

## DOCUMENTS' MAIN IDEAS

### Doc 1 :

A war photographer (or anti-war photographer) expresses his core beliefs, his personal work ethic: exposing the horror of war in order to sway public opinion and bring peace to the world. He uses his pictures exhibited in art galleries as a mode of expression.

- War has always existed, raging throughout history. The progress of civilization, far from putting an end to it, has instead facilitated war.
- Putting an end to an eternal phenomenon is a daunting task for photography. And yet, this is the photographer's chief motivation for doing his job.
- photography (an expression of all that is human) vs. war (the negation of all that is human)
- As a result, photography is the antithesis of war—its antidote, its cure. War photographers work as peacemakers and, as such, are very much in the way of warmongers.
- Because the public cannot experience war first-hand, it is the photographer's job to bring it to them, to expose war in all its graphic horror, to bring home the feelings of sorrow and fear.
- In a mass media culture that consumes images on a daily basis, it is the photographer's role to catch the public's attention, wake them up, raise their awareness, and prompt them to protest.
- He does all that by crafting the most potent and evocative images possible.
- He is haunted by the risk of somehow capitalizing on other people's suffering to serve his personal ambition. He just won't allow it.

### Doc 2 :

A university professor sets about deconstructing the iconic photo, "The Napalm Girl"—adopting an analytical approach (dates, statistics) to decipher modern myths created and circulated by the press, denying war photos their alleged power to sway the course of historical events.

- The photo of the Napalm Girl has gone down in history as an iconic image of the Vietnam War; it has garnered many professional accolades.
- Journalists and critics have claimed this photo has contributed to swaying American public opinion in favor of peace.
- Nothing could be further from the truth according to this article: American public opinion had already turned around by the time the photo was published, and the withdrawal of US troops was already well underway.
- The alleged power of this photo in putting an end to the war has been much exaggerated.
- This article sets about debunking the myth circulated by the media regarding journalism's ostensibly crucial influence over the course of history.

### Doc 3 :

A historian's personal testimony of his classroom experience: his underprivileged students respond to a narrative of war in Ancient Greece—they intuitively relate to the brutal violence of history and immediately grasp the eternal cycle of the rise and fall of all empires.

- The Athenian historian, Thucydides, told the story of the war between Athens and Sparta (destruction and ruin of Athens).

- He was criticized by his contemporaries but always had an eye on posterity, writing for readers of "all time" about the reasons nations go to war, teaching lessons that are every bit as valid today as millennia ago—an eternal, timeless work.
- When teaching Thucydides, the author, V.D. Hanson, enjoys the response of the underprivileged students of his night classes: Unlike scholars, these students immediately relate to Thucydides' narrative of violence and blood, make perceptive points about the reliability of the historian's narrative, about his realism, about the rise and fall of civilizations, etc.
- Why? History teaches these kids from very diverse racial and social backgrounds that the violence and suffering they experience in their lives is part of our human nature, and thus timeless—not something to feel ashamed or guilty of.
- The universality of human experience: we are all alike, no matter when and where we were born.

#### Doc 4

A poem in reaction to 9/11: a history of violence as seen through the lens of a chronological account of the history of the airplane. This man-made invention has brought nothing but war, with the 9/11 attacks as the logical outcome of an escalation that has run completely out of control.

- The chronology of the history of the airplane is delineated through its landmark moments and iconic figures (the Wright brothers, Lindbergh, the flights of the Boeing Clipper, etc.).
- The chronology quickly gives way to a history of violence—a chronicle of how the invention, initially meant to bring peace on earth, was quickly put to warlike uses.
- Ex: The Boeing Clipper was used in the Pacific during WWII; bombers; the invention of jets; American bombing campaigns in Third World countries...
- This history of violence culminates in an evocation of the 9/11 attacks, depicted as the Third World striking back.
- Chaos and destruction have an element of universality ("Everywhere") and eternity; biblical echoes with the ashes of America returning to the earth.
- The hubris of man: like Icarus in Greek mythology, man trespasses into the kingdom of birds on his "man-made bird."
- The bird of peace (the dove) is nowhere to be found—only death and destruction come with this "man-made bird": much irony from the poet.

