



HST 209: American History: Civil War W17 (Escobar 31664)

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Civil War Photography

by Joe Escobar - Saturday, January 28, 2017, 9:22 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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Egregious? No!

by Joseph Miller - Wednesday, February 1, 2017, 1:30 AM

Egregious? No!

Like Ken Burns of today, they were entertaining the masses. I never said, Ken Burns wasn't a great filmmaker I don't understand how we can't understand the historical truth. They weren't writing on cave walls. We kept very good records during that time. Also, everything is in English, as to not have to translate, as someone else pointed out. I think that's what we're doing, though. We are figuring out history. What I don't get, was how could the photographer, supposedly a professional, because it was still new and only professionals did photography, how could a photographer think he was going to get that one by. He used plate 36 and 37. He didn't think anyone would realize they were in succession and they might look a little similarly odd. Besides that, because that's a stretch, it still doesn't matter. If Alexander Gardner, Matthew Brady, and Ken Burns were alive today, they would all be fighting for the same awards in cinema and entertainment. Gardner and Brady's photos were authorized by the government to accompany Union troops during the campaigns. I think it's safe to say this whole argument is void. Of course, you can't trust the photographs, they were sanctioned by the government, manipulated, and he we are today. You could say, the very first photographic propaganda. Absolutely fascinating. And I mean that. Our historians are smart enough to realize this and we can piece together the real history. We have the facts, names, dates. It would be nice to have some photos to go with it. There are. But like today, there's now alternate facts. It's up to the people to sort them out.

I believe we can discover the historical truth about this time period. There's always going to be new discoveries, corrections to be made. The joy of studying history. You can't always take something for what it's initially for. I want to say it's worse to change an image. Only because people always say pictures don't lie. People then and now are swept away with pictures, before they even read the caption or story. Even today people don't see manipulations in photographs unless they're pointed out, but they're quick to call foul if something is written and say "that's not true" or "I don't believe that". I say that, but I enjoy the stories, the personal part that goes into the letters from the soldiers. I feel I would be more betrayed if I knew they skewed his/her words, that if a photo was altered. Can I be on both sides. Literacy rate wasn't that bad then, as low as 80 percent in the south. So at least 8 of 10 could read. I think without the sense of sight, or being able to view the photo's it relies upon us to use our imagination. We almost need those photos to get a real sense of the history. Like baseball statistics, maybe we should have asterisk when it has to do with anything Burns, Gardner, and Brady, not for possible steroid use, but for manipulating history, and for entertaining us. Last question. I see no difference. I can't come to an agreement with myself on this.

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Re: Egregious? No!

by Melissa Garcia-Jimenez - Thursday, February 2, 2017, 9:25 PM

I'm not sure if I was allowed to be on both sides but you did point out good reasons. Everything was in English and not written on walls. So if everything was properly recorded or so how is it possible to have flaws in history when telling it.. I like to think of it as a game of telephone. One thing or another will drop. Changing an image will always be bad but it may have been influenced by the government.

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Re: Egregious? No!

by Joseph Miller - Friday, February 3, 2017, 9:53 AM

It's surprising that we even have that old saying "A picture doesn't lie." I really don't know who came up with it. I think that's why it's actually more important to rely on written accounts vs. photographs. At least with the written accounts you can have numerous peoples views and decipher from them. With the picture, what you see is what you get and it's up to you to decipher it. I think it's best stated as this:

"A picture is worth a thousand words" is an English idiom. It refers to the notion that a complex idea can be conveyed with just a single still image or that an image of a subject conveys its meaning or essence more effectively than a description does.

That puts it more into perspective. Those images obviously conveyed a meaning very effectively, However, a thousand words, or a thousand different meanings? How do we decide what's real with out the written context? And not with the photographer's but with legitimate accounts from people who were actually there and didn't show up a week later to try to profit on it. Pictures to me are nothing. They may help to show a scene, but to convey how things were going on there, or how people felt, what happened, the real death and carnage, 2 of every 3 soldiers dying, not by enemies, but by sickness. Pictures hold no credence next to first hand accounts and descriptions to me.

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Re: Egregious? No!

by Melissa Garcia-Jimenez - Saturday, February 4, 2017, 8:08 PM

I think the meaning behind "a picture is worth a thousand words" is the fact that maybe pictures can be changed and then what we say about them changes. Yes, written text is better but even with that things will get changed with written text. Everything can be changed and I do agree the picture can be nothing but it's also back up information to prove things.

