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Photo Analysis

by **Joe Escobar** - Monday, January 28, 2013, 8:51 AM

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Historical Truth...?

by Adam Coutts - Tuesday, January 29, 2013, 12:58 PM

Of the two cases, the one that was really the more interesting of the two cases for me was the Case of the Confused Identity. The first picture shows up Confederate troops that were to desert their post and were shot while the second was Union troops that died gloriously in battle but the kicker came to that the photographs are actually on the exact same scene altered by a mere angle. It does to me; make it harder to identify what are historical truth and an altered lie.

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Re: Historical Truth...?

by Courtney Merrell - Sunday, February 3, 2013, 5:17 PM

Adam,

I also found the Case of Confused Identity, where they changed names and positions of the dead for a more emotional photo, to be more important when it

somes to us learning the historical facts. It was interesting that they not only altered the scene but they also changed the name of a common soldier in order for the picture to bear more importance. It was weird of Gardner to knowingly adjust these things in order to make a profit.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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The real worth of a picture.

by Jennifer King - Tuesday, January 29, 2013, 1:30 PM

I would have to say that it is a close race when it comes to which of the two cases, confused identity or moved body, shocks me the most. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, yet we all know that in today's society with all the photo editing programs, those words are not always truth. Thanks to programs like Photoshop anyone can appear to have been water skiing with Barack Obama, or meditating with Gandhi. Photos from a generation before the internet, before Photoshop, I thought would have been safe from such manipulation. Clearly, I was wrong.

I guess I would have to say that the case which bothered me the most was the moved body. First off the fact that Gardner and O'Sullivan were moving a body around to take photos of it is a little morbid. The thought of them dragging a corpse and positioning it, I'm assuming more than once, is quite gross honestly and very disrespectful of the fallen soldier. Secondly it seems as if Gardner was not out to document a historical battle at all, but simply to push some sensationalistic photos. This bothers me because while I am fully aware there has been at least some bias in journalism since words first hit print, these photos are being represented as historical pieces.

As far as the case of the confused identity, I'd have to say I gave that photo a little more lenience. By looking at the analysis, it was clear they used the same photo from two different angles to tell two stories, however in the caption of "Harvest of Death" it makes mention of there being both fallen Union and Confederate soldiers in the field. So Gardner took much smaller liberties when manipulating the information about these photos than he did with the case of the moved body.

Trying to decide which is worse, changing what is written or manipulating images, is like trying to choose the lesser of two evils. In either case the outcome is still the same, the person reading or viewing the information comes away mislead. I would have to say manipulating images is a slightly worse in my opinion though. After all, it's been said "seeing is believing" and we tend to trust what we see with our own eyes. If photos which are supposed to show us key moments in history have been altered to tell the story the photographer wants us to see rather than the real story, then how are we to know what is real and what is not? I suppose it goes back to what we've talked about in other forums, when it comes to historical research having multiple sources to reference and cross check facts is key.

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Sum of ratings:3 (1)



Re: The real worth of a picture.

by Alexander Kristy - Tuesday, January 29, 2013, 4:51 PM

If in fact Gardner and O'Sullivan did move around bodies to take photos and create images, it is very morbid, like you said. I agree with you that it is very disrespectful to the fallen and Gardner and O'Sullivan should be ashamed of themselves for doing so. I also agree with you on the point of whether Gardner cared at all about historical accuracy. It seems to me all he was after was some sensational photographs. Reminds me a little bit of what paparazzi do.

While I agree with you that manipulating a photo is terrible especially when it comes to history. I have to disagree that it's worse. I think that the confused identity is worse for a couple of reasons. Even though Gardner might have not moved the bodies in this photo, the fact that he took the photos from different angles to create a different look is also a form of manipulation. After looking at the photo many times, it actually looks like the bodies are placed differently. If you look at the enlarged image in "A Harvest of Death" four of the bodies are laying parallel and body number 5 is perpendicular. In "Field where General Reynolds Fell. Battle-Field of Gettysburg." the bodies are for the most part all parallel. Also, the fact that Gardner talks about General Reynolds being killed is misleading; because he was killed in a different location. I think this makes it worse. Moving bodies to create sensational photos is horrible, but misleading photos paired with wrong historical information is worse, in my opinion.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The real worth of a picture.

by Jennifer King - Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 8:56 AM

You make a great point about the confused identity case. While contemplating the question about whether changing text or picture was worse, I hadn't really thought about the fact that Gardner manipulated both in this case. But as you point out, not only did he shoot the photo from different angles, he also wrote inaccurate information in his description. This is definitely horrible. Basically it was like he was creating a fictional story about the war with both a manipulated photo and false information.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: The real worth of a picture.

by Adam Coutts - Friday, February 1, 2013, 10:08 AM

You both make excellent points; however both Alexander Gardner and

Mathew Brady were authorized by the government (Union) to accompany the Union troops during the campaigns. Many of these photographs were sold and their images were vivid scenes of carnage and caused many sensations during the course of the war. "Artists use lies to tell the truth..." (V for Vendetta). Gardner and Brady moved bodies of dead soldiers, altered the picture and painted the portrait. They wanted the Union troops painted in calm and peaceful were their deaths whereas most of the Confederates were dishonored troops who paid for their treason. Gardner's portrayal is morbid yes, but even after people saw the pictures, more and more men from all ages signed up and volunteered to fight for the Union.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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The historical truth

by Mark Gorski - Tuesday, January 29, 2013, 2:44 PM

At the beginning of the American Civil War the art of photography was in it's infancy. Cameras were quite cumbersome, (notice the camera the gentleman is seated next to in the photograph at the top of the web page.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphhtml/cwpcam/cwcam1.html>) shutter speeds were quite slow, requiring the subject to remain completely immobile for several seconds. The chemically treated (see photo below) exposed glass plates had to be developed immediately to fix the image before the chemicals dried which meant that photographers had to lug their developing equipment with them in wagons set up as dark rooms.

