



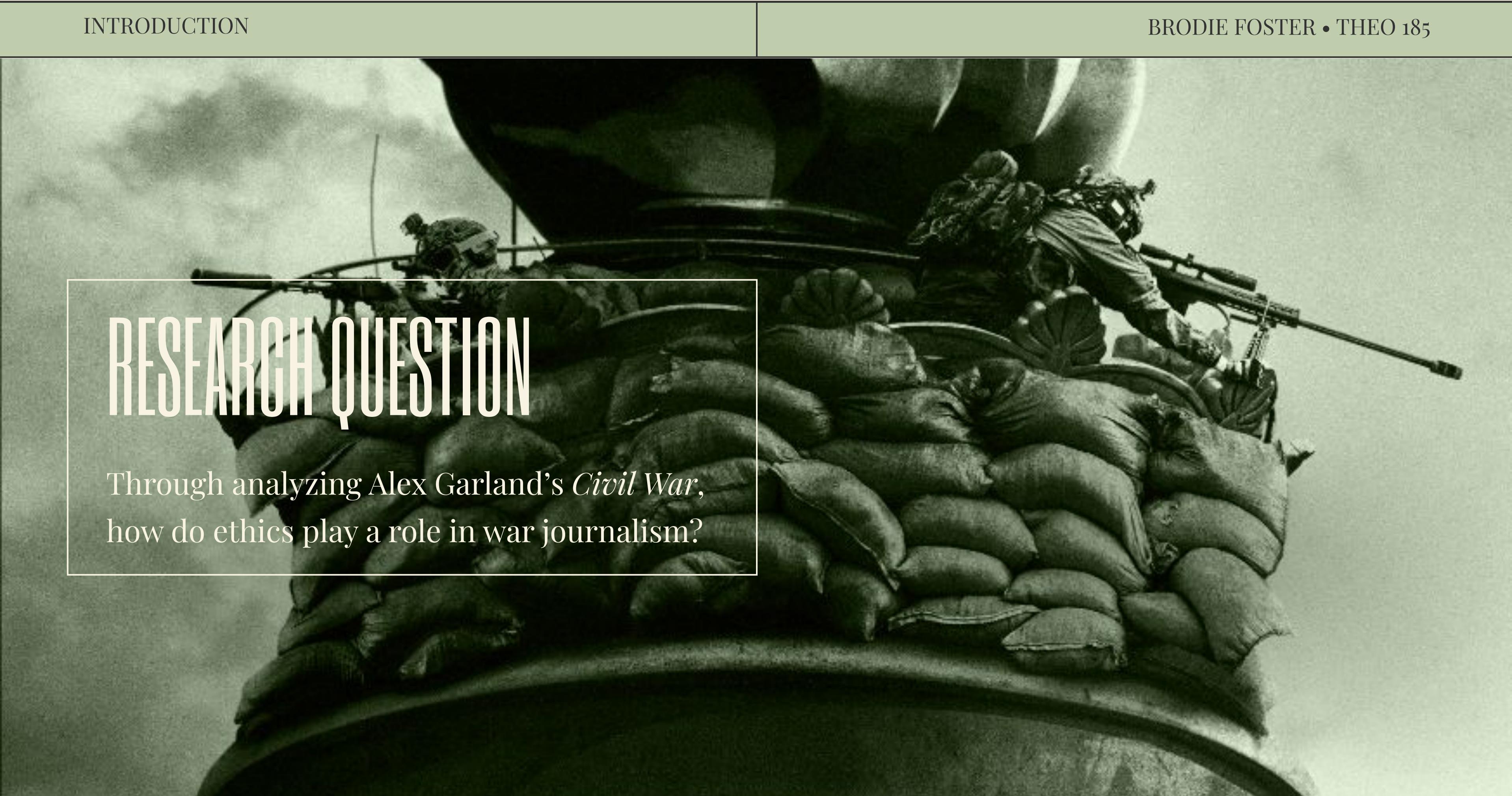
# WAR JOURNALISM & ETHICS

# CONTENT WARNING

This presentation discusses war and violence, and shows both real life and fictional depictions of those events. Spoilers for Civil War as well.

# RESEARCH QUESTION

Through analyzing Alex Garland's *Civil War*,  
how do ethics play a role in war journalism?





## Lee

Played by Kirsten Dunst, she is the main character and one of the most famous war photographers.



## Jessie

Played by Cailee Spaeny, she is an aspiring war photographer who idolizes Lee and her work.



## Joel

Played by Wagner Moura, he has a career in war journalism and works closely with Lee.



## Sammy

Played by Stephen McKinley Henderson, he is a veteran photographer turned war photographer.

