



CONCOURS CENTRALE-SUPÉLEC

Anglais

MP, PC, PSI

2016

4 heures

Calculatrices interdites

L'usage de tout système électronique ou informatique est interdit dans cette épreuve.

Rédiger en anglais et en 500 mots une synthèse des documents proposés, qui devra obligatoirement comporter un titre. Indiquer avec précision, à la fin du travail, le nombre de mots utilisés (titre inclus), un écart de 10% en plus ou en moins sera accepté.

Ce sujet propose les 4 documents suivants :

- la déclaration *Why photograph war?* de James Nachtwey écrite en 1985 ;
- un billet du blog *Media Myth Alert* de W. Joseph Campbell, publié le 20 mai 2014 ;
- un article intitulé **Raw, Relevant History** de Victor Davis Hanson, paru dans le *New York Times* le 18 avril 1998 ;
- **History of the airplane**, un poème de Lawrence Ferlinghetti écrit en réaction aux attentats du 11 septembre 2001 aux États-Unis.

L'ordre dans lequel se présentent les documents est aléatoire.

Nachtwey's credo

In 1985, shortly before becoming a member of the world famous photo agency Magnum, the then 36-year-old James Nachtwey wrote the following text, a credo about the relevance of his work as a war photographer.

Why photograph war?

There has always been war. War is raging throughout the world at the present moment. And there is little reason to believe that war will cease to exist in the future. As man has become increasingly civilized, his means of destroying his fellow man have become ever more efficient, cruel and devastating.

Is it possible to put an end to a form of human behavior which has existed throughout history by means of photography? The proportions of that notion seem ridiculously out of balance. Yet, that very idea has motivated me.

For me, the strength of photography lies in its ability to evoke a sense of humanity. If war is an attempt to negate humanity, then photography can be perceived as the opposite of war and if it is used well it can be a powerful ingredient in the antidote to war.

In a way, if an individual assumes the risk of placing himself in the middle of a war in order to communicate to the rest of the world what is happening, he is trying to negotiate for peace. Perhaps that is the reason why those in charge of perpetuating a war do not like to have photographers around.

It has occurred to me that if everyone could be there just once to see for themselves what white phosphorous does to the face of a child or what unspeakable pain is caused by the impact of a single bullet or how a jagged piece of shrapnel can rip someone's leg off — if everyone could be there to see for themselves the fear and the grief, just one time, then they would understand that nothing is worth letting things get to the point where that happens to even one person, let alone thousands.

But everyone cannot be there, and that is why photographers go there — to show them, to reach out and grab them and make them stop what they are doing and pay attention to what is going on — to create pictures powerful enough to overcome the diluting effects of the mass media and shake people out of their indifference — to protest and by the strength of that protest to make others protest.

The worst thing is to feel that as a photographer I am benefiting from someone else's tragedy. This idea haunts me. It is something I have to reckon with every day because I know that if I ever allow genuine compassion to be overtaken by personal ambition I will have sold my soul. The stakes are simply too high for me to believe otherwise.

*James Nachtwey*¹

¹ James Nachtwey (March 14, 1948) is an American photojournalist and war photographer. He has been awarded the Overseas Press Club's Robert Capa Gold Medal five times and two World Press Photo awards.

Media Myth Alert³

Exaggerating the power of ‘napalm girl’ photo

May 29, 2014



‘Napalm girl,’
1972 (Nick Ut/AP)

The famous “napalm girl” photograph of June 1972 undeniably ranks among the most profound and disturbing images of the Vietnam War. Its power, though, is often overstated.

The photograph, taken by Nick Ut of the Associated Press, showed Vietnamese children terror-stricken by a misdirected napalm attack on their village by the South Vietnamese Air Force. At the center of image was a 9-year-old girl named Kim Phuc, shown screaming and naked as she fled. The photograph, formally titled “The Terror of War,” won a Pulitzer Prize in 1973.

In the years since then, a tendency has developed to attribute to the image effects that are far more powerful and decisive than it projected at the time.

For example, the Guardian newspaper in London asserted in a review the other day of an exhibit in France of the imagery of war that Ut’s photo “galvanized” American “public opinion and expedited the end of the Vietnam war.” Neither claim is accurate.

By June 1972, American public opinion had long since turned against the war in Vietnam. Nearly 60 percent of respondents to a Gallup poll conducted early in 1971 had said that the United States had made a mistake by sending troops to fight in Vietnam. (Gallup periodically has asked the question since 1965, when just 24 percent of respondents said it was a mistake to have sent troops to Vietnam. By August 1968, a majority of respondents said it had been a mistake.)