#### **COMMON THEMES:**

- Representation = art, words, images // war & violence / / history = telling the truth, reliability, objectivity vs idealism
  - The power of representation to shape our view of war & relation to history
  - What eternal truths about human nature are revealed by the depiction of war through art and history
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#### **I. The role of observers of war**

- Nachtwey's credo emphasizes the photographer as a witness who risks personal safety to communicate what is happening, aiming to move public opinion toward protest and peace.

This frames the observer as an ethical agent whose presence and images are intended to counter indifference and compel action (Document: Nachtwey credo).

- Campbell's piece reframes the observer as a critic of media myths, challenging the claim that iconic war images decisively shape historical outcomes, thereby positioning the observer as a debunker of received narratives (Document: Media Myth Alert excerpt).
- Hanson's essay presents the observer as a scholar who tests narratives about war through empirical and historical scrutiny, asking what Thucydides can teach about current events and the reliability of historical narratives (Document: Raw, Relevant History excerpt).
- Ferlinghetti's poem positions the observer-poet as someone who traces the arc of technological violence and its societal impact, offering a reflective, critical vantage on the meaning of war through history and imagery (Document: History of the airplane).

## II. Historical truth vs. representation

- The Nachtwey text acknowledges the tension between representation (photography) and truth, noting the ethical risk of exploiting suffering and insisting that images must convey truth to resist war's dehumanization (Document: Nachtwey credo).
- Campbell's analysis explicitly argues that widespread claims about photographs decisively shaping public opinion are overstated, highlighting a gap between representation and actual historical influence (Document: Media Myth Alert excerpt).
- Hanson's Thucydides piece discusses the problem of truth in historical narration, illustrating how students and readers assess reliability and realism, and how historical narratives endure beyond their original moment (Document: Raw, Relevant History excerpt).
- Ferlinghetti's historical-poetic treatment of aviation illustrates how a chronological account can evolve into a narrative of violence, raising questions about how representation (chronology, imagery) can obscure or distort the underlying uses and consequences of technology (Document: History of the airplane).

## III. War as an immutable topos of human nature

- Nachtwey's credo frames war as an enduring aspect of human behavior and civilization, with photography serving as a countermeasure that seeks to humanize and mobilize citizens against war's destructiveness (Document: Nachtwey credo).
- Hanson's portrait of Thucydides argues that violence and conflict are rooted in universal aspects of human nature and political dynamics, suggesting a timeless pattern of war across cultures and eras (Document: Raw, Relevant History excerpt).
- Ferlinghetti's poem depicts war and violence as universal forces embedded in human history, using mythic and biblical resonances to underscore the perennial character of human aggression and the uneasy search for peace (Document: History of the airplane).

Document	Quote/Passage	Explanation	Theme / Part
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Nachtwey credo	<p>"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. ... if everyone could be there just once to see for themselves ... 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 ..."</p>	<p>Observers (photographers) serve as witnesses to suffering and agents of change and protest.</p>	<p><b>1. The Role of Observers of War</b></p>
Campbell / Media Myth Alert	<p>"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."</p>	<p>The observer (journalist, critic, historian) may challenge exaggerated claims about media influence, aiming for factual accuracy.</p>	
Hanson / Thucydides	<p>"Because he had lived through and participated in the events he described, Thucydides had an advantage over later historians...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.'"</p>	<p>The historian's role as observer is both immediate and enduring, shaping how events are interpreted by future generations.</p>	
Ferlinghetti / Poem	<p>"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)...but the parliament of birds was freaked out by this man-made bird and fled to heaven...And so then clever men built bigger and faster flying machines...flew right into the 21st century and then one fine day a Third World struck back..."</p>	<p>The poet acts as observer to history's arc of violence, technology, and irony.</p>	
Nachtwey credo	<p>"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. ... 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."</p>	<p>Images communicate and evoke, but their power is complex and limited; the tension between representing and changing reality.</p>	<p><b>2. Historical Truth vs. Representation</b></p>
Campbell / Media Myth Alert	<p>"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. ... Compelling though it was, the 'napalm girl' photo exerted impact far less profound than is now believed."</p>	<p>Challenges the narrative that images fundamentally alter historical events, separating myth from factual effect.</p>	