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Re: Egregious? No!

by Randi Carlton - Sunday, February 5, 2017, 10:43 PM

I think the point that you bring up is very interesting; we often relate pictures as being something that have the power to convey a lot of information at once. You can look at a picture and immediately get the sense of a story that might take pages to accurately describe. But, just as much as with written word, a picture can be manipulated or fabricated to convey a *certain* message which may not necessarily be true or accurate. So, while that picture may still say a **lot**, it may not be saying anything at all that is credible or reliable.

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Re: Civil War Photography

by Josh Myhre - Wednesday, February 1, 2017, 11:38 AM

The articles on photo manipulation raise some pretty interesting questions. The work of photographers, at least in these early days of photography, is "focusing on creating a strong image that will communicate the desired message" ("Does the Camera Ever Lie?"). These articles prompt me to question if photography in a political context can ever truly be neutral. A photographer's work won't sell very well if it doesn't capture a "strong" image that's trying to communicate a message. And the very fact that a photograph is trying to accomplish something leads me to believe that it can never be truly objective, which is a weird thought to have given that photos are literally just a captured image, an objective moment in reality made permanent. But the way photographs are presented and the context that they are put in cannot be objective. And without context, the photo would be meaningless. If we were to view Gardner's photos with no context whatsoever, the viewer wouldn't know *where* the photo was taken, *who* was lying in the field, or even *what* the deaths were in regards to. Without context, all we would really know as taken directly from the photo, is that here is a portrait of human misery and death.

A photo-journalist is always a journalist, someone with an opinion and a purpose for his/her reporting. It would seem an agenda is always going to be attached to the photographs presented. This problem is making me rethink my thoughts on Burns' Civil War. I've been

pretty critical in the previous forums of Burns' taking liberties with "the real truth" in order to stoke the flames of drama, but now I wonder if the very nature of film prevents any presentation of "the real truth," if indeed "real truth" is accessible at all. Burns' job in making Civil War is not unlike the job of Gardner in trying to communicate the horrors of war to the people who weren't there to see it. In a sense, Burns is a photo-journalist. And thus, Burns has to approach the material with some kind of agenda; Burns has a purpose for making these films. Perhaps this makes some of his errors in presentation more excusable. It's possible they're not so much errors as they are simply journalistic decision-making.

Upon the first reading of these articles, I thought Gardner's manipulation of the battle scene to be pretty deplorable. But his goal was to convey the horrors of war to American citizens, and in this he succeeded. He probably shouldn't be dragging bodies around a vacated battlefield, but he did succeed in taking a series of photographs that are shocking and eye-opening. Due to the nature of being a journalist, a purely objective approach to these photos isn't in Gardner's best interest. In this regard, I don't think photographs allow us the "best" access to the truth of the civil war. I think relying on the written accounts of those who were there is our best means of accessing whatever objective truth still exists. I think comprehension of the events is far more important than a sensory/emotive understanding of the events.

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Re: Civil War Photography

by Joseph Miller - Thursday, February 2, 2017, 9:58 AM

I hate to just say very well said. But I am. The images, as you say, are just a captured moment and without context, they would seem to be meaningless. That was my take all along. Burns has his own agenda, whether we want to believe that or not. He has to make something interesting to the viewer and be legitimate at the same time. It's unfortunate we are at a point where we can really only take from the photographs of many, only what we see and not what is written with them. I rely on written accounts myself. Pictures speak a thousand words, too many to try to decipher.

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Re: Civil War Photography

by Randi Carlton - Sunday, February 5, 2017, 10:53 PM

I feel like it is more likely for a person to take in and believe a picture than a written story; looking at a picture is such a visceral and instant response whereas when you read a story, it is a slow revelation and absorption and you really have to wait to be

convinced by the writer. It is definitely just as possible for either a writer or a photographer to deceive, but once they have constructed their deception (whether or not they are aware that they are in fact creating a deception) I believe that the photographed falsehood is much more easily digestible and able to be widespread than is the written version, which ultimately makes it have more serious of an impact. You are very correct in pointing out that Burns has to make things interesting; making things interesting definitely helped to make the series successful. And this shows the same motivation behind the photos by Gardner; he wanted to make them interesting, whether that was just what was on his mind or whether he had an agenda that was maybe not so hidden or he just wanted recognition, he wanted to make them interesting. This makes them easy to look at, easy to be interested in, but difficult to trust. It is a good reminder of what it looks like when it's obvious that someone is trying to make things interesting and altering things a bit, but it also may be a reminder that makes some people nervous; how do we know what other people's agendas are and who is actually controlling the tone and message of our history and how much can we actually accept as truth, or can we only accept that we are receiving a version of the truth through any form of history?