All of this made photographing actual battles impossible so photographers were relegated to taking portraits or taking pre battle photographs or photographs of the aftermath of a battle.

Most civil war photographers were forced to rely on the proceeds earned from portraits (Alexander Gardner was appointed to the staff of General George McClellan) as they were not paid to photograph battles. Most financed their battle field expeditions out of their own pockets or through the sale of photo journals to civilians. (The government eventually purchased the collection of some Civil War Photographers but not until long after the war ended)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photography_and_photographers_of_the_American_Civil

Given that most Civil War Photographers relied on sales to the general public many were aware of the need to use their photographs to tell a story. A story that the public would find appealing enough to pay for. To that end it is not difficult to understand why a photographer might have felt the need to add to a scene or embellish on a scene so that it became more appealing and related the feelings the photographer was trying to convey to the viewer.

The photographer is as much of an artist as the painter or the writer. All of them rely

on selling their product to the public as a means of supporting themselves.

Who questions the truthfulness of the painting "Washington Crossing the Delaware" by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze? Most will admit to historical discrepancies in this painting yet all will admit that it truthfully and faithfully portrays the event.

Why should photographs of Civil War battlefields be treated any differently? Yes, historians have found discrepancies in many civil war photographs but don't those photographs give us a feel for what battle was like for the soldier? Don't those photographs show us the realities of war?

Civil War Photography did something that had never before been done in the annals of human struggles. I brought the horrors of war home to those not involved in the actual fighting. For the first time shop keepers, farmers and even government officials knew what was happening to the soldiers sent off to fight for them. Who cares if a photographer added a prop to a scene or moved a body so that it better portrayed the even being photographed? How do these photographs make you feel? Do they make you feel angry that men died? Do they make you feel sad for the families of the men who died? Do they make you ashamed that a race of humans were treated so poorly? Do they make you feel proud of your country? If so then these photographs had their desired effect.

Is this yet another case of erroneously judging past events by today's standards? Possibly. Is this another case of some historians being so enthralled with facts and figures of a given event that they completely missed the human equation of the event? Likely.

My friends, understanding history is so much more than facts and figures. Understanding history is about understanding the human equation. It is about understanding why we do the things we do. It is about understanding ourselves and where we came from. It is about understanding what brought us to where we are and It is about understanding where we are going.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The historical truth

by Micah Young - Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 1:24 AM

I liked your posting. It's a different perspective than what I've been reading here. It's interesting to see some additional sources brought in like the Wikipedia article and I know that I've seen the Washington painting but wouldn't have thought of it if you hadn't mentioned it.

I take the work of these photographers (or at least how they managed the photos we read about in the article) a little differently than you do. I like though that you stick up for them, or it sounds like you do, because I don't think that many people will do so in this forum. And, I think that it is helpful to find some good to be positive about when generally only critiques are being made. So, I

want to present a question and then explain where I'm coming from.

You propose that "The photographer is as much of an artist as the painter or the writer." My question then is, if this is how a photographer views himself shouldn't he admit it? As I read the articles that accompanied Alexander Gardner's photos, it seemed that he meant them to be taken as truth, not as fictional stories meant to illustrate the pains of war. I think that Gardner should either change his stories and make them as accurate as possible or disclose to his clientele that he made up certain stories and modified certain images in order to help them respond emotionally to the war. His stories do sound eloquent, and his pictures arose certain emotions, but are they true is what I would want to know. I want the facts first and the feelings second. I want more control over my feelings than to let them be led on by someone who has already mislead me into thinking that he gave me a real rendition.

I have read fictional history novels (a long time ago) and enjoyed them. Although, I think it's hard to really get history out of them because it's hard to know which is which. It's like the mistaken identity where there are real pictures with false identities and we feel like genius detectives for deciphering the difference between real and fiction which should have in honesty, in this case, been disclosed. In a case like this I don't think he shouldn't call his art history; that is what bothers me about his work because it makes it hard to get truth and it is misleading with false stories. I think that people who document history should do so accurately. I think it's fine if they want to help peoples' imaginations too. But, they should use good not distorted history to spur imagination; or, disclose that they are not actually trying to report history. Is there a way Gardner can seem better than dishonest?

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: The historical truth

by Mark Gorski - Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 10:10 AM

I don't surmise that the photographer thinks of himself/herself as an artist. What I surmise is that society views them as artists.

During the Civil War it was technologically impossible to take photographs of an actual battle due to the size of the camera, slow shutter speeds and the necessity to develop the photographic plates immediately after exposure. This meant that the photographers did not get onto the battle field until after the battle. In most cases after the wounded had been carried off and after any usable weapons or equipment had been foraged.

What this meant was that photographers had to rely on the verbal accounts of survivors as to what happened. They then had to walk the battlefield in search of scenes that would best portray what they had been told. I am certain that props were added to photographs and I am sure that in some instances bodies were moved to create an appropriate scene. Was this

wrong? I really don't think so given the limitations of photography at the time.

