering the content of a photograph in any way is a deception to the public. The photographer may play with lighting effects,

camera angles, and contrast to alter the makeup of the photo, but this does not directly change the content of the image. People are satisfied with this type of alteration.

The problems arise when programs such as Photoshop are used to digitally change the context of the image by changing and modifying the content of the still image. The war in Vietnam occurred because the American leaders claimed that the Vietnamese leaders had immoral communist ideas. The image was of a burnt naked Vietnamese girl who was fleeing from the flaming napalm. This image helped to sum up the war in Vietnam and told the world of the atrocities of the American soldiers. One can argue that pictures of a undressed girl cannot be published.

This is a valid point; however this image was one exception for the editor. He or she also knew that the public needed to know. War photography also raises questions about freedom of the press, with government control inevitably at issue. There is always the possibility that censorship by the government and self-censorship by photographers, editors, and publishers, combine to limit what we see about any particular military situation. In World War I, there was heavy censorship, access to the front line for photographers was not allowed, and there were only few photographs of actual combat. Many people may support the idea of censorship, as there are many images that are not liable for public observation.

The BBC 6 o clock news cannot show the shocking images of conflict. They are well aware of the type of viewers who watch the program. On the other hand, photographers often intrude on private grief. Many subjects of the

photographs do not desire the cameras flashing near their face during a moment of grief. Everyone has the right to privacy, but why do photographers take this right away? There may be a few occasions where the photographer has asked permission taking the image, the most notable being the photo of a lady embracing the gravestone of her husband.

This may be one occasion where the photographer has asked after taking the image. How many other photographers even make the effort to ask? Not many. Instead, they sometimes go against the subject's request and carry on with the image. For example, when Princess Diana died, the Paparazzi still took photos of her dead body even when the officials refused them. This is an example of the intrusion that photographers make on private grief.

Furthermore, People are unaware of what photographers experience in their jobs.

Photographers go through very situations to achieve that ' special shot'. They can be described as the companions of the conflict. They almost share the same discomfort as civilians and the troops. From some of the war photographers we see, we can almost figure out how close they are to the conflict. The pressure and the competition they have from other photojournalist enable them to put their lives at risk; just to capture a better picture. War photography can also cause long term mental illnesses.

Some photographers, who work in extreme conditions often, experience the effects of being subjected to dead corpses, hungry children, burning buildings, people suffering from famines. The repetitive exposure causes compassion fatigue to the photographer, and may even lead to death in

some of the worst cases. One major example is South African photo journalist and war photographer Kevin Carter, who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1994 for a picture taken in Sudan. The picture shows a vulture behind a crouching and starving child.

Carter took the picture but failed help the child. He committed suicide. In his farewell letter he says: “ I’m haunted by the memories of the murder, of the corpses, of the rage, of the pain ...

, of starving and wounded children, of trigger-happy madmen ...The pain of life surmounts the joy to an extent that no joy exists anymore..

.” The speech says how bad his situation was, his suicide proves to the public that he really was affected by the scenes. War photography has its good values and the bad values. The good values are that the public finds out more, the photographs help change opinion; whereas the bad values are that photography intrudes on private grief and causes affects the photographer. Overall war photography should still exist. Through the aid of these photographs, people generate their opinions on conflict, feuds and other general combat issues.