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Historical fact or fiction

by Melissa Garcia-Jimenez - Wednesday, February 1, 2017, 9:01 PM

Out of the two cases I read over, what I found to be more egregious is what changed in the photograph taken by Alexander Gardner. I thought of two things. One, that they may have moved the body at the time to two different locations just for a photo which is horrific. Another fact is that the body could have been photoshopped even though the body is in different positions. Then I went to reading into the article "Solving a Civil War Photograph Mystery" and how the one simple picture of General Ulysses S. Grant could have been altered in so many ways that it may not even be a real image. The article did point out good facts on why it could possibly not be real as that was not his favorite horse at the time or the fact that he was very well "known for his skill and ease around horses" but yet was very stiff in the picture. Which all means that photographs we use as important historical artifacts could or possibly have been altered. Which now has me questioning how can we exactly know what is the truth or not. I would very much like to believe they have not been tampered with.

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Re: Historical fact or fiction

by Joseph Miller - Thursday, February 2, 2017, 10:03 AM

That's the beauty of it almost. Being able to learn new things about history. Finding photographs and learning that they are a fake, and rewriting history. I'm not a historian, but if I had to guess, being able to correct a part of history by uncovering something egregious as this would be absolutely fantastic, and career note worthy(sp). I still believe that the Union, although, they had the right message and idea, not arguing the cause now. They had their own agenda, so all the photo's by Gardner and his affiliates, would be propaganda and should be taken with skepticism. The fact that we take photo's for what they say they are is a scary thought.

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Re: Historical fact or fiction

by Melissa Garcia-Jimenez - Thursday, February 2, 2017, 9:55 PM

Do you think that the Union had their own agenda because of what they were saying what the battle was about? There was that one picture that had two different captions that stated one was from the confederates and then the second one was stating it was the union.

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Re: Historical fact or fiction

by Joseph Miller - Saturday, February 4, 2017, 1:36 PM

I think no matter what side of any war your on, you have your own agenda. The fact that these were hired photographers from the Union to me, cements in stone, that whatever they photographed was in the Unions best interest and it would be up to the Union to use them as any form of propaganda they wanted. Propaganda seems like a harsh word. It just means its biased or misleading in nature to promote a specific cause. The photographers, had a job to take photo's of the war so the Union could use them in their own agenda, their ideological plan.

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Re: Historical fact or fiction

by Melissa Garcia-Jimenez - Saturday, February 4, 2017, 8:13 PM

I understand. My question is how the one picture got both titles if they were paid photographers. Both Confederate and Union.

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Re: Historical fact or fiction

by Spencer Kellar - Saturday, February 4, 2017, 10:30 PM

It's absolutely propaganda, harsh word or not. What Melissa is mentioning is that in *The Case of Confused Identity* article, Gardner uses the same fallen soldiers to tell two different stories. For Plate 36, his description depicts Confederate soldiers killed while retreating. The very first sentence is telling of how Gardner is choosing to present the scene to his audience, as he writes of "Lee's broken army." At the end of the second paragraph, he says the soldiers were "killed in the frantic efforts to break the steady lines of an army of patriots, whose heroism only excelled theirs in motive" and who "paid with life the price of their treason" (The Case of Confused Identity).

Yet when talking about the very same soldiers, now (accurately) depicted as Union men, he says that these men died as stoic and brave heroes, who "wore a calm and resigned expression, as though they had passed away in the act of prayer"; others died smiling or in various action poses (The Case of Confused Identity).

What we know about Gardner is that he has a knack for drama, and he fabricates stories he thinks will resonate the most with his readers. But even the article points out the different treatment the Confederate story receives in relation to its Union counterpart. If that isn't propaganda, I don't really know what is.

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Which of the two "cases"

by Holly Olson - Wednesday, February 1, 2017, 9:06 PM

Both "cases" really bothered me while reading them. The fact that he took pictures of the same men, in the first case, and described them separately as dishonored Confederate troops who "paid for their treason with their lives," and then again as Union troops who were, "so tranquil that they seem about to wake and rise." I thought, was deplorable. To him, these aren't even people anymore regardless of their description. These people, that had given their lives for what they believed in, had now been diminished to props. How would their families feel if they found this out? It's dishonoring these men regardless of what they fought for.