One of the most moving and inspiring battlefield scenes ever to be captured on film was that of Marines raising the American flag on Iwo Jima during world war two. Now imagine, if you will, there was no one there at the time with a camera and photographers were forced to recreate the scene after the fact based on eyewitness accounts. Would that have been wrong? I don't think so! Would a staged photograph taken after the fact have been any less moving or any less inspiring? Doubtful.

Photographers stage and pose photographs all the time. Open the family photo album. 99% of those photographs are staged or posed. Do they portray the event they were meant to portray? Most definitely!

Should staged photographs carry a legal disclaimer informing us that they were staged? Why? Have we become so distrusting that we can't look at a photograph from the past and not accept it for what it is? Have we become so caught up in our own level of technology that we forget the limitations of the past? To my knowledge none of those Civil War photographers ever claimed that their photographs were photographs of actual events as they happened. We look at photographs in newspapers and magazines today and do not question their accuracy yet because a few picky historians look over a few Civil War photographs, point out a few discrepancies and all of a sudden we are crucifying Civil War Photographers as a whole.

All I am saying is that these photographs should be viewed for what they are. A visual depiction of events that enhance any publication on the subject.

Is our understanding of the Civil War better served by viewing these photographs or would we be better off not viewing them?

I personally think my understanding of the Civil War has been vastly enriched by my having viewed many of these photographs.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The historical truth



by Micah Young - Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 3:08 PM

Okay, that helps. Thanks for the reply. And, I'll just clarify at first that I am really thankful for the Civil War photos that we do have. I think that they definitely, like you say, enhance the publication of the subjects that they accompany. So, with that, I don't mean to be critical of photography and the industry, because I think it can help greatly, while on the other hand, depending on how it is used, it can also be misleading.

I think you make a good point about staged photography, in general, but Gardner's two cases seem very different. At very least I think this because he wrote a false story to go along with the photos. Essentially, telling us what we should believe about his photos and consequentially about the war. This is one example: "On the nineteenth of November, the artist attended the consecration of the Gettysburg Cemetery, and again visited the "Sharpshooter's Home."" The paragraph continues by saying that the man's skeleton and gun were still in the hole after four months. While reading this I thought, that can't be true, and was relieved to learn that it wasn't. Maybe we were supposed to assume the story was made up? Regardless, I did not like the technique and if Gardner wasn't proposing his art (the quote refers to him as an 'artist') as history then historians might leave him alone. I think that if we are going to imagine what the war was like, we need to start with the best facts and realities. Thanks again!

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The historical truth

by Robyn Stevens - Sunday, February 3, 2013, 7:51 PM

I have been following the conversations and really starting to understand that I am riding the fence on both of these issues. I have a hard time with written and photographic documents that are misleading, but on the other hand, I can see why certain decisions are made to "stretch the truth" in certain instances. I went into this conversation thinking one way, and now, with a little more reading, I have started to look at it differently. I really think that no matter who you are, whether a photographer or a writer, you are never going to be able to please everybody with your work. I do feel like if you are going to do that type of work for the public, then you should serve the public with the truth. Just my thoughts even though they are a bit confused at this time. I really do agree with you. I think the facts matter. Even if they are a little biased.

Gardner did the job with the resources he had. In that period of time, the conditions that you had to work in must not have been the best. I will look at photographs and articles from history with a totally different view point from now on.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The historical truth S

by Jennifer King - Thursday, January 31, 2013, 12:09 PM

I like the point of view you chose with your post. Photographers do indeed aim to tell a story with their photographs, and the way they chose to do that is part of their art. I can see and agree with your point that when it comes to the photography of the Civil War we should not get caught up in worrying whether each photo is historically accurate. The photos enable us to see what the war was like and definitely do show the human aspect.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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confused identity versus moved body S

by Alexander Kristy - Tuesday, January 29, 2013, 4:01 PM

This is the toughest question yet. It's hard for me to say which is worse confused identity or moved body. If I had to pick, I'd probably go with confused identity. I was very surprised by both cases. It's clear Alexander Gardner wanted to create a story behind these photos so that the people viewing them would be drawn into the stories. It seems ridiculous that someone would manipulate dead bodies to create a story. Isn't the war itself a tragic enough story that the whole nation was following anyways?

I'd say the confused identity is more appalling because he goes into specific detail about fallen General Reynolds. William Frassanito states that Reynolds was actually killed in another location, and gives details of why the soldiers in the photograph are Union men. "Several clues indicate that the images are two views of the same scene taken from opposite sides. One of the most obvious clues is a piece of rumpled clothing that shows the diamond badge worn only by Union 3d Corps soldiers. The numbers identify the individual bodies; to confirm these identifications, researchers may wish to compare the placement of hands and feet. Other features of the men's uniforms permitted Frassanito to identify them as Union. Topographic clues convinced him that the photographs were made in open fields near the Rose farm and close to the Emmitsburg Road. Under General Dan Sickles, the Union 3d Corps suffered heavy losses around Emmitsburg Road. General John Reynolds, commander of the 1st Corps and mentioned in Gardner's title, fell at a different location." (The Case of Confused Identity, second link). I believe the confused body is more egregious because Gardner talks about a specific death and accompanies it with a non-corresponding photo. The moved body is an unidentified soldier and there is no known history about it. I guess it comes down to which you think is worse, making up a story and moving a body to create it or creating a story and misrepresenting facts with a photo.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Historical truth or manipulation?

by Alexander Kristy - Tuesday, January 29, 2013, 4:19 PM

After seeing and reading about the confused identity and moved body, it does concern me what to believe and what not to believe. I was surprised by the liberties taken by Alexander Gardner in his photos, but not shocked. I think many photographers want to catch a certain feel in an image and I'm sure some photographers would go to great lengths to get that exact image they are looking for. What bothers me more is that these photos are being used in educational forums. How do you expect someone to learn if they very images they are looking at have been altered to create a more compelling story. History is supposed to be factual right? If these images have been manipulated to create a different image they're not very useful are they?