Ut’s photo can hardly be said to have galvanized opinion against the war: That shift had taken place years before.

Nor can it be said that the photo “expedited” the war’s end.

By June 1972, the war was essentially over for American forces in Vietnam. President Richard Nixon had announced in November 1971 that U.S. ground operations had ended in South Vietnam and by June 1972, nearly all U.S. combat units had been removed from the country.

Compelling though it was, the “napalm girl” photo exerted impact far less profound than is now believed.

But so what? Why is it problematic to overstate the image’s effects?

To do so is to indulge in a central flaw of a media-driven myth — that of media centrism, of exaggerating the power of the journalism, of attributing to news media greater influence than they really wield. To do so also is to misread and distort the historical record. No single photograph turned public opinion against the war in Vietnam or “expedited” its end: The war’s duration, its uncertain policy objectives, and its toll in dead and wounded all were far more decisive factors in the outcome of the conflict.

“Napalm girl” was an unsettling image, undeniably memorable. But it does not follow that it wielded immeasurable or decisive influence.

It did not.

<https://mediamythalert.wordpress.com/2014/05/29/>

² W. Joseph Campbell is a tenured full professor in the American University School of Communication’s Communication Studies program.

³ The Media Myth Alert blog calls attention to the appearance and publication of media-driven myths — stories about and/or by the news media that are widely believed and often retold but which, under scrutiny, prove to be apocryphal or wildly exaggerated.

FRESNO, Calif. — “Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians.” With those words a disgraced Athenian admiral matter-of-factly opens “The History of the Peloponnesian War,” his monumental, though unfinished, narrative of the 27-year war (431–404 B.C.) between Athens and Sparta that left the Athenian empire and the entire culture of the Greek city-state in ruins.

Because he had lived through and participated in the events he described, Thucydides had an advantage over later historians, who have had to dig through unreliable records and consult secondary sources. But even as he set down his record of contemporary events, Thucydides was eyeing posterity. His work, he boasted, was “not an essay to win applause of the moment, but a possession for all time.”

If his contemporaries failed to appreciate his true genius, perhaps people like ourselves would fathom it two and a half millennia in the future. And so we do. Studying how a seafaring democratic Athens fought an insular oligarchy like Sparta teaches us a lot about current world crises and the fickleness of public opinion. Thucydides knew nothing about peace studies, conflict resolution theory, God’s will or the United Nations, but could declare for all time that people go to war over “honor, fear and self-interest.” Period.

Thousands of paperback translations of Thucydides are sold each year, bearing out his extraordinary boast. But if his book, like other great works, is timeless, it is also very difficult, in places even obscure. [...] Then why read him at all?

Yet people do — and in surprising places. I teach classics at the California State University campus in Fresno, in the middle of the agricultural central Valley, home to the wayward Bulldogs basketball team, coached by the much maligned Jerry Tarkanian. There’s no reason to think a book by an ancient Greek would interest these students. They are the children of farm workers and the working poor from Tulare, who wait in line for a turn on the university’s outmoded computers.

They are not privileged, nor well prepared for college. Their reference points come from television, not ballet, computer camp or prep school. [...] At Stanford, where I did graduate work, Thucydides was an entirely different historian from the one I’ve come to know in Fresno. [...] His book is the subject of many pages of high-flow jargon in which, for example, Pericles’ funeral oration is discussed as a dry rhetorical exercise that reflects subjective, not absolute, “truth.”

I prefer the analysis offered by a Fresno State student I taught in night class. “Sure, he might have lied a little,” he said. “Who doesn’t? And what do you expect? Thucydides with a tape recorder?”

Scholars and graduate students talk grandly of Thucydides “the realist” whose bleak assessment of

human nature was a valuable antithesis to romanticism. But this remote, literary language takes us far from the actual Thucydides, a hard-eyed pragmatist whose judgments derive from first-hand experience. As a working mother at Fresno put it, “Thucydides might like Carter better, but he’d want Reagan dealing with the Russians.” Another student, an immigrant, agreed: “Be trusting with someone else’s life — not mine.”

Students in Fresno savor Thucydides the disgraced admiral. They soak up the street fighting at Plataea, where the women and slaves “yelled from the houses and threw stones and tiles,” and root for the blood-hungry Athenians at the slaughter near Delium, who in their fury “fell into confusion in surrounding the enemy and mistook and killed each other.”

“I bet he killed a few himself to write like that,” observed one student, tattooed and scarred, in a late-evening humanities class. “It gets crazy like that in a free-for-all,” another added.