The second “case” was the one that bothered me most. I think the sole reason being that they actually *moved* this dead soldier. Knowing this made me upset while reading through the whole description of it. How he sets a scene for what might’ve happened and also what could have been going through this soldier’s head when he said, “What visions, of loved ones far away, may have hovered above his stony pillow! What familiar voices may he not have heard, like whispers beneath the roar of battle, as his eyes grew heavy in their long, last sleep!” And then again when he described the scene of four months later, “...some mother may yet be patiently watching for the return of her boy, whose bones lie bleaching, unrecognized and alone, between the rocks at Gettysburg.” The thought never even crossed my mind that anyone would do anything like this. I wouldn’t be surprised if something like that happened today. But I’ve never seen pictures of events or times in history and wondered to myself if it was staged. The picture, let alone the entire description of it. I wonder how Gardner would have felt if he had found out, a family member had died fighting in the war, only to then have his body moved around and used as a prop or to even be described as paying for their treason with their life?

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Photography as Art

by Lillith Ka'at - Wednesday, February 1, 2017, 9:41 PM

Which of the two “cases” (confused identity or moved body) was more egregious to you, when it came to manipulating the data/image?

They're both pretty equally bad. At least one of them didn't involve dragging a corpse around, so there's that. But willfully giving false information about what the photograph is or represents, lying about what side the subject was even on to begin with - that's pretty bad, too. Seems pretty disrespectful to give a photo and try to evoke some sympathy for one side of conflict with it... But not even use a photo OF that side. Like, "aw, things are rough for them, too. You can tell by the NOT THEM."

But, uh, dragging a corpse somewhere else and lying about their role... Is also awful. I can kind of get my head around it artistically - photography is art, it makes a good scene, and I don't think it pushes that deep a false image of the situation to put the corpse in the wrong spot. The spot is real. The corpse is real. They are nearby. I'm not saying it's 100% morally sound and undeserving of criticism, but I can get behind it more than 'look at these two different scenes. Just kidding, they're the same.'

I guess mainly I don't like it because it seems so disrespectful to the dead to spread lies about exactly what they did and where. On one hand, how much legacy would that individual have without the photo? On the other hand, is it worth it when it's a false representation of their role?

Do you think we can discover the historical truth about this time period when some of the very things we rely on, such as photographs, have been altered?

So - the thing about historical truth is that the doctoring of information is going to happen. Always. And that is something that should be reported on just the same as the closest-we-can-get-to-objective-facts. As with all things, we just have to study the subject matter carefully and use it for discussion. If a picture was altered, we can still use that for a lot of things. We can say: this was doctored, here's how they did it. That's valuable information. More importantly, we can look at WHY it was doctored.

I'm not saying that it's admirable or 'right' to allow constant doctoring of pictures, but at the same time, people were as complex and human back then as they are now. A doctored photo can be used for propaganda - can be used to raise morale, or to boast about one's character. It can be a tool that says 'look how great I am, and how great we are, and how great we are doing.' It can also be a tool that says, 'there's a lot going on so instead of 7 pictures here's one doctored picture that has all the important elements of the situation.' Artists photoshop, crop, doctor, and compose their photos now, and they did it then. It's part of photography.

Basically the core of all of it is truth. It's important to know that a picture was altered, how it was altered, and why it was altered. I think that's more important than dismissing something because it has been altered. I feel like my answer to basically every question always boils down to: "give us context, give us information, make it a conversation, and handle each situation with its own nuance." So, once again. That. Ken Burns, my guy, let me down again because of his aggressive refusal to provide context.

Reading the first paragraph in the 'Does the Camera Ever Lie' essay was basically just me going 'yes, yes, sounds right.' The problem just comes from when there's no "**footnote: this is altered," or the part where it mentions that he lied in his captions.

Side note: I'm beginning to realize that I would like this show a whole lot more if it was just a bunch of history buffs sitting at ~~ fancy darkwood desks in front of antique bookshelves ~~ saying, "so then THIS happened." That kind of documentary, with people talking about a subject they like passionately, is so much more engaging than this hammy voice acting with long pauses between every other word. Ken Burns, I suspect, doesn't have as much passion for the topic as you'd expect. Also I want to punch him in the neck during every instrumental.

