

HST 209: History of the Civil War W18 (Escobar 31595)

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Civil War Photography

by Joe Escobar - Saturday, January 27, 2018, 11:17 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Civil War Photography topic.

To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

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Disrespecting The Dead

by Kyle McDaniel - Monday, January 29, 2018, 9:54 AM

I will admit, when it came to black and white photos I would look at them and think of them as nothing but the concrete truth. I guess that is a little naive, but I just thought people weren't so dishonest back in the day, but it looks like dishonesty has just been around forever.

I was downright shocked to read that civil war photographers Alexander Gardner and Timothy O'Sullivan more than likely moved a corpse just to weave a more sympathetic tale. It just seems so downright disrespectful to the dead. I did not realize that even back in the day, that reporters and photographers only went for the "juiciest" headline. It wasn't sad enough that a

solider lost his life on the battlefield; so they staged a little scene and spun a more dramatized story out of this mans dead body.

I think it's equally bad to alter photographs or printed articles. Either way, it is a fabrication of the truth and very selfish. The author or photographer is looking for more attention or more sales and will gain this at the expense of anyone it takes (even the dead apparently). There is no difference in my mind, be it printed words or photos. These acts are disgraceful; especially when there is a public seeking the truth; but as long as dramatized headlines and photographs sell more, the truth will be hard to find in our lives.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Good comparison to yellow journalism

by Paul Geu - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 11:57 PM

I too was a bit naïve when it came to the manipulation of civil war scenes but when you talk about using the "juiciest" headlines got me thinking about other events from the past that were very similar. William Randolph Hearst, a pioneer of yellow journalism said "You furnish the pictures, and I'll furnish the War" he said this in regards to the Spanish-American War in 1898. After reading both cases I felt that Gardner was just like Hearst, willing to do anything he could to drum up support for the cause, and make a lot of money in the process. Unfortunately, people like these will always be around to trick the general population to think what they want us to think.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Good comparison to yellow journalism

by Jonathan Wheeler - Friday, February 2, 2018, 5:20 PM

I too was reminded of yellow journalism as I read these articles. I am curious if reporters in the North and South had been more neutral, would the Civil War have lasted as long as it did? At the beginning of the Civil War, both sides were gung ho to fight. But if the media had taken a different approach than trying to fan the flames of war, would the outcome have been different?

One way to defiantly attract the attention of the public is by doing what Alexander Gardner did, by in sighting hatred of the other side with a false narrative. The worst part was that it probably was all for profit. Just like you said "willing to do anything he could to drum up support for the cause".

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Outcome would probably be the same

by Paul Geu - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 9:52 PM

As much as I would hope that if the media was more neutral the war would have been shorter, I think that once the war shifted to one of total war, the path of destruction was set. By being fanning the flames of war the media was able to focus the people

on finishing the fight for the Union and fight til the end for the Confederacy. But it would be an interesting alternative history documentary to see what would have happened if the newspapers were not biased.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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Re: Outcome would probably be the same

by Jonathan Wheeler - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 10:49 PM

I agree that once the war reached total war that there was no turning it around. As Abraham Lincoln relaized, that in order to preserve the Union they would have to win the war at all costs, with no compromise or treaty with the South. Do you think the media of the time had a duty to invoke patriotism for their side to continue the fight?

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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Re: Outcome would probably be the same

by Jackson Peterson - Sunday, February 4, 2018, 9:25 AM

Agreed, I believe that once the war was off and running at full speed there was no stopping it. People became invested in the war and wanted to win regardless of what it may cost every involved. After seeing evidence in this weeks readings of the manipulated photos, I do believe that the media may have contributed to invoke patriotism by making the public enraged to see the dramatic violent photos.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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More than a duty

by Paul Geu - Sunday, February 4, 2018, 10:32 PM

I think that the media went out of their way to promote the war especially in the beginning of the conflict. It was a sign of pride to wave the flag and I am sure the editorials that were written inspired that many more men to join the fight. In addition, most of the Union states were going out of their way to out do the other states in terms of recruitment and arming their soldiers. I know to this day there are plaques in Ohio bragging that they sent more troops into the war than any other state.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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Sign of the Times

by Miles Arnold - Tuesday, January 30, 2018, 10:21 AM

There is no doubt that altering history is messed up but I think you have to take a closer look at where photography was as a whole before you judge the photographers.