One thing that did catch me off guard is that I never really thought about how old photos such as these could be manipulated. I guess I was under the impression that old photos were always believable and I never really questioned their authenticity; a bit naive on my part. In the world today photos can be altered into practically anything you want, but I never thought about it with older photos.

It's difficult to gauge what historical truth is when photos aren't what they appear to be, or Burns has given us some wrong information. As this class has moved along I'm seeing that we are being shown many mistakes, in what is supposed to be historical information. So I don't know what to believe sometimes. The best way to deal with it, for me, is to take everything being taught or shown with a little reservation.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Wrong Gun sharpshooter??

by Jessica Cadenasso - Tuesday, January 29, 2013, 8:40 PM

The case that stuck out to me was the case of the moved bodies. i find it very interesting that he takes the same guy and moves him to a different spot claiming that he is a sharpshooter. He didn't even get the guns right to make that claim, and then say he say the body again four months later., with the gun still sitting there. People would have claimed the gun and buried his body. Its very interesting how he try's to make this seem different. The other case was also funny how they just took different angle shots of the same people and claiming them different sides of the army.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Wrong Gun sharpshooter??

by Courtney Merrell - Saturday, February 2, 2013, 10:28 PM

I too found the whole ordeal interesting. Not only did the photo provide an incorrect gun for what a sharpshooter would use during that civil war time but it was Gardner's prop that he had brought with him in the first place. He left that day knowing there would be corpses on the battle field and knew he would want to make it even more dramatic by enhancing the story of a photo. The whole thing makes me disgusted.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Misrepresenting facts in print is much worse than altering photos

by Micah Young - Tuesday, January 29, 2013, 11:49 PM

I have never specifically thought about how manipulating historical perception by altering facts compares ethically between written misinformation and pictured misinformation. I still haven't reached an absolute opinion one way or the other, and think they are both wrong since they manipulate facts and thus their reader or observer. However, as I am now working on my response to this question, I think that I am becoming more absolutely decided. I have erased some of my initial sentences, changed my opening thoughts, and come to some conclusion about these distinctions.

It is more detrimental to historical record to change a printed document than a photograph. There are certain distinctions between the two that I use to conclude this: expectation of each source, purpose of each source, and the processing of each source.

Much is expected of documents. Written records predate photography by centuries and they have, since the beginning of recorded history, been relied upon as the best means for understanding the world outside of one's own experience. Without written records, much of the past would be even further lost. Also, the accuracy of certain antiquitous sources, such as the Bible, is heavily relied upon. The antiquity and historical purpose of print make it more important and more relied upon than photography and therefore its alteration is more detrimental. Conversely, photography is relatively new and it does not contain inherent messages. I think it is not relied upon as heavily to communicate history for these reasons and in part because of lost credibility due to how easily it can be altered. I think that written history can exist without pictures (though images can be invaluable) however, pictures always need some written definition: a name to a face, introduced event, explanation of cause, etc.

There are ranges for each medium's usefulness, so their purpose cannot be simply reduced into one category, however, I do think that photography is more likely to be used for entertainment and sensation (exemplified by Gardner's case), whereas written sources are more regularly (compared to film) applied to communicating events and facts. The purpose of written sources is to explain and teach. Such sources help my comprehension of history. The purpose of pictures is to show, assist and amplify what is written and help imagine. Pictures help me become emotionally

engaged in a story or event, and they help me relate to other times and people. Because I consider written documentation to be essential to communicating a message and pictures as amplification of that message, I think it is worse to change the explanation than the mode for imagination.

Pictures are powerful. This reality, and dynamics about how the two mediums are processed is what left me initially unsure about this whole question. The things that we read and the things that we see are processed differently. I propose (generalizations of course) that in reading we interpret information and construct knowledge, whereas seeing images and watching film leave us with emotional impressions and invoke a response to what we have felt. I am very engaged by old photos, particularly of places that I know. Recently I was at a friend's house in Ruch, Oregon where he and I both grew up. On his wall was a picture, taken in the fifties, of his family's old saw mill and I scrutinized the details, imagining the history that passed from then until now. I think that photos can leave deep impressions and be much more moving than what we read. Analysis is important when processing historical information yet I think the advantage initially goes to visuals because they preempt the definition stage by capturing imagination. So, based on a person's processing habits, I think that alteration of the two mediums can be equally misleading. However, changing print, in general, is much, much worse.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Misrepresenting facts in print is much worse than altering photos

S

by Jennifer King - Thursday, January 31, 2013, 12:20 PM

The case of the moved body personally bothered me the most, but after reading your post the identity case is much more troubling. You make some terrific points about written word. One does tend to believe what is written, especially when it is a narrative accompanying a photo. Pictures are very powerful as you stated, and the fact that not only the picture was manipulated in this case, but the written description of it as well is upsetting. I suppose if the photo hadn't been preserved as a historical document it wouldn't be as bad, but the narrative is supposed to tell facts about what happened in the photo. Since both the photo and caption are false it becomes merely a work of art based in reality.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Confused Identity S

by Robert Stimpson - Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 1:07 PM

The case of the confused identity was one that really stuck out to me. One picture supposed to be showing rebel deserters, the other glorious Union soldiers who died in battle. What they didn't want us to know though was that it was the same picture, but taken from opposite sides.