Hanson / Thucydides	"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.' ... Scholars... talk grandly of Thucydides 'the realist' whose bleak assessment of human nature was a valuable antithesis to romanticism."	Reflection on how historical texts are interpreted and questioned for reliability and realism.	
Ferlinghetti / Poem	"The chronology quickly gives way to a history of violence—a chronicle of how the invention, initially meant to bring peace on earth, was quickly put to warlike uses."	Chronological representation can obscure underlying violence; critiques the difference between technological promise and historical outcome.	
Nachtwey credo	"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."	War is a constant, deeply rooted in human history and nature, resisting simple solutions.	<b>3. War: Immutable Topos of Human Universal Nature</b>
Hanson / Thucydides	"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... could declare for all time that people go to war over 'honor, fear and self-interest.' Period... 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.'"	Cyclical nature of violence and war as an immutable aspect of humanity, transcending eras and cultures.	
Ferlinghetti / Poem	"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"	War and destruction are depicted as eternal and universal human experiences, always recurring.	

## POSSIBLE SYNTHESIS

### The Observer and the Truth: War's Enduring Nature and Its Modern Representation

*[Introduction]* War has always been "raging throughout the world" and "there is little reason to believe that war will cease to exist in the future" (Nachtwey). This sentiment introduces a collection of four documents, each analyzing the role of observers in wartime, the friction between historical truth and representation, and the immutable presence of war in human nature. James Nachtwey's "Why Photograph War?" (1985), a blog post by W. Joseph Campbell "Exaggerating the Power of 'Napalm Girl' Photo" (2014), Victor Davis Hanson's New York Times essay "Raw, Relevant History" (1998), and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poem "History of the Airplane" (2001) all beg the following question: what is the real impact of those who observe and record war on our understanding and response to conflict, and does representation ever alter the relentless human reality of war?

[I. *The Role of Observers of War*] Nachtwey positions the war photographer as a mediator between the battlefield and public consciousness, risking personal safety “to communicate to the rest of the world what is happening,” with the ambition of “negotiating for peace” and igniting protest. Nachtwey’s approach is at once empathetic and fraught; he is haunted by the ethical dilemma of “benefiting from someone else’s tragedy,” emphasizing the gravity and responsibility inherent in the observer’s role. In contrast, Campbell interrogates the power of another observer—the journalist and media critic. He criticizes the myth that iconic images, such as Nick Ut’s “Napalm Girl,” single-handedly “galvanized American public opinion” or “expedited the end of the Vietnam war,” arguing these claims distort historical reality and overstate the influence of media actors. Hanson provides yet another perspective: the historian as both participant and analyst. Thucydides, he notes, regarded his history as “a possession for all time,” illustrating how scholarly observers shape not just contemporary but future interpretations of conflict. Ferlinghetti, finally, embodies the poet’s function as observer, tracing technological escalation and its existential consequences, seeing history’s arc through the lens of art and irony.

[II. *Historical Truth Versus Representation*] All documents probe the gap between observed truth and mediated representation. Nachtwey wonders whether photography can truly “put an end to a form of human behavior which has existed throughout history,” admitting the limits of images and the power of context. Campbell disassembles the myth of decisive media influence, urging readers to heed “far more decisive factors” like policy, death toll, and public fatigue, rather than singular journalistic moments. Hanson’s reading of Thucydides is likewise skeptical of pure truth, underscoring that “subjective, not absolute, truth” is reflected in classical accounts, and that realism is contingent on experience, not rhetoric. Ferlinghetti’s poem showcases the irony of representation: the chronology of technological marvels “quickly gives way to a history of violence,” revealing the ambivalence and distortion embedded in artistic and factual depiction.

[III. *War: Immutable Topos of Man’s Universal Nature*] Fundamentally, the documents affirm the persistence of war. Nachtwey observes that the more civilized he becomes, the more efficient and devastating man’s means of destruction become. Hanson, channeling Thucydides, distills war’s causes to “honor, fear and self-interest,” labeling violence “universal, even banal.” Ferlinghetti’s final image —“a wind of ashes ... chaos and despair...everywhere” — demonstrates that war’s traumatic reach is endless, marked by repetition and mythic resonance. Each observer, whether photographer, historian, journalist, or poet, confronts the tragic universality of human conflict.

(569 - 19 = 550 words)