Perhaps at that time in history, Photographers were more worried about how to portray the status of the war to the public people than they were about the facts of the battle. Everyone was caught up in the "romance of war and patriotism."

By the time the photos were taken or released, the outcome of the battle had been decided. All there were were pictures and the people who took them to tell the story.

I think as photography and film became more prevalent and warfare more advanced, the way photographers covered and shot the stories changed. They weren't worried so much about the art of the story but more about getting raw photos to the people to see what was really going on.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Sign of the Times

by Jackson Peterson - Sunday, February 4, 2018, 2:28 PM

I can understand that, it was a different time and although today it would be considered something bad the photographers may have been doing what they thought was right for the scene. But, it has altered our view of what really happened with inaccurate details about a major event in history. However the photographers could have been doing what they think was right to depict the scenes of what was happening at that time.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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Re: Does the camera lens lie?

by Brandon Gericke - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 3:38 PM

I think that the worst case of manipulation was the one where the two photographers took the body of a dead soldier and moved it to fit their needs. I think this is worse because they took a soldier who died for his cause, and twisted that truth. I believe that the historical truth will always be skewed and twisted when we rely on a source that has an agenda. Any information attained by that source will be made to fit into their particular narrative. I think that it is worse to change the image of what is perceived by the viewer. An image is much more likely to stick with someone, over what is written in print.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Does the camera lens lie?

by Kyle McDaniel - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 11:19 PM

That is a scary thought, but nonetheless definitely one worth exploring. The thought that all history has been skewed in some way when people have a different agenda. It kind of ties into the other forum discussion about Ken Burns decision to omit some facts about the Ballou letter.

It would be interesting to take a look through history and really jist question all the sources and dive deep into peoples intentions eith relaying historic information.

And I too agree that the worst case was the two photographers that moved the body of a dead soldier. That just seems so morbid and disrespectful to use a dead body to gather more attention for yourself.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Case of confused identity and historical truth

by Andrew Smith - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 4:33 PM

The confused identity case seemed the most egregious to me. Once it was pointed out, the picture seemed obvious that it was the same image taken from another side. I understand sensationalism to draw readers to his work, but portraying false stories about two sides of conflict using the same photo for both seems not only wrong but insulting to the readers and history. I believe we can still find historical truth despite things being altered. The historian William Frassanito compiled a book unraveling the falsehood of many images and through doing that he was able to draw the real facts by closely analyzing what was in each picture. Despite the stories being false behind the pictures, the pictures themselves can still tell us something when closely analyzed.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Altering photos versus altering word

by Andrew Smith - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 4:47 PM

There doesn't seem to be much of a difference in changing printed word versus altering a picture. Pictures can bring life to a topic and vividly express reality. One can change the reality being presented when altering a picture just like changing the words in a written story. Both alterations could be equally as dangerous in portraying false facts or false history. In the time period in which these were taken, these pictures had a profound effect on the viewers. I would argue that in this time period, altering photos was worse than altering print. Actually being able to see the realities of war was never seen before and most likely painted a much heavier picture than anything written about the war.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Gardner's Sharpshooter

by Jonathan Wheeler - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 5:35 PM

Alexander Gardner seemed more interested in making a profit with war photography, then actually trying to document the horrors of the Civil War. It seems acceptable to photograph a battlefield and the dead for documentation; however, moving around the body of a dead soldier (or "sharpshooter" in Mr. Gardner's words) to fit a narrative or agenda seems unacceptable.