I think this case shows one of two things: first, that some of the photographers from the war were not worried about the historical accuracies, but were out there to make a buck on an iconic photo. Second, it shows how gullable the people were, especially if they were biased towards a side and thought the picture had an emotion impact.

Looking at both the pictures at a glance it is hard to tell that they are of the same scene, it took me a while to notice much similarity and I even had to look at an analysis of the scene to figure out which bodys were which in both pictures. After taking the time to figure it out though, I can easily tell that they are of the same men.

I don't blame the photographer as much as some historians would. At the time things like the Civil War happen, almost all of the people involved don't think they're having as much of a historical impact as they actually do. So a photographer, wanting to get a little money for a battle scene wasn't thinking about how people would feel about his deceit over 100 years into the future, but what the emotions of the people at the time were.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Confused Identity

by Jacob Pusey - Sunday, February 3, 2013, 10:12 PM

I could not agree more with your interpretation of Civil War photographers. I think it is important to point out that many of these men were also employed by authorities on both sides. Because the Union won the war and they had more resources to commission the photographers, it is not really surprising that we see more northern influence in what remains. You mention that you do not blame the people who took the pictures for their lack of historical perspective and I also agree. After every army, there was always a following of people who were there to sell provisions, weapons and even women to the soldiers. Large groups would even plunder the battlefields and scavenge war trophies. These were tough times. I see the marauding armies almost like a traveling city. There were hundreds of thousands of young people traveling and as the book and film pointed out, they had mostly down time between battles and skirmishes. The Union had bad food, the Confederates had worse. I'm sure when the local people would actually come out of their homes they would try and sell the soldiers whatever they had. There were quite a few groups that tried to exploit the war and among them were the photographers which were mostly traveling salesman selling a product. This is why there were so few battlefield pictures compared to the portraits. I think most did not stick around once the actual fighting began.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Historical Propaganda

by Jacob Pusey - Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 5:06 PM

Using wartime propaganda to vilify an enemy, glorify the righteous -whatever side that may be- and to remind a war weary public that their "boys" are not dying in vain was not new to the Civil War and is still very much being used to this day. While propaganda can be very effective, it is rarely accurate. The article mentions how Gardner was likely trying to create a narrative to go along with the photos. Any photo out of context can be misconstrued but, I think that moving and posing bodies for Gardner's own personal gain is not only professionally uncouth, but also just wrong. At least the mistaken identity pictures were taken where the soldiers fell. Even with the false narrative and obvious bias that accompanied them, they were still accurate. If a wartime photojournalist would do this today -and I'm sure they have- their work would be immediately discredited and their reputation permanently tarnished. I think that this serves as a wonderful example of how our brains tend to trust more what we see rather than what we read. We like to think that before photoshop, images were pure and unaltered. In reality, even the first photographs were staged and manipulated because early photographers were trying to justify their practice as a legitimate form of art or journalism and this meant coming up with either a beautiful image or something that creates a reaction in the viewer. I think that because anyone can write a story, overtime we have become more skeptical of writers and more accepting of what we can see with our own eyes. Historically speaking, because of the analysis done on the mistaken identity pictures which shows them to be Union troops from the 3d Corp and even where they were taken, gives them back their context. However, Gardner's narrative is practically useless.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Historical Propaganda

by Robert Stimpson - Thursday, January 31, 2013, 6:53 PM

Yes, that is exactly what I was thinking when I thought of the pictures and deception, the "propaganda." They wanted their side glorified to their people, to garner the peoples support for supplies, which these pictures probably did, seeing as they became iconic and so much controversy has surrounded them. You make a good point later too, about modern propoganda like that. We probably see it all the time, but we can't tell, especially with photo manipulation and our fast information world clouding what we see, but I think if a photographer was found out it would put them in the gutter. This also proves that a photo could be manipulated even without computer technology, just a change of angle or a body repositioned could elicit a false emotion to garner support.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Manipulation with photographs

by Robyn Stevens - Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 5:11 PM

I shouldn't be surprised at the fact that someone rearranged bodies, or had

photographs they used multiple times to manipulate others, but I am. I guess for the fact that not only was it disrespectful to the fallen soldiers and their loved ones, but it was also disrespectful to the public for making them form opinions about circumstances that may or may not have happened.

Some people, throughout history, have always been self serving. To me, Gardner was just another one of those people. There is always someone who will lie, cheat, or steal. This is what I think Gardner has done. No one disputes the fact that all of the photographs taken are real, but the way they are used is manipulation.

Gardner may have had his reasons, that we may or may not ever know, but the reason for deceit when you are supposed to be a professional is not what one would think of as good form. In this day and age, or in the past, people are still critical of others for things like "doctored, copied, or photo shopped" pictures. Right now, in the present, people are sued for this all the time. People now scream with outrage about the injustice of pictures taken they say are false or misleading. I just think about the injustice of these dead soldiers and their families who had no say in how they were portrayed.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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Deceit

by Courtney Merrell - Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 7:59 PM

This subject is tough to discuss. Both topics are equally upsetting, although I think moving the body of a dead soldier in order to get the shot that will satisfy your creative expression of the war is despicable, purposefully giving corpses random names in order to give your picture more importance is not only disrespectful but also alters our historical outlook when studying the era.

