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SUNDAY  
SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS  
MAY 9, 2004

# Perspective

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NEWS ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY FROM THE NEWSPAPER OF SILICON VALLEY

In the Opinion section

## Judging America

Policy shifts are crucial if we are to repair our image in the eyes of the world. **OPINION** | 4P

# War photography's power

From Vietnam to Iraq, images have changed the course of war and history



WWW.THEMEMORYHOLE.ORG

**COFFINS AT DOVER:** Responding to a Freedom of Information request, the Pentagon recently released photos of caskets holding soldiers' remains at Dover Air Force Base.



NEW YORKER

**ABU GHURAYB PRISON:** An American soldier points at a hooded and naked Iraqi prisoner at the prison near Baghdad in this undated photo.



NABIL MOUNZER — EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

**AL-FALLUJAH ATTACK:** Iraqis chant anti-American slogans March 31 after killing four civilians working for a U.S. contractor and hanging the burned bodies of two from a bridge.

## Shocking Iraq photos spark media debate over taste vs. truth

By Kenny Irby

It is true that a picture can be worth 1,000 words. And it's also true that some pictures are worth 1,000 pictures. Especially in war, certain pictures have a unique way of changing the course of history.

Photos from Iraq released in the past few weeks — especially the images of prisoner abuse shown again and again last week — could be in that category: pictures that inform and influence the public in profound ways.

The decision to publish dramatic and tragic photographs that depict the horrors of war is never easy. Perhaps even the cave dwellers of ancient times felt unsettled as they drew detailed battle images on their walls. We do know that throughout the modern era of warfare and photography, journalists have struggled with achieving a balance between maximizing truthful reporting and minimizing unnecessary harm, and the graphic images from Iraq have ignited that struggle anew.

Newspapers across the country have made different decisions about whether to publish the new images that show abuse and even death, and they are likely to face more difficult decisions if new photographs and videotapes of even worse brutality become public, as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld warned Friday.

Yet by and large the U.S. media's principle is this: Citizens can make their own best choices when armed with honest information.

Consider the impact of certain iconic photos of past conflicts. There was the 1968 photo of South Vietnamese National Police Chief Brig. Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a Viet Cong officer with a single pistol shot to the head in Saigon, as reported by Eddie Adams. There was also the photo of the napalm-seared 9-year-old Kim Phuc seeking help, documented in 1972 by Nick Ut.

More recently, recall the countless "Highway of Death" photographs from the 1991 Operation Desert Storm, especially one that showed an incinerated Iraqi soldier at the wheel of his vehicle. And lest we forget a U.S. soldier's limp body being dragged through the dusty streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, by angry anti-American protesters, recorded in 1993 by Paul Watson.

These photos earned journalistic recognition. Yet the greatest prize was informing the public on matters of world interest. All ex-

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## Tale of motherly love leaves glimmer of hope

By Charley Lindsey

*Once there was a tree . . . and she loved a little boy.*

Love leaves scars. Love can destroy you. Love can survive the loss of every sweet hope — even the hope for gratitude.

**CHARLEY LINDSEY** (clindsey@mercurynews.com) is national/foreign copy chief of the Mercury News.

These are some of the bitter lessons of "The Giving Tree," Shel Silverstein's classic fairy tale, which this year marks its 40th birthday. It's the story of a motherly apple tree and a selfish, driven boy who takes her fruit, her limbs, finally all she has.

The tale is spare as haiku, starkly drawn. It makes parents sniffle and educators squirm. It's a children's

story that baffles children as much as it fascinates them.

And like every children's classic worthy of the name, it gives off a glow that illuminates and burns.

The book is being given to many mothers today, on Mother's Day. It also appears at birthdays, weddings and baby showers. It is, yes, an evergreen — one of the bestselling children's books of all time.

By the end of 2000, 5.6 million copies had been sold since its 1964 debut. And it's still going strong: Last year, 286,000 copies went home in their apple-green dust covers, ranking it at No. 14 for 2003 on Publishers Weekly's "back list" for hardcover children's books. Those are the immortals like Beatrix Potter

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