For historians and students of history today, this now makes us second guess if a photo is true or not. What we have to do is not take the photo at face value, but instead investigate it with a critical eye. William Frassanito approached this the right way by investigating 6 different photographs covering "the sharpshooter". This analysis allowed Mr. Frassanito to develop his unbiased assumption.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Civil War Photography

by Jackson Peterson - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 7:16 PM

Personally I would the case of the "Moved Body" to be very interesting. It is observed and crazy to believe that major photos of history have been altered or manipulated to convey a false reality of what actually occurred during the war. This makes me think, what other major events in history have been falsely shown and documented. Another part of the article was that the photographer used a prop weapon in the photo. That is observed to believe that these images were then taken down in history and the photographer knowingly altered the historical event for their own benefit. Gardner also stated that the bodies were there for four months lying on the ground which the article says is false. I believe we still have the ability to find the truth of history even when such things like this are altered. Comparison of information and comparing images will help find the truth, it isn't easy but I believe it is capable of getting the truth though historical documentation. Written documentation can be disputed more easily then images of the actual event which should provide hard cold truth, but in this case when images are altered it makes for a larger discussion.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Identity or moved?

by Hannah Adams - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 7:50 PM

I personally thought that the identity case was more interesting because the soldier became the character "who suffered a painful, lonely, unrecognizable death. I found it sad that Gardner saw the same body a couple months later, and no one buried him. I don't enjoy how they dragged the body to a different location just to take a picture. I think it is disrespectful, and it shouldn't matter if the photographers were low on time or not. He was a soldier. It is interesting to me that they used a prop; I was surprised that the soldier didn't have one. However, I don't think he needed it, but it adds to the effect.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Re: Identity or moved?

by Kyle McDaniel - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 11:24 PM

I believe they used a prop to make him look like a sharpshooter who died alone, waiting alone for the enemy to come. He must have had a normal weapon so they used a sharpshooter rifle as a prop to drive the loneliness of this soldier's death for the picture.

And I find it very disrespectful as well to move a corpse just to stage a scene. The only reason a corpse should be moved is to get it properly buried, especially a soldier who died fighting for his country.

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Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



Re: Identity or moved?

by Hannah Adams - Friday, February 2, 2018, 9:14 PM

That makes sense if they wanted him to look like a sharpshooter who died alone. He adds emotions and could be a good story. However, I think just whatever weapon he had would of been enough. The pictures are extremely story telling as it is; I just think it was unnecessary. Although I do get your point.

And I 100% agree that a body should only be moved to be buried, including if it is a soldier.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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A case of old fashioned propaganda

by Paul Geu - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 8:49 PM

I personally believe that the case of confused identity was more egregious for several reasons. In the written explanation by Gardner of the photo print titled "A Harvest of Death" shows to the reader that the rebel army is "devilish" willing to steal the very shoes and personal effects of their fallen comrades. Meanwhile Gardner described the Union dead in "Field Where General Reynolds Fell" as being "calm and peaceful in death." (The case of Confused Identity). This is a case of pure propaganda of the time, painting the enemy as being savages while painting those for your cause as righteous and true. The use of photography was an excellent way to get the message out to the masses just as film, and now social media is used today. I felt this case was more egregious mainly because Gardner lied about who the enemy was, to paint them as horrible people that needed to be killed for being traitors to the union. While posing a body in the other case was horrible, I felt that he portrayed that soldier as one that died alone but was a human and not a savage as the previous case.

I believe we can find the historical truth of this period by taking all forms of data that we have and use it to build a big picture of what we are trying to understand. If we focus on one aspect, such as photograph, too much we might lead ourselves to believing the wrong facts such as these two cases. I am glad that we have thousands of men and women who can analyze all the data today and give us a clearer picture of the facts.