# WHAT IS CIVIL WAR

Written and directed by Alex Garland, *Civil War* follows photojournalists throughout a modern American Civil War. Rebel forces are taking on Washington D.C. to eliminate the president after political turmoil. Main characters Lee, Jessie, Joel, and Sammy are on a quest to be first on the scene to capture the prospective death of the president. As they go along this journey, they document their experiences through photography for eventual journalism.





**JOURNALISTS ARE PROTECTED ONLY AS LONG AS THEY  
DO NOT TAKE A DIRECT PART IN THE HOSTILITIES.**

*International Committee of the Red Cross*

**COMMON GOOD  
LENS**

Examines how actions affect a population as a whole, rather than the individual.

**JUSTICE LENS**

Examines actions through how fair they are for all parties involved.

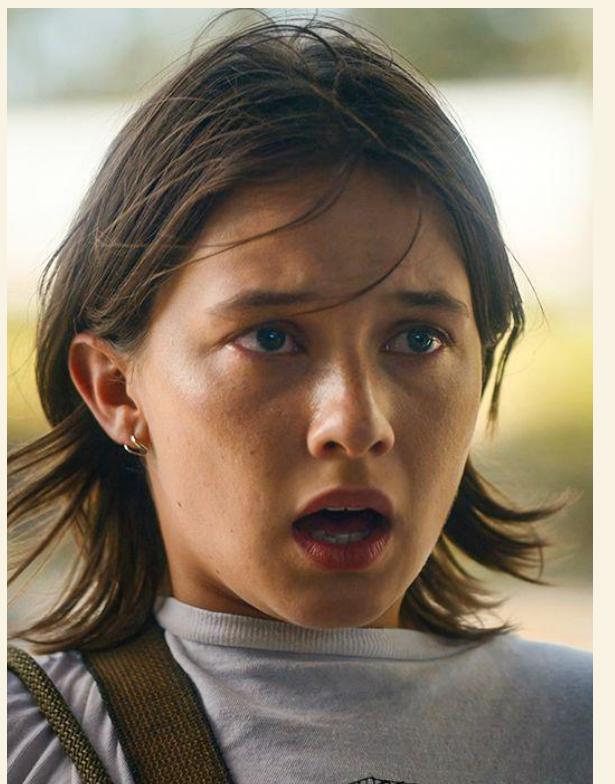
**CARE ETHICS**

Examines how your actions impact others and vice versa.

**VIRTUE ETHICS**

Examines the question “what kind of person should I be?”

# FROM THE MOVIE

**Jessie**

“I didn’t take a photo. I didn’t take a single photo. I didn’t even remember a camera’s on me. Like, oh, my God, like, why didn’t I just tell him not to shoot them?”

**Lee**

“Once you start asking yourself those questions, you can’t stop. So we don’t ask. We record, so other people ask. Wanna be a journalist? That’s the job.”

# THE CONTEXT

After arriving at a gas station en route to D.C., Jessie notices two strangers hung under a passway. She asks to see them, and is too stunned to take any pictures. Lee, on the other hand, does, and even gets the man holding them hostage to pose with them. After, Lee gives insights into why she feels her job is so important, after Jessie feels she can't do it anymore. She finds war journalism important so *others* can comment on and explore why these atrocities occur.



# SONDERKOMMANDO PHOTOS



These photos were taken secretly within Auschwitz in 1944. They've always fascinated me, as they're the rawest form of war photography available. While haunting, they give insight into what was really going on during World War 2. It begs the question; **how important is war journalism as a society? Do we need it to gain the full context of history?**



# THE PROFESSIONALS

*Tiffany Fairey - Demythologizing War Journalism*

**“Findings from this research show how the cultivation of multi-dimensional and multi-ethnic stories is central to strategic narrative peacebuilding approaches.”**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a local group called Post Conflict Research Centre took an aim to lessen the political turmoil within the country. By pursuing a ‘peace is possible’ narrative, they’ve successfully reported the political climate in a way that examines all arguments, and brings forth testimony from many different backgrounds. This approach to journalism is important to equality, especially in a place where many political titans control the media.

# THE VERDICT

By examining war journalism through the common good lens, it is deemed ethical. Under the assumption of unbiased journalism, being privy to what's going on in war-times is important to understanding the true severity of the situation. If these were hidden or unreported, not only could that lead to corruption, but history would be altered and missing key components.

**Common Good Lens**

**Justice Lens**

**Care Ethics**

**Virtue Ethics**

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# FROM THE MOVIE



**Joel**

“Wait! Wait! I need a quote.”

“That’ll do.”



**The President**

“Don't... Don't let them kill  
me.”

# THE CONTEXT

The political side of the film follows allied forces overthrowing a corrupt government. The ending shows journalist Joel reaching the president alongside the opposing militia. Just before they kill him, he takes whatever final quote he can for his article. This comes as a triumphant moment not only for Joel in his career, but the country as a whole. **Was justice served? Was Joel right to cover this final act, or should he have stayed out of it?** Determining if he was fair to both sides through his journalism is near impossible, as his eventual article will be inherently biased.