Gardner moving a soldier from one stand point to another just to have a different view for a new picture to sell, deceiving the viewer into thinking that these are two different men is just weird. What strikes me as even weirder is the fact that Gardner and his associates brought props, such as the rifle shown in "the sharp shooters last sleep" and "Home of the rebel sharpshooter" to better show off these lifeless bodies as corpses of a battle. And although this is wrong in every way, I feel as though the other topic mentioned would have a greater effect on our historical teachings. Don't get me wrong, both of these cases by manipulating the truth deter us from learning factual information. But in the case of mistaken identity the corpses are rephotographed in a different view, as with the first case. And although these corpses were not touched, they were renamed, one as a General Reynolds. Who was not left on the field as these men were. Gardner changed the identities in order to sell these photos for profit. And when learning about our history we always seem to rely on dates, names and places. If these are altered it makes it difficult to really learn the truth.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Photo Analysis

by Kale Sheldon - Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 10:30 PM

The image and story that felt by far the most egregious to me was the one Alex Gardner wrote about the Confederate soldiers, mainly because the writing in it appeared to be meant to get Union supporters excited and riled up.

I think "historical truth" is a somewhat vague term, because I'm not sure that there is really such a thing as absolute historical truth. Even with photographs, history can always be easily distorted for the purpose of manipulation or to make one side appear superior to the other. However, I don't think it is anything to be disappointed about, because it romanticizes history in a certain way, and makes it fascinating and endlessly debatable.

I don't think there is a difference between manipulating something that is written and manipulating a photograph. Both tactics accomplish the same goal, in that they are used to alter someone's opinion. Propaganda seems to always have a bad stigma attached to it, but depending on the intent of the message, it can be a useful and important tool to keep your side confident in a brutal, vicious, and seemingly never-ending war.

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Moving Bodies

by Ashley Clark - Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 11:50 PM

To me, the idea of a photographer disturbing a soldier's rest simply for the goal of making the scene "more picturesque" is infuriating. These are men who laid down their lives for their country, who stood up to protect their land and stand up for what they believed in. They are not models, dolls to be posed and played with to make something pretty.

While the idea of mislabeling a caption for a certain effect is also rather underhanded, it's more understandable. Even now, pictures are labeled out of context to engage viewers. Celebrities seen talking to another married star are instantly labeled as having an affair. It was done then, it's done today. Pictures are captioned to be sensational and to spark emotion. Purposefully taking something out of context is protected by the right to free speech and freedom of the press. It's not necessarily a good thing, but it's more acceptable than staging those photos.

Moving a dead man's body, giving him props and changing the angle that he's lying is outright disrespectful. If the body had been moved to an area where soldiers were not sent to go, the men in his division may never have found him or identified him. He would have been given a half-hearted burial by the enemy. As the website said, "'Missing' was all that could have been known of him at home." The photographer

lied about where the body was found, who it was, and how he had died. The idea of toying with the corpses of a soldier for aesthetics' sake is downright repulsive. People would be outraged today if their loved ones were fussed about with as models to sensationalize the war.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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The Most Egregious? Abuse of Public Trust!

by Mark Gorski - Thursday, January 31, 2013, 12:20 PM

Prior to the American Civil War the "Folks Back Home" were rarely exposed to the horrors of the battlefield. All they saw was the brave boys in their splendid uniforms with their polished weapons marching off to war in parade formation. Because of this most "civilians" attached a certain romanticism to soldiering and war while fully supporting their government in the execution of that war.

Mr. Gardner was attempting to show those "Folks Back Home" that war is bloody, messy, frightening and just downright ugly by giving them a small taste of what it was actually like. In this regard he definitely succeeded in getting his message across. However, I believe that the American people would have been much better served had he stuck to the truth and allowed the people to form their own opinions.

While I can certainly understand the message Mr. Gardner was trying to get across it does not excuse his having manipulated and misrepresented his photographs nor does it excuse his having embellished his accompanying narrative.

In large part thanks to the Photograph and the Telegraph the "Folks Back Home" were able to read firsthand accounts and view actual images of battles within days or even hours. For the first time in history the civilian population was able to follow victories and defeats as well as view casualty lists and make their opinions known to their elected officials. Many of whom would soon be up for re-election. This had the effect of forcing military commanders to not only consider tactical situations but also political considerations on the battlefield. This also forced elected officials to become directly involved in battlefield strategies and actions.

As Americans we place a certain level of trust in our news media. (Yes, Civil War photographers and writers were the "Imbedded War Correspondents of the time). It is a very hard pill to swallow but our history is replete with examples of individuals in our news media abusing that public trust for either personal or political gains. To my mind abusing the public trust is the most egregious and cowardly of actions and should not be condoned for any reason.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The Most Egregious? Abuse of Public Trust!

by Ashley Clark - Sunday, February 3, 2013, 9:59 PM

My concerns come with the fact that he intentionally manipulated and mislabeled photos to change the public's outlook. I understand that he was trying to destroy the romanticized outlook in order to provide a more realistic perspective, but he went about it in the wrong way. If he were intending to inform people of the truth about war, he should have given them the truth. While yes, his method was effective in showing the harder times of war, of the death and destruction faced by both sides, he failed to provide accurate information, which immediately destroys his credibility.

However, I do not believe that he was solely out to provide this bloody image. The fact that he held an obvious Union bias in depicting the fallen soldiers as peaceful is evidence enough to that. "Confederate" soldiers were always shown shot in the back or lying awkwardly as though they had been deserting, whereas the Union men were posed to look peaceful and asleep.