I personally believe that there is really no difference between the two because they both need each other to provide the emotional response that Gardner was looking for when he took the photographs. Without the written explanation of the photo we would only see the savage way that these brave men fought and died, however, without the photograph the words fall flat. The new medium of photograph opened a new world to the civilian population and allowed them to see exactly what the price of war was. Gardner and Brady were able to capitalize on this technology and bring the population the message that they wanted. That message was that the Union was on the correct side, the soldiers of the union died peacefully for a noble cause and that the enemy was inhuman to their brethren and deserved to be destroyed. Using this new technology, I am sure that the message was convincing and the masses only wanted more.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Civil War Photography: Moved Body Response

by Matthew Hubbs - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 10:47 PM

The moved body case was more shocking to me than the confused identity case. I believe the moved body case stood out more to me because Alexander Gardner tampered with the scene and props of the photo whereas with the confused identity case he simply just changed the angle of the picture. Moving a dead soldier's body doesn't seem right. I think it comes across as disrespectful and inconsiderate just to capture a picture. I do believe we can still discover the historical truth about this time period because we do have other things to rely on other than photography. For example, we also have text and stories we can use to help decipher what's true or false. Especially when we use all the information together to come up with a conclusion.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Deplorable behavior

by Kishahn Fellows - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 10:59 PM

I personally found the second case more egregious, as taking pictures of the same battlefield from different angles and writing up different descriptions about the two photos like they are of two separate events like Gardner is sleazy, moving the corpse of a soldier for a better photo is absolutely disgusting, deplorable behavior to me.

To be honest I am not sure we can ever find the "whole and absolute" truth of the civil war era, or any era for that matter, as history is written by the strong, the victors, so much history lost long before people like Ken Burns got to it. I believe it would be best if people would start or continue to be skeptical and use and compare multiple sources when researching any topic , so as to be as sure as possible they are being informed with accurate information. That being said, while being skeptical is good, one should always be open to new ideas, as long as they are good ones/

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Desecrating a corpse for profit

by Paul Geu - Friday, February 2, 2018, 12:07 AM

It is crazy to me that I completely forgot that Gardner by moving the body was basically desecrating a corpse. I was more focused on the impact of photography in terms of propaganda that I over looked the moral aspect of what he was doing. Even though he moved it just days after the battle, by moving the man and posing him he overstepped a line that most people would not dare cross.

I bet Gardner would rationalize his actions by saying it was for the higher moral purpose of preserving the union, but I would like to think that he was only doing it for the fame and fortune.

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Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1



Re: Desecrating a corpse for profit

by Matthew Hubbs - Sunday, February 4, 2018, 7:28 PM

I completely agree with you on your opinion about moving the bodies. I too believe it is uncalled for and ultimately disrespectful to that soldier and his family. I also can see how Gardner would try to justify his actions, but when it comes down to it he clearly violated basic morals.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Deplorable behavior

by Miles Arnold - Friday, February 2, 2018, 9:41 AM

I agree that you can never really find the whole truth. Its hard to find and report. Eyewitnesses in court don't even get it right, even though they are sure of what they saw.

The more I think about the pictures the more I think its lazy and more disrespectful to the art of story telling and photography than the dead.

With all the killing and carnage, there was certainly no shortage of bodies to photograph. maybe they were on a time crunch or something. They couldn't just email their shots to the editor. Just a thought.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: Deplorable behavior

by Kyle McDaniel - Friday, February 2, 2018, 10:04 AM

Not only was it lazy, disrespectful and disgusting to do; but one could argue that the picture of the soldier would have generated enough of a public interest to get attention even without the staging of the scene.

In this case, just referring to the lone man they staged as a sharpshooter who died alone. When all is said and done, this man was still a soldier who died fighting for his country. Why was it necessary to further dramatize the tale? I am just wondering why he felt that this farce would be more dramatic than the actual sad truth of the scene.

I am guessing that people who were living in the 1800's around the time of the civil war were not accustomed to pictures of violence and carnage as a lot of us nowadays are. So it seems the picture of a deceased soldier on the battlefield would have been enough. But for some reason, Gardner felt the need to fictionalize this already sad scene. Makes one wonder how someone could do such a thing just for a little more fame/fortune. Disgusting.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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**Re: Deplorable behavior**

by Jackson Peterson - Sunday, February 4, 2018, 9:40 AM

I agree, anytime eye witnesses are involved in cases I've seen in the past it does seem like there are always differences in their story even though they are the ones that should remember it exactly like it happened. It is disrespectful to the dead and their story of how they died and fought in battle.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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**Altering photography**

by Kishahn Fellows - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 8:12 PM