Sorry that I'm like this. LIVE BLOGGIN' MY HOMEWORK, OKAY.

Which is worse, changing what is written or revealed in print, which relies on the comprehension of the reader, or when images are involved, which relies on the sense of sight, the eyes of the viewer? Is there a difference?

I think changing the photos is more forgivable, honestly. In olden days, their methods are more primitive and visible, and analysts are able to figure out when photos are doctored. Experts are able to discuss the scenes. And in modern days - originals tend to pop up. Industries don't hide that they use photoshop to touch things up. We just need to not have the expectation that photographs are some impartial view - they aren't. They're art, and they're going to show the artist's perspective.

It's bad to lie either way, but I think it's worse to lie in text. Words are where you get context for the picture. The words are supposed to say "in this picture we see X, and here's some more context for that." If the context is false, that, I think, is worse than a staged scene or a doctored picture.

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Re: Photography as Art

by Josh Myhre - Friday, February 3, 2017, 7:44 AM

Overall I like what you have to say, but I think it's dangerous to say that history should be about discussion. If Civil War was just a 12 hours of 6 historians sitting around a table and giving you their competing interpretations of the history as it happened, then at the end of that 12 hours you wouldn't be any closer to the truth, you'd just have 6 subjective impressions of how the history happened. You'd be too bogged down in minutia to even know what your opinion is. And really, how could you know what your opinion on an event even is without getting at primary sources?

Photographs are useful historically in that it helps us to form a mental image of the history we read about, but at the end of the day I don't think photographs should be considered a primary source by which we can glean new information. Sure, studying the reasons why Gardner opted to use fabricated and altered photos can reveal some interesting things about Gardner himself and the time he was living in, but I don't believe it reveals any unique truth about the civil war itself. I think the closest we can get to objective truth is to study the written records of the people that were actually there on the scene. The diaries kept by soldiers, the edicts and legislation passed by politicians, the letters and directives sent by generals and commanders. Studying these documents is the closest we can get to a true understanding of the civil war. And yes, discussion about primary sources is obviously helpful to our understanding. That's why I like our textbook a lot. McPherson does a good job of citing sources for almost every point he tries to make (and most of them are primary) and then gives us solid ground on which we can form discussions.

Photographs are helpful but can't really be trusted, because, as you say, they're art. Even the famous pre-election photo of Lincoln that Mathew Brady took in New York is heavily doctored and augmented (in artistic ways) to make Lincoln appear less disgruntled and more stately. Photographs are dangerous, in a way, because they give us a false, augmented reality. As you say, we need to study the subject matter and come together over the core of truth to launch our discussions, and I think our starting place needs to be primary sources.

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Re: Photography as Art

by Lillith Ka'at - Friday, February 3, 2017, 4:31 PM

I think it's more dangerous to say that it *shouldn't* be about conversation, because all that means is that we leave it up to *one* historian. I completely disagree that hearing six perspectives on events would leave you with less valuable information as opposed to more. History is events that happened to real people - the opinions on it as it was happening were just as varied as the interpretations of it when it's over. To say we shouldn't have too many voices chiming in with how they interpret it is really just saying that we should listen to just *one* person, and that leads to situations like Ken Burns and his frequent mistakes.

I'm not sure what you think primary sources *are*. Not photographs, because they could be doctored, even back then. Plus, they will inherently be biased by the photographer. But they give us a bunch of valuable information on visuals, the human perspective, and emotional weight. They give us insight on artistic styles of the time, and of what sort of composition was admired. What people thought was worth capturing or conveying. Is that information somehow less 'valuable,' even though it's just as much a part of history? Culture is history, even if it's not as interesting to you, personally, as events and dates and guns and generals. I also think it's interesting that photographs are dismissed for being too subjective, but *diaries and directives* are fine? They're closest to the action, so I get that, I'm not arguing that those *shouldn't* be on the list of 'stuff that matters a lot,' but I'm confused about why those things are there but photographs are not. They can augment reality just as much. "I think the closest we can get to objective truth is to study the written records of the people that were actually there on the scene," doesn't cross photographers off from the list. They were there. And they chose to portray the scene in their own way, making the same decisions that someone would make when writing in their diary, about how to show themselves and how to show what they are experiencing.

