

## Analysis

A photo exhibit, a tip from a community contact, a book, a documentary, and childhood memories converge to help reporter Emerald Yeh bring to light the nearly forgotten six weeks of terror and atrocities thrust upon the citizens of Nanking beginning in December 1937. In "The Rape of Nanking," Yeh presents just the right combination of images and dialogue to recount the rapes and murders of an estimated 300,000 Chinese civilians by Japanese soldiers during the World War II-era rampage.

Yeh succeeds in telling the story of the Rape of Nanking in its historical context while exploring implications for a twenty-first century couple with ties to both sides. Her interviews with Helen Wong and Kenji Taguma show that feelings about the wartime event are still close to the surface.

The photos and film footage provide a realistic portrayal of the events in Nanking. The images are both the vehicles that transport the viewer back in time and the elements that sometimes make the story hard to watch. But the use of disturbing images not only conveys the horror, as Yeh says (**DVD: Yeh interview, 9:13**), but also sharpens the story's accuracy.



Kenji Taguma holds Helen Wong's hand as she discusses the trauma the Rape of Nanking episode still holds for the Chinese. (KRON-TV)

Yeh's treatment of what happened over sixty years ago faced several contemporary challenges. One of them was the variety of potentially conflicting agendas. Her community contact was a Chinese American advocate pushing for redress of long-held grievances. Japanese Americans in the community, particularly those with no direct connection to the massacre, had a stake in how the story was told. And Wong and Taguma wanted to find enough undisputed space to stand together.

Yeh aims for fairness by giving voice to the many sides of the story, including the documentary footage of a Japanese soldier apologizing for Nanking. Added to the images and anecdotes of the atrocities, the apology provides a layer of complexity and humanity sometimes missing from such stories.

## In the Classroom



Emerald Yeh, KRON-TV

Journalists are accustomed to covering stories focused on conflicts between racial and ethnic groups. Rare are the stories that reveal something about intraracial or intraethnic conflict. Students may find these stories to be more challenging than others, depending on their knowledge of history and world cultures.

Encourage a conversation about the advantages and disadvantages of being a total outsider racially and/or ethnically when doing a story about intraracial or intraethnic conflict.

Tease out the potential pitfalls — overgeneralization, hidden stereotypes, ignorance of history — that stand in the way of telling these stories. Draw comparisons to similar themes in “The Family Secret” and “Best of Friends, Worlds Apart.”

## Using Disturbing Images

Excellent journalism is compelling and often provocative. Sometimes it employs images that are disturbing, even as they also hold information that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the story for a reader, listener, or viewer.

Such images can help tell a more complete story and bring with them a strong sense of accuracy and thus authenticity. They allow people, in effect, to witness for themselves what happened. Showing the images can obviate the need for adjectives that carry with them greater subjectivity. If the event was horrible, the images will convey that thought, and the journalist need not say so.



Exhibit documents the atrocities in Nanking. (KRON-TV)

Sometimes, reporters become intoxicated with the idea of showing disturbing images just because they have them. That’s not enough of a reason. Deciding whether to use such images is best handled through the prism of ethics.

Using a series of questions proposed by Bob Steele of The Poynter Institute, journalists can arrive at a good decision based on a solid foundation of ethics. A number of journalists across the country have taken on this issue. Find some of their thoughts in the list of resources available at Poynter Online.

## Also in the DVD Topic Index

Besides Ethics: Using Disturbing Images and Words, the interview with Emerald Yeh has entries listed in the Topic Index in the following categories:

**Building Trust / Establishing Credibility**  
**Capturing the Authentic Voice**  
**Complexity**  
**Context**  
**Covering People Like You**  
**Covering People Different from You**  
**Ethics: Portraying People Fairly**

**Ethics: Various Issues**  
**Ethics: What Is Balance?**  
**Framing the Story**  
**Language Choices**  
**Lessons from the Field**  
**Power of Images**  
**Who Is the Audience?**

## Assignments



**Japanese World War II  
veteran apologizes in  
documentary.  
(KRON-TV)**

1. Choose a controversial story currently in the news that reports two sides of the issue. Construct a list of the potential stakeholders in that news story in addition to the two sides already included. Write an essay about the possible impact of leaving the unheard voices out of the story. Describe how the story may have been improved by the inclusion of more of those voices.
2. Find a historical event that affected race or ethnic relations in your town. Do a story about how that event continues to impact the lives of current citizens in the town, especially the lives of people who were not born at the time of the original event.
3. KRON-TV news anchor Susan Shaw introduces “The Rape of Nanking” with a warning: “Some of the pictures you are about to see are very disturbing.” Was the warning necessary? Under what circumstances would you suggest such a warning? Could the story have been told without the disturbing images? Explore your thinking on these questions in a 300-word essay.