Kip Taylor

9/20/2015

Eng W1

Gregory Julius

Image Analysis

Tank Man

It’s a warm sunny day, but there is a chill in the air. A man stands alone. Repression, violence, courage, corruption, shock and rebellion. Four tanks, one man. Alone, carrying a briefcase- on his way to work. The ambience of impending disaster.

The Road is wide and well taken care of. The light fixtures, expensive and decorative; something you might find in an affluent neighborhood. One man standing in front of four tanks. All alone. The man stands in the left lower side of the photograph. The four tanks diagonally slice across the photograph, right down to left. Like an exclamation mark, ending in the white-shirted man, the tanks moving down the urban road with gun barrels pointed up in the air, not at the man. Perhaps the man wants to make a point- we must stand up to “them”. God gave us free will. Others don’t want us to have it. No soldiers are visible. Just the machines against a business man. The man faces away from the camera. His hair is a bit long, therein suggesting that he is young. His clothes, conservative--white shirt and black slacks. Alone, the photograph presents a mystery. Why would a young man, with a good job, risk all to stand off with four tanks? Why is he alone? Where are the others? What are the tanks doing in a

Nice neighborhood?

The written article fills in many holes in the inquiry. It’s a standoff between people and an oppressive government. The story is one that is repeatedly heard throughout time. Repression, violence, courage, corruption, shock and rebellion. Sometimes the violence is on the side of the oppressed and sometimes it’s on the side of the oppressor, as it is here. The man staring at the tanks almost looks as if he is in shock over the presence of the weapons of death and destruction in his hometown. The young man was actually a student. We know, immediately without any information other than the picture that this is not in the United States. It is further picked up by the information that the man is a student. College students in the United States do not typically dress this way, especially if rebelling. The written article presents other mysteries such as who was the tank man and is he still alive. Opposing stories about his name, position and mortality are set forth in the article.

The symbols in the photograph are such things as:

Man is all of us, wanting freedom and ready to die for it. Tanks are government, oppression, & power. The raised tank barrels symbolize the desire of the powers to scare the people, not injure them. Of course, other photographs and the article reveals that many people were shot and killed that day in Tiananmen Square, but by soldiers.

What is the story behind the picture? This story begins in May of 1989, when thousands of Chinese students started pouring in to Tiananmen Square to mourn the death of their student organization leader, who held a governmental office. After a few weeks, the students felt as if their government should not be run by one man. They wanted a simple democracy, not a communistic society. So to please them the current leader opened trade with the West and soon the markets flooded with "democratic influence" and it wasn't long until riots and peaceful protests started. The power in China was starting to shift which was not what the government wanted. As a result, on June 4, 1989, when the students met to peacefully protest and have a hunger strike, they were unexpectedly met with force, a deadly one. The Chinese government pushed troops and tanks into Tiananmen Square and on their way into the square they were met with thousands of locals blocking the roads and paths into the Square. This behavior was disruptive to the government and further showed how the Chinese people were being corrupted by the Eastern cultures. The military open fire, creating one of the worst Chinese massacres known to date, the Tiananmen Square massacre. In one evening, hundreds to thousands of peaceful Chinese citizens were killed. People just like the “tank man”. Yet despite the murderous military assault, everyday people continued to show uncommon bravery. The morning after the massacre, a single man, with a briefcase or bag, dressed for work or school, stops in the empty road to turn towards oncoming tanks. He uses his own body as a wall to stop the tanks in an effort to show that he, an average citizen, cannot take what is happening anymore and must take a stand. Without weapons, this implies that there he is willing to put himself in danger to show how he feels against in that situation The photographer tells everyone, through this one picture, that an entire society is so fed up with the current government that, everyday people are willing to throw themselves onto tanks to stop the violence. This man is a symbol of the true working class of China.

The photograph of “tank man” was broadcast across the world. The entire democratic world shook. Yet, the picture the world saw of the “tank man” was altered from the original photograph. When you look at the altered photograph, you feel as if you are close to the scene. Perhaps from the angle of the shot, you think it was taken from a vantage point maybe in a nearby hotel or bridge. The light in the shot shows that it is mid-day, when a time the streets should be buzzing with business, cars, and people. This time of the day is when the morning shift and afternoon shift switch and go home or to another job. But on this day not one hundred or one thousand people would be out but one person, one sole man who felt something needed to be changed. Was he scared since he had to know that so many people had been gunned down the night before? He disregarded all the possible threats and even death to show that he was one of the people. The photograph drips of empathy and anticipation of danger.

The media outlets, to improve the story, apparently altered the original photograph. Using the angle and lighting to set the scene, they cropped the area behind the tanks (people on the street) to make you feel as though it's one man against four tanks. This intensifies the emotional response and empathy for the people. Further cropping is done to the area behind tank man where people are also sitting and walking to gather the same feeling of he is all alone, to drive home the response they wanted from you. Then they broadcast the photo and you hear about the news of the massacre and suddenly an entire society is behind the fixing of China and to help this man's cause. One photo can say so much and can change how the entire world feels about one single situation in an instant, how everyone can fall behind one photo that could be tampered with or advertised in a certain way to get the audience to act. They did this perfectly in this photo. Without even fact checking the photo the audience stood behind "tank man".

In our current society, this form of "advertising" is used frequently to get you to get a product *or* to get behind a cause, such as the refugee photo. The photo of the refugee ended up being a huge lie, the media cropped out and changed what refugee camp it was from in order to get what they wanted out of it, a response from the public.Everything from media outlets to governments tamper with evidence and photos to get what they want. Companies advertise a certain way to get you to buy their product or to sympathize and spend money on the relief fund that 90% goes to the board leader and maybe 10% goes to the actual refugees or relief fund. It's corrupted and not right, it needs to change but most likely won't. This day in age we can't trust all we see and all we read, we must look beyond that and search for the facts before whole heartedly getting behind a cause. The media tampers with everything even thirty years ago in the tank man photo, they messed with the lighting, the cropping and the angle to change how the public saw the photo, and this shows how the media even in the past, present, and future will influence how we see all events and news.