I think a lot of this disagreement has to do with the parts of history that I find valuable. Again, I really don't care about which general used what gun on what day and what tactic they used to win a battle in what city. I don't mean to say this isn't information we should *keep*, just that I really don't think it's even half as valuable as the social context of these things. I put a hundred times more value in the conditions of life and politics that led to these events, and in the emotional and societal impact they had on participants and witnesses. So when you say "objective truth," I imagine you mean dates and names and specific events. And those are valuable. But all the things I emphasize and prioritize are focused on the fact that the truth was subjective, even as it was happening.

There's no point studying what happened if we aren't studying *why*, and how it felt to people at the time. And to say - well, the people capturing images were biased, so we can't use them - is strange, because *that* is also a part of history.

"As you say, we need to study the subject matter and come together over the core of truth to launch our discussions, and I think our starting place needs to be primary sources." That leaves me confused about the core of your message. "Discussion

would hinder because it's too many perspectives. We need unbiased sources like *diaries* instead of photographs. Then we should have discussions to discover the truth from *those*."

Isn't that basically saying we should look at limited information before having our discussion, instead of taking in as many very real factors as possible? If we're limiting the subject matter to whatever qualifies as a "primary source" to avoid things that might confuse our perspective, then we may as well not have the discussion at all. In that situation, we've already removed a bunch of things from the table, meaning we've already chosen what we've decided is 'accurate' enough to stay. In which case - the discussion becomes superfluous.

I think.

I hope that doesn't come off as hostile. I really think it's just a difference of what we think is important in history; just wanted to articulate my perspective clearly.

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Re: Photography as Art

by Josh Myhre - Saturday, February 4, 2017, 7:01 AM

First of all, I did not say that "discussion over history is bad." I said that *only* having access to a debate between a bunch of historians would be bad. It's important that we have exposure to primary sources and first-hand accounts before we listen to experts debate minutia of events in order to persuade us toward their interpretation of events. I'm trying to make a distinction between knowing the *actual* events that took place, versus hearing only second-hand, opinionated accounts. Discussion is good. Hearing *only* discussion is bad.

Secondly, on primary sources. From the University of Illinois: "primary sources of information are those that provide first-hand accounts... these are documents that were created by the witnesses or first recorders of these events at about the time they occurred, and include diaries, letters, reports, photographs, creative works, financial records, memos, and newspaper articles" (<http://www.library.illinois.edu/village/primarysource/mod1/pg1.htm>). Yes, this list includes photographs. I am simply making the argument that photographs during the time period of the civil war should be considered as being a step or two down on the rung of immediacy. Photography was a young art form, and yet it was masquerading as journalism. This is simply the distinction I'm trying to make - that photography is art, not hard-line journalism. I'm not sure why you're trying to make me out to be a historical fascist, obviously culture and art are important to any historical understanding. But if we're trying to get down to the essential facts of an event that occurred, it's important to understand that photography (and art in

general) usually has an agenda it's trying to push. It has an opinion that it is trying to communicate. This isn't bad, it's just the way it is. The photo's from Gardner are aiming to mislead the untrained eye for political purposes, whereas Lincoln's journals are an insight into his immediate frame of mind. This is the distinction I'm trying to make.

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Re: Photography as Art

by Lillith Ka'at - Saturday, February 4, 2017, 6:56 PM

Again, sorry if I came off as hostile? I think when I try to articulate I get extra verbose because I want to make sure I'm clearly expressing what I mean, which can totally come off as accusatory?

I think what's happening is we are both leaping to ridiculous extremes of what the other is saying. So when I say "this is totally super valuable for a lot of things, it just needs the caveat of it being a conversation with multiple nuanced perspectives," you take away that I'm saying that we should having *nothing* except for Old Man Historian Debates, 4 hours, no breaks, nothing else. So then you go "no that would be bad?" Because yes, of course any no-brakes extreme would be bad. But because I didn't mean anything extreme and my stance was already a very mild one, I misinterpret your hesitation on the matter as extremism in the opposite direction, and react with according confusion. That's my best guess about what's happening - but at any rate, I apologize for my general unpleasant demeanor that made you feel like I thought of you as some kind of fascist. I don't.

I agree that we want to do our best to nail down the exact order-of-occurrences, and that it has its own value... I guess I just kind of consider that in a separate camp from 'history.' That's more like a timeline, and that's not actually particularly valuable to me in particular. Not saying it's not valuable *in general*, just that it honestly doesn't hold as much weight to me. To me, history encompasses the emotions and different perspectives, and that's what matters 100x more than who was where and what they did with what gun on what day. (I think I've talked about that stance enough, ha.)