Though both are awful practices that nullify any and all validity of a subject, in my opinion, at least in the modern era, it is worse to alter the images. This being due to people of today's tendency to not read an focus almost entirely on the imagery of a subject, relying on said images to relay as much of the story as it can before their attention is lost. While this is a somewhat depressing fact, it is what it is. Altering the imagery of a subject to change the perceptions of the viewers is dishonest, disrespectful, and down right crooked.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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**Re: Altering photography**

by Jonathan Wheeler - Friday, February 2, 2018, 4:55 PM

I agree with what you have said. My question would be, how do we hold those accountable who alter imagery? Also, how do we keep that from happening in the future? I ask not because I know the answers, but because we are faced with this and will continually be faced with it.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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**Applied today (staging of a dead body)**

by Kyle McDaniel - Friday, February 2, 2018, 9:57 AM

I was just curious if anyone had thoughts on if something happened like that today. I mean, I know not to accept everything I read/see as concrete proof and to question things. But say, someone in this day and age was blatantly caught moving a corpse and adding props to the scene in-order to spin a more dramatic tale?

What do you think the outcome would be? Would there be any kind of criminal charges?

I am also curious if people think if this still happens today. I know the news tends to focus on the negative, and I am more than certain journalists and reporters sometimes shift events around to spin a more fantastic story to get more viewers/readers, but do you think things still happen to this degree (staging a corpse to make a story out of it) in our present time? Maybe things like this happen all the time and we just don't know about?

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Sum of ratings:1 (1)



Re: Applied today (staging of a dead body)

by Jonathan Wheeler - Friday, February 2, 2018, 4:49 PM

You bring up a good point on questioning if these kinds of things happen today. It seems with everyone having a smartphone there could be countless images and testimonies of one incident. Something that comes to mind for example, when there is a police involved shooting. It seems there are usually bystanders who capture the incident on camera/video, the police officers body camera, and possibly the patrol vehicle camera. In some ways could that maybe be too much evidence? Does one angle fit a specific agenda or show something that may not have been seen on any of the other videos? What if some of the video footage is used and others not, or if it is cropped? These are the kind of questions that I think would have to be asked, to seek out the truth. What I do strongly believe, is that those who report the news should be unbiased and truthful as possible. This would hopefully tell the true story and not a perceived narrative for profit or gain. If someone is caught blatantly lying, then they should be held accountable for their words/actions.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Would not even happen today

by Paul Geu - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 12:07 AM

While the use of technology has certainly opened the possibility that anyone could really do this kind of action, I don't believe that any main stream media has thought about doing it. Earlier in the class we discussed that these photographs were highlighted in the media of the time. However, in this day in age we do not see the carnage of combat in any main stream media outlets in such detail. This has been the case since at least the Vietnam war did we see anything like this. Hopefully no one today is willing to cross this ethical line like Gardner and others did.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Applied today (staging of a dead body)

by Jackson Peterson - Sunday, February 4, 2018, 9:33 AM

I thought the same thing. I am sure there are photos that have been altered especially now in days where photoshop and all the other computer programs could make it easier to change photos. If a reporter took photos and altered them I'm sure that they would be held accountable. I'm sure there are things like this happening today as well, but in smaller doses. If a reporter moved or altered a crime scene then they would probably be held accountable for their actions.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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by Zach Haxby - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 9:01 PM

I found that the Case of Confused Identity was the more shocking "case" for me. This was because of the way that these images could be manipulated even for being the 19th century It is amazing that this can be done even back then and for me this case was much more shocking to me than the other.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

0

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Changing what is Written vs. when Images are Involved

by Matthew Hubbs - Sunday, February 4, 2018, 7:44 PM

Changing what is written is worse than changing images because with images I believe its easier to decipher what's right and what's wrong. Yes, there's a difference. The sense of sight is more complex and can "read between the lines" better than actually reading text.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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