While I agree with you that it's unfair to abuse public trust, we ought to have learned by now that we can't always trust the media. Tabloids are proof enough, and with this added manipulation of context even in trusted photos, I think it's time we decide our opinions on our own.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Gardner's Photo Sketchbook

by Robyn Stevens - Thursday, January 31, 2013, 9:09 PM

I went back to read the passages that accompanied the photographs, once again, to see if I had missed some important point. I realized I had. I had not really acknowledged the page about Gardner's Sketchbook. I actually typed in the name of Gardner's book online at google and it came up with other images that he had taken that were also in the book. I actually looked at a lot of other photographs that were taken by him or were associated with him.

The pictures were really very good given the time period. When I looked at these photos, it was like I was looking at the war as if I were the one standing there taking in this view firsthand. Being on the front lines of a battlefield at the time of the fighting, before, or after, has to be one of the hardest things a human being will have to go through. I do think it took alot of courage to do what the photographers were willing to do at the time. By all means, it does not make it right in all the cases with the moving bodies or manipulation of photographs, but they were trying to bring a story about war to people who might not otherwise have known what was going on.

I still take my earlier stand on what I do and don't agree with, but after looking at more of the photographs, I am starting to understand why some would make certain decisions. If you had people to sway to your cause and you needed to win a war, print or photographic propaganda was a really smart way to go about doing just that. It was not a very pretty sight to behold in pictures. I wouldn't even put myself in their place to imagine what it must have looked like up front and face to face, so to

Speak.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Gardner's Photo Sketchbook

by Ashley Clark - Sunday, February 3, 2013, 10:33 PM

I agree with you to a certain extent. While yes, I do believe that the images expressed in the photos were meant to give the public a more accurate idea, I think that they should have given an *accurate* account.

As I mentioned in my own (very opinionated) post, I'm outraged by the way the soldier's memories were disrespected for the sake of propaganda. In terms of bringing the news to the public, I understand the goal but disagree with the method. If Gardner wanted to show the public a realistic portrayal of war, he should have given it to them.

This is not to say that they weren't effective. Clearly, the aftermath of the Civil War gave people enough of a perspective to realize that war is a lot more than vanquishing the enemies and coming out on top. They had an overly glorified and romanticized view of war, as they had come out on top of all their others. The Civil War was the loss of our own citizens, murdered by their old friends and brothers. It was a tragic event, but people were too consumed with the idea of murdering those who didn't share their ideals to realize that. The photos given showed people what war really represented, and the death and destruction and sorrow that surrounds and is associated with it. It may not have been the most accurate depiction, but it did its job.

I don't agree with the way the method got across in the least, don't get me wrong. But I do understand the reasoning, and I respect his intentions.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Historical Importance

by Courtney Merrell - Thursday, January 31, 2013, 9:30 PM

As the days have passed since my first post on the discussion, I have thought about this issue. I found it interesting that Ken Burns uses these photos specifically, pictures that would be considered manipulated history. I would think he being the historian that he is, would know of the falsification of the two photos and would find others that would do the peace just as much justice, while still holding truth. As the discussions go on I'm starting to get a different feel for Ken Burns, I'm not sure if it's how the discussion directions are worded or if it's just me seeing information I didn't

know was there before. I guess I just believe that if you are preaching, especially to students, than you better know your stuff. Although my confidence in him and his documentary wasn't necessarily shaken from last weeks discussion and I still agree with my first statement (that white lies like that, as long as they are small, won't effect learning severely), this week makes me feel like there is going to be more 'no-nos' that Burns pulls throughout this film series that will effect our learning.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Historical Importance

by Micah Young - Friday, February 1, 2013, 2:56 PM

Does Ken Burns use these photos? I really don't know, but I don't think I've seen them in the first three episodes. I agree though, that to use a medium like film for teaching history it should be accurate.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Historical Importance

by Robert Stimpson - Friday, February 1, 2013, 8:18 PM

I found that interesting too, Burns using the photos. It got me thinking too, what if a lot of the other photos used in the series were manipulated as well? We may never know, Burns might not even know if they are or not, and even if he does I think he would probably use them. Most of the photos in the series are used as a suppliment to the narrative, not showcased themselves as actually from that specific place and time, or even of the same battle.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Historical Importance

by Ashley Clark - Sunday, February 3, 2013, 10:47 PM

I've begun to get that impression as well. Although I'm not necessarily bothered by the "no-nos" themselves, the idea that they'll continue is a bit disconcerting. I've not lost my faith in the series, as I still see it as an extremely accurate account aside from the small tweaks of context, but I'm disappointed that they're there in the first place. I realize that they're placed in the documentary for emphatic effect, to present a certain message to the viewer in the way that Burns is intending, I think that he should be a bit more clear. For example, the photos that are the topic of this week's discussion. They were good photos showing the destruction of the war, but there is nothing that makes them stand out from the other photos taken of the battlefield. I feel it's safe to assume that Gardner wasn't the only photographer staging his photos, but perhaps Burns

could have used ones from a man with a lesser reputation for posing.