# JAMES FOLEY STORY

James Foley was a war journalist who was taken hostage during the Syrian Civil War. Two years later, he was executed in response to the U.S. airstrikes in Iraq, which led to an even stronger war on Iraq. While a tragic death, **do events like this lead to more political strife?** Deaths like these are a reminder that war journalism is never truly safe. **However, if having journalists can lead to worse conditions in war, is it worth having them at all? Is it fair to the citizens caught in crossfire?** Some would say no. Others would say yes.



# THE PROFESSIONALS

*Nicola Magnavita - War Journalism: An Occupational Exposure*

**“Referring to himself and his colleagues he is reported as saying, ‘At times we felt like we were chewing that air, it was so thick and slimy.’”**

In a case study with a long-term war journalist, his time spent in rubble and warzones negatively impacted his health later in life. He developed a pneumothorax (air-leaking lung), which his work had a strong role in the development of. **While recording events through journalism is important, is it worth sacrificing people’s health over? Is it fair to expect *someone* to risk their life in order to document world events?**

# THE VERDICT

While war journalism can occasionally lead to worsened conditions for parties involved, many of the questions through the justice lens dissolve to personal choice. Choosing to risk your life for your stories is still a decision made by the journalist. Journalists being used as pawns and hostages is also unfair, but that violates the international law for journalists, and the fault falls on the party committing the atrocity, not the journalist.

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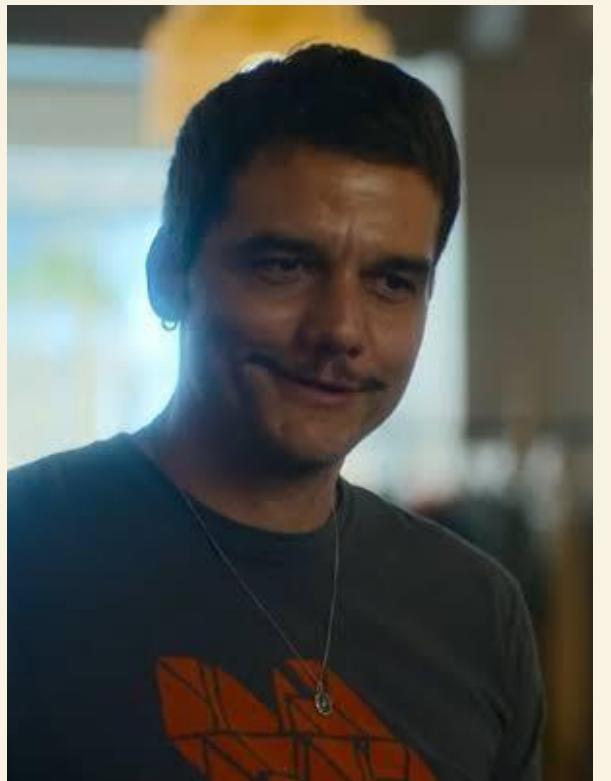
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# FROM THE MOVIE



**Joel**

“There has to be some mistake. We're American, right?”



**Soldier**

“Okay. What kind of American are you? You don't know?”

# THE CONTEXT

After a run-in with soldiers on the government's side, they are interrogated about where they're from, especially as the government is against journalists. The soldier only supports one thing, true Americans. He kills their friend Tony who they met up with on the way to D.C., as well as firing the gunshot that eventually kills Sammy. Both of these happen due to their race. Lee, Jessie, and Joel begin to question whether these missions are worth it. **How many friends can they lose because of this profession before its no longer worth it?** These questions lead to long debates within the group.



# SADOU YEHIA CASE

France 24 televised an interview with Mali farmer Sadou Yehia, where French troops had their faces blurred, but not him. This led to his murder by terrorist groups.



## QUESTIONS

Was France 24 responsible for his death?

Do journalists need to take better steps towards protecting those involved in their stories?

## IMPACT

This case sparked many debates within the journalism community, and called to action a need for more protections to those involved with war journalism.

## CARE ETHICS

Within care ethics, it's important to think ahead to the potential impact of stories. All outcomes must be considered to have ethical journalism, as within war, many people's lives are at stake.

