

AP Language Essay: Media in War



Prompt

During an ambush on August 14, Marine Lance Corporal Joshua Bernard was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade in Afghanistan's Helmand province, where the Marines have been engaged in a major offensive, fighting to take territory back from the Taliban. The Associated Press photojournalist Julie Jacobson took a picture of comrades trying to save his life. But it was too late.

Over the objections of Bernard's family and Defense Secretary Robert Gates, the AP published the photo as part of a series of articles and photographs about Bernard's platoon. Gates protested to AP that the wire service's "lack of compassion and common sense... is appalling..." AP replied that it had made a tough decision to "make public an image that conveys the grimness of war and the sacrifice of young men and women fighting it."

Thomas Ricks, writing in *Foreign Policy*, feels like the decision was an indefensible one. He writes:

The Associated Press's decision to publish a photograph of a mortally wounded Marine over the objections of the family and of the Defense Department was wrong. Also, morally indefensible.

Look, I'm a 1st Amendment fundamentalist. I lean in the direction of publishing anything and letting the public decide. But just because you have the right to do something doesn't mean it is the right thing to do.

The AP stated that despite the objections, it went ahead and ran the photo because it "conveys the grimness of war and the sacrifice of young men and women fighting it." I confess that I haven't looked at the photo, and don't want to. But if that was the AP's purpose, what was so urgent that it couldn't wait a few weeks or months, until the family had had a chance to mourn? I mean, these wars aren't going away.

Today I am embarrassed for American journalism. As a former military reporter, I also am angry with the AP. They've committed the sin, but all of us in the media will pay for it. This one will haunt us for years. The Marines especially don't forget. What a long way to come from Iwo Jima -- that iconic photo of the flag-raising on Mt. Suribachi was taken by another AP photographer, Joe Rosenthal.

I'll end with a plea to the AP: It is never too late to do the right thing and apologize.

In a well-developed and carefully reasoned essay, defend, challenge, or qualify the argument that journalists should demonstrate more respect for privacy and sensitivity for the right to mourn when choosing to publish photographs from war zones.

Requirements

- Please submit a typed response that uses a legible 10 point font, 1" margins, a double spaced body, and a simple single spaced header.
- Your response should include both an introduction and conclusion, both of which should be short and direct.
- A good goal would be 1 ½-2 pages.

Tips

- For this essay, remember some of the specific tips we've discussed all year: developing a clear, argumentative thesis, weaving in examples rather than overdeveloping one or under-developing others, and engaging the reader with a STAMPY introduction.