I don't think that these little upsets will really change the accuracy, but I can see why people start to lose faith. Yes, these "little white lies" won't significantly hurt anything when it comes to story portrayal, but when these repeated manipulations are pointed out, he will start to lose credibility in the public's eye.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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New Sensation

by Adam Coutts - Friday, February 1, 2013, 10:37 AM

It's true that manipulating images to promote their version of the truth is a very tricky line that's been crossed many times throughout our history. Using the dead especially in war has sometimes been used to sensationalize and sell newspapers, magazines and other types of war coverage. During, for example, the media hyped up the Iraq war as a "cake walk" and "turkey shoot" without really covering the impact that the war had on the people of Iraq. And in 1860 to 1865, they didn't have the news coverage like we do today where within moments of the inciting incident they have 24/7 news coverage from start to finish. It was a new world of opportunities for people like Brady and Gardner.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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An Altered Example

by Adam Coutts - Friday, February 1, 2013, 5:10 PM

Talking about altered images or manipulating the truth of an image as such with Gardner and Brady, I wanted to share with you all an image that I remembered seeing. I searched high and low and finally found it and took a picture of it and I will attach it to this post. The picture I believe is referencing World War II with a shot of Winston Churchill and several Generals standing in the background, however what makes this image similar is that four men (one's head is cropped out) standing directly behind Churchill is in fact the members of the band Alien Ant Farm. Either their faces were digitized into a very real picture or perhaps the entire picture is a phony with hired actors that appear to be Churchill and others. This particular image has always stuck with me, not because it was an elaborate ruse that they created but rather how they got the picture to look so real. If this looks phony or has bad lighting for that I apologize, I took this with my smart phone as I couldn't find this specific image on the web. The thing is, I know this has only one similarity that it's phony, there's nothing morbid about it unless you met Winston Churchill in person and think this is in poor taste. I just wanted to share this one example with you all. And to say Gardner and Brady were photographers and they needed someone to buy their images and war always sells.





Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: An Altered Example

by Robert Stimpson - Saturday, February 2, 2013, 3:19 PM

Your post about photo manipulation in other sources got me thinking about some that I had seen about the Soviets and Nazis manipulating photos as propaganda, or even removing people from photos if they did something to disgrace the party after the photo was taken. I couldn't find the exact thing about it, but I did find a website about Soviet photo manipulation that is very interesting.

<http://englishrussia.com/2012/09/06/photo-manipulations-in-the-ussr/>

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Is there a difference between changing what is in print and staging a photograph?

by Mark Gorski - Saturday, February 2, 2013, 7:42 PM

To my mind there is no difference. Manipulating an image or falsifying a written account both violate the public trust. What lessens the severity of this violation is the fact that most of these photographs and written accounts were clearly meant to be representations of events instead of actual first hand accounts.

As has been stated by several of my classmates Mr. Burns does not make any claims as to the authenticity of the images or narratives used in his film. And in all honesty does knowing some images or narratives may have been manipulated detract from the impact of the film? Somehow I think they still enhance it because regardless of their accuracy they do effectively depict the feel they are trying to project.

Yes, it is a good thing that current technology allows us to verify the accuracy of historical records but sometimes I think we go too far and completely overlook the intent of the original photographer or author as well as the level of technology available at the time. I just pray that 150 years from now historians aren't sitting around nitpicking what we are doing today based on the accepted standards of their own time and not the standards of ours.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Is there a difference between changing what is in print and staging a photograph?

by Ashley Clark - Sunday, February 3, 2013, 11:27 PM

I understand your point, but the events that they're representing are staged. Some of these soldiers were moved from their positions, toyed with, given props, and lied about. That's what I find to be truly upsetting about the photos. Not that they were given an inaccurate label, but that these soldiers were treated as actors on a stage.

I see nothing wrong with Burns using these specific photos. After all, he never implied that the images were true, even as he made no claim to the contrary. They were, as you said, simply representations of an event. Burns is trying to show exactly that--representations of this specific event.

Likewise, I agree that people are going somewhat over the top with outrage over the "accuracy." It's not as though the photos are *really* lying about the events, they're not showing the soldiers sitting around having tea and crumpets on the field and trying to convince us that they're real. However, if they were trying to give an accurate representation, they should have given a truly accurate one. Keep the soldiers in their appropriate locations. Tell about how they really died, and what they died fighting for. It will still effectively show the sorrow and destruction, but there will be no manipulation to make the audience question the authenticity and, as a result, the actual events of the battle.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Photography Played a Vital Role

by Jacob Pusey - Sunday, February 3, 2013, 1:13 PM

After watching Ken Burns latest episode *Forever Free*, I did have a slightly different idea of what many of the photographers really did. Most provided a valuable service that became very important to not only the soldiers themselves but, also their loved ones. For the first time they were able to have an image that they could use to remember how their husbands and sons looked. While the battlefield pictures served as a crucial new medium to document history, the posed shots of the soldiers proudly dressed in their uniforms and posing with their weapons must have meant a tremendous amount to them when they shipped out letters to those back home. The faces of these young men who were about to risk their lives knew that those pictures might be the last time that friends and family would see them alive. The people who took these pictures must have known that the soldiers counted on them to provide this service and what many of them surely did for personal gain and exploited the war, I also think that as many likely took the job very seriously and were proud to do their part to help with moral.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Antietam photos

by Courtney Merrell - Sunday, February 3, 2013, 5:59 PM

After participating in the discussion this week, I couldn't help but pick apart the photo collection that was used in episode three of Ken Burn's series. Around the part showcasing the Battle of Antietam they did a slideshow of various war time pictures. It made me wonder if any of the photos were even of that particular battle or if they were just photos he had found that were war themed and fit the era. With photo manipulation being used in prior episodes I'm sure that some of the photos in this episode are not actually historically accurate, therefore somewhat effect our learning.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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