In class when we discussed the slaughter of the Athenians on Sicily, which brought a pathetic end to the greatest generation of the greatest Greek city in its greatest age, one student urged me on: “Check it out. Don’t be afraid. Read it to us out aloud.” I did:

The Peloponnesians also came down and butchered them, especially those in the water, which was thus immediately spoiled, but which they went on drinking just the same, mud and all, bloody as it was, most fighting to have it.

If we’re to keep the ideas of Greece alive, we must first rekindle the Hellenic spirit, for the two are inseparable. That spirit, though it may already be lost in the Ivy League, thrives here among students working at Burger King and among night-school returnees, who, once hooked on Thucydides’ blood and guts, then “but only then” begin to appreciate the power of his thought.

Students working off their tuition in places like Fresno, Turlock and Bakersfield don’t need the university to tell them how unique their own lives are and how richly diverse their past experiences are. Instead they welcome a tough guy like Thucydides who shows how their brutal experiences are universal, even banal, and thus explicable through abstract canons that exist “for all time.”

In an age like ours in which setbacks and disappointments are dealt with through therapy rather than accepted as evidence of the tragic nature of our existence, Thucydides’ honesty comes as a welcome touch of realism. With him there is no “feeling your pain,” no pretense of cheap compassion, and there are no easy apologies for what we are and what we have done.

Thucydides offers students of all races and classes the reassurance that we are all more alike than we think. And in so doing, he offers wisdom about the present, but relief from it as well.

Victor Davis Hanson, a professor of Greek at California State University, Fresno, is the co-author, with John Heath, of “Who Killed Homer? The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom.”

History of the airplane

And the Wright brothers said they thought they had invented
something that could make peace on earth
(if the wrong brothers didn't get hold of it)
when their wonderful flying machine took off at Kitty Hawk⁴
into the kingdom of birds but the parliament of birds was freaked out
by this man-made bird and fled to heaven

And then the famous Spirit of Saint Louis⁵ took off eastward and
flew across the Big Pond with Lindy at the controls in his leather
helmet and goggles hoping to sight the doves of peace but he did not
Even though he circled Versailles

And then the famous Yankee Clipper⁶ took off in the opposite
direction and flew across the terrific Pacific but the pacific doves
were frightened by this strange amphibious bird and hid in the orient sky

And then the famous Flying Fortress⁷ took off bristling with guns
and testosterone to make the world safe for peace and capitalism
but the birds of peace were nowhere to be found before or after Hiroshima

And so then clever men built bigger and faster flying machines and
these great man-made birds with jet plumage flew higher than any
real birds and seemed about to fly into the sun and melt their wings
and like Icarus crash to earth

And the Wright brothers were long forgotten in the high-flying
bombers that now began to visit their blessings on various Third
Worlds all the while claiming they were searching for doves of
peace

And they kept flying and flying until they flew right into the 21st
century and then one fine day a Third World struck back and
stormed the great planes and flew them straight into the beating
heart of Skyscraper America where there were no aviaries and no
parliaments of doves and in a blinding flash America became a part
of the scorched earth of the world

And a wind of ashes blows across the land
And for one long moment in eternity
There is chaos and despair

And buried loves and voices
Cries and whispers
Fill the air
Everywhere

Lawrence Ferlinghetti⁸

Blind Poet, A Tourist of Revolutions (Speaking Out after 9/11)

ed. Maëlstrom, & Le Veilleur, 2004.

⁴ Town in North Carolina where the Wright Brothers made the first successful flight in history of a self-propelled aircraft in December 1903.

⁵ Airplane in which Charles A. Lindbergh made the first nonstop solo flight from New York to Paris in May 1927.

⁶ One of the largest aircraft of the time, the Boeing 314 Clipper was produced between 1938 and 1941. The Yankee Clipper flew across the Atlantic on a route from Southampton to Port Washington, New York. Its inaugural trip occurred on June 24, 1939. The Clipper fleet was pressed into military service during World War II for ferrying personnel and equipment to the European and Pacific fronts.

⁷ The Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress, a four-engine heavy bomber aircraft developed in the 1930s for the United States Army Air Corps.

⁸ A prominent voice of the wide-open poetry movement that began in the 1950s, Lawrence Ferlinghetti (born in 1919) has written poetry, translation, fiction, theater, art criticism, film narration, and essays. Often concerned with politics and social issues, Ferlinghetti's poetry countered the literary elite's definition of art and the artist's role in the world.