

The Kent State Massacre Photo and the Case of the Missing Pole

[🕒](#) AUG 29, 2012[👤](#) MICHAEL ZHANG

Recognize this photograph? It shows 14-year-old Mary Ann Vecchio screaming and kneeling over the body of 20-year-old Jeffrey Miller, shot during the [Kent State Massacre](#). Kent State photojournalism student John Paul Filo — just 22-years-old at the time — captured the image, and was later awarded [the 1971 Pulitzer Prize](#) for Spot News

ADVERTISEMENT

What you might not know, however, is that the widely published photograph at the time was actually manipulated. Here's what the original photograph by Filo looked like:



Notice how in the original photograph there's a fence pole rising straight up from Vecchio's head. Somehow, major magazines (e.g. *Time*, *People*, and *LIFE*) around the country get their hands on the secretly-manipulated version of the photograph, publishing it as the original.

[Read More](#)

00:00

00:00

When people began noticing the discrepancy, there was major controversy on online bulletin boards regarding the 'shopping.



Here's how David Friend, Director of Photography at Life Magazine, responded at the time:

ADVERTISEMENT

■ ■ *There has been some heated back-and-forth discussion on the net concerning an allegedly manipulated image in the May 1995 issue of LIFE magazine (John Filo's*

directly, clearly and put the matter to rest. LIFE did not and does not manipulate news photos. The photo we published was supplied to us by our photo library, the Time-Life Picture Collection, the second largest such repository of catalogued images. Amazingly, the fence post had been airbrushed out by someone, now anonymous, in a darkroom sometime in the early 1970s. The picture had run numerous times, without the fencepost, and without anyone taking notice: in TIME (Nov. 6, 1972, p. 23) PEOPLE (May 2, 1977, p. 37), TIME (Jan. 7, 1980, p. 45), PEOPLE (April 30, 1990, p. 117), to name just a few publications.

On deadline, while closing our May issue, the LIFE photo department contacted photographer John Filo, hoping to secure a repro quality print, as is customary at LIFE. Since we could not obtain a print from him directly in time to make our run, we went with the photo we had, not realizing a pole had been removed. One can only wonder why the missing pole hasn't been noticed the previous times it has appeared, even though literally millions of people have seen the fence-post-less photo in publications dating back 23 years. At no time would LIFE's photo, art or production department intentionally alter a news photograph.

Now you know: if you ever see a version of the photo that doesn't have an unsightly fence pole, it's 'shopped.

P.S. The [Wikipedia article on John Filo](#) has interesting behind-the-scenes details of how the image was made. Filo was equipped with a Nikkormat loaded with Tri X film, was exposing at 1/500s at f5.6/f8, and had initially dropped his camera and begun to flee before gathering himself and documenting the scene.

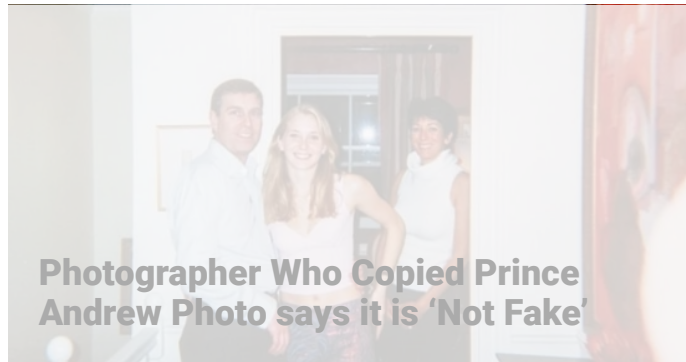
Image credit: Photograph by John Paul Filo/Valley News-Dispatch



EDUCATIONAL

PetaPixel articles may include affiliate links; if you buy something through such a link, PetaPixel may earn a commission.

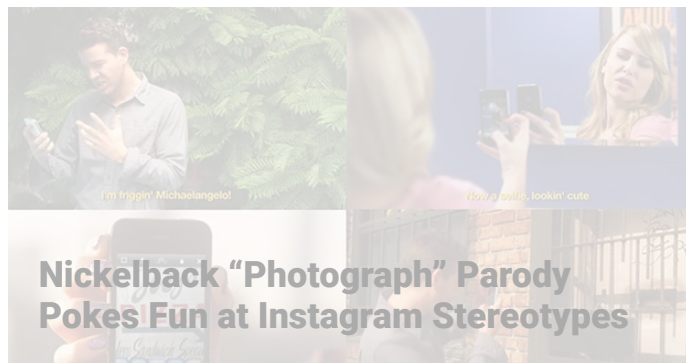
RELATED ARTICLES



Photographer Who Copied Prince Andrew Photo says it is 'Not Fake'



Old School Paparazzi Photograph



Nickelback "Photograph" Parody Pokes Fun at Instagram Stereotypes



Artist Has Self-Portrait Painting Approved as Drivers License Photograph

DISCUSSION

LOAD COMMENTS

BECOME A MEMBER

Become a PetaPixel Member and access our content ad-free.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

TRENDING ARTICLES



Photographer’s Once-in-a-Lifetime Shots of the Lunar Eclipse and Aurora

MAR 17, 2025



World's Largest Camera is Ready to Take Its First 3,200-Megapixel Photos of the Universe

MAR 14, 2025



OM System's Strategy Might Box It Into No-Man's Land

MAR 16, 2025



Tesla Autopilot Car Drove Into a Giant Photo of a Road

MAR 17, 2025

Reading mode:  Light  Dark