# THE PROFESSIONALS

*Meenakshi Gigi Durham - "Napalm Girl" at 50: On Photojournalism and the Ethics of Care*

**“Napalm Girl/Terror of War” introduces feminist care ethics as a missing discourse in the news values that mobilize the selection and transmission of images of embodied vulnerability as well as a philosophical rubric for assessing the ethics of their consequences, particularly for the subjects of the images.”**

During the Vietnam War, photographer Nick Ut photographed children running from napalm gas, specifically a 9-year-old girl who was completely nude. While the image itself won many awards, it raises questions of how journalistic work impacts those within the stories. **Especially as many subjects of photos don't consent, is it okay to broadcast people's pain to a large audience, especially within compromising positions?**

# THE VERDICT

Understanding the ramifications of your work is important when using a care ethics lens. Because journalistic stories, especially within a time of war can impact those within the stories. For careful journalism, all possible outcomes must be considered to protect the safety and identities of those featured. Especially when they can be left vulnerable.

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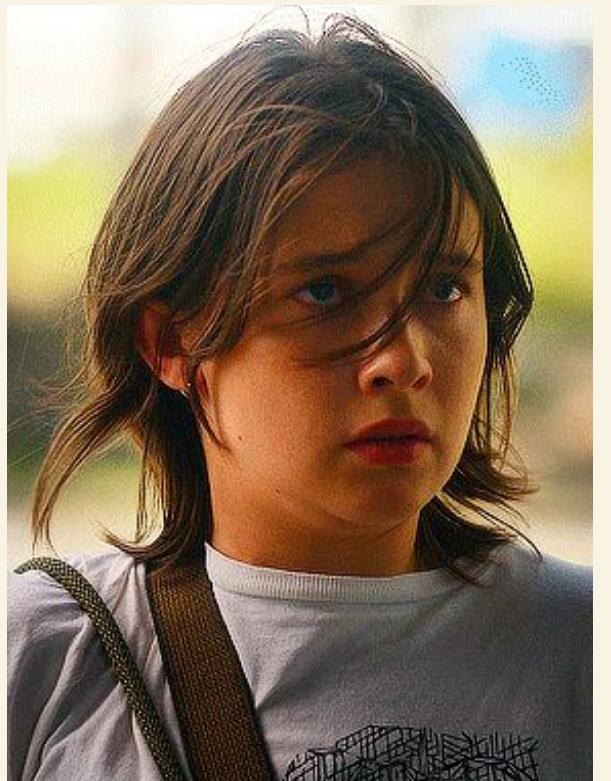
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# FROM THE MOVIE



**Jessie**

“Would you photograph that moment if I got shot?”



**Lee**

“What do you think?”

# THE CONTEXT

Through their developing relationship, the lines between Jessie's relationship blur. Are they just colleagues?

Adversaries? Friends? By testing the waters, she reframes her thinking. While they may have a personal relationship, their journalism comes first above all else. This double backs as Lee sacrifices herself to save Jessie, and Jessie takes her picture as she falls to the ground. This ends the movie allowing one to question the morality of Jesse's decision to photograph Lee's death. **Was it right for Jessie to take Lee's picture after she just saved her? Is she morally wrong for it, or is she just doing her job?**



# BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

“He wrote with a heavy pen. On that morning, Wilkeson had arrived at the scene of the battle. He had come upon the body of a shattered 19-year-old lieutenant, dead with all the men of his command, Battery G of the Fourth United States Artillery. It was his own son, Bayard Wilkeson.”

# ARISING QUESTIONS

Across history, many journalists have come upon frightening scenes. **With a loved one falling victim, how can you report on your own son’s death?** Questions like this haunt war journalists, and blur the lines that remove you from what is being covered, and make covering tragic events that much more disturbing.

# THE PROFESSIONALS

*Giles Dodson - Australian Journalism And War*

**“Within the field of war journalism studies scant emphasis has been placed on discursive understandings of professionalism, political and military conflict or the production of knowledge concerning war.”**

As qualified war journalists expand their craft, keeping their journalism professional is extremely important. Especially within war times (this article analyzes journalists during the Iraq War), many journalists ask themselves the questions on how to keep their journalism correct, and helpful to a larger scale of people. Professionalism, to me, goes hand in hand with virtue ethics. By examining how you want your work to be, you are also examining yourself as a person, and how you relate your words and stories to these same topics.

# THE VERDICT

As the most ethically gray way to view war journalism, virtue ethics plays a strong role within war journalism. This is the most personal category, as there's no clear stance one way or another. It is up to the journalist themselves to explore stories in a way that makes them feel proud and content with their work.

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# THE ANSWER

After viewing war journalism through various lenses and methods of ethics, I found that war journalism, when considered through ethical lenses, is important to society at large, as well as those impacted by war. However, war journalists should be taking measures to ensure that their work has a positive impact while mitigating as many negative outcomes as possible. This can be done by protecting the identities of those involved, taking photos that are in good faith, and providing fair stories that have little to no bias involved. Civil War shows both the positives and negatives of war journalism, and while ethically ambiguous, sheds light on the quick decisions war journalists are faced with every day and how to navigate those while remaining true to their stories.