The reason I was confused about primary sources wasn't because I don't understand what it means - but the definition was still a nice refresher, haha. My confusion came from your desire for distinction. Since you were discussing striking photography off the list for being too easy to misrepresent situations, I was mainly just confused about why diaries and other first-hand accounts which are just as biased were still on the list.

But - yeah, we see pretty eye-to-eye on the purpose of photography and its role. I think basically what I'm saying is "everything is a source, it just can't necessarily be trusted, which is why we need a lot of eyes on it. And since the reason it can't be trusted is because of the individual perspectives of the people that were alive back then, it should be met with multiple perspectives now."

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Morality in media

by Kamron Bratlie - Wednesday, February 1, 2017, 10:57 PM

"Moved body" hit harder for me than confused identity. Manipulation of a scene by mistaking or even deliberately changing information surrounding the photo is wrong, both in an ethical and moral way. Moving a body to create a scene is just unfathomable to me. As a veteran, it strikes closer to home to know that a soldier's body was moved to prop up a story that is untrue. War is enough of a story in its own right, especially the Civil War.

Taking things out of context in print has always been an issue, even to this day. Reading comprehension has undoubtedly caused controversy in news stories, scientific journals, and even court transcripts. Photos used to be a more reliable way to distinguish what actually happened, but as these case studies show, manipulation of the media has been around as long as it has existed. Now we are in an age where photos and video come into question, regarding their legitimacy, thanks to programs like Photoshop.

I look forward to this discussion, feel free to reply with your thoughts.

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Re: Morality in media

by Melissa Garcia-Jimenez - Thursday, February 2, 2017, 10:10 PM

Did you get a chance to read the last article regarding Ulysses S. Grant? It got me to question of how many of these photographs are real and how many are fake or have been altered with. Yes moving a dead body is horrible just to get a "good picture". After reading that article and how one simple picture can be altered in many ways do you think any of the other pictures could have been altered with?

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Re: Morality in media

by Holly Olson - Friday, February 3, 2017, 1:40 AM

Yes! I was thinking the same thing. I may have been naive in being so surprised at this happening but it definitely had me wondering about other instances where this may have occurred. I actually searched and found this site:

<http://twistedstifter.com/2012/02/famously-doctored-photographs/>

The first picture on there threw me for a loop because that's one of the photo's I think of when picturing Lincoln. I'm sure many people think of this picture too. And I wasn't aware that airbrushing was a thing already in the 1930's.

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Re: Morality in media

by Melissa Garcia-Jimenez - Saturday, February 4, 2017, 8:18 PM

I saw the first picture on the website you provided and now I'm not even sure how many photos of times back then are real. There are photographs in museums that are displayed as the "real thing" but are they really or are those altered as well ?

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Re: Morality in media

by Kamron Bratlie - Saturday, February 4, 2017, 9:00 PM

Yes, I absolutely think there were more photos that were doctored in some way. If it was that easy for Gardner and his team, who knows what level of shenanigans others got into. I wonder if there are more examples of widely popular photos from a more recent time that are actually manipulated in some way.

This manipulation has gone on as long as the media has been around, and it does a huge disservice to future generations. I agree with you in that these case studies have altered and shaken how I feel about modern photographs and historical photographs. When all we have to rely on are these photos and journals to get a sense of what happened, it is a shame to think they might not be true.

In the case of “moved body,” it is interesting that the rifle used was “not used by sharpshooters.” This idea makes me wonder if Gardner was ever confronted by Civil War veterans, shortly after these photos were released. From personal experience, I have seen several forums and websites from veterans who have called out photographers and journalists for fabricating a story. I can’t imagine that there not being a large group of Civil War veterans concerned with these photos. Do you think there people advocating for the truth about Gardner’s photos during this time?

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Re: Morality in media

by Melissa Garcia-Jimenez - Sunday, February 5, 2017, 2:53 PM

I'm not 100% sure because there were thousands of deaths in just one battle. If the families knew about them then I would sure hope so! I'm curious to know if the photos taken in that time were released shortly or a couple years after the war for civilians to see.

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Re: Civil War Photography

by Xin Sun - Wednesday, February 1, 2017, 11:01 PM

Read this period of information, I think confused identity to me more influence than moved body. When I was looking at confusing papers, I was drawn to an article describing the body of the soldier. It is written in great detail, each person's movements, look has described even for their behavior before the death of judgment, which is very attractive to me. Moved body of the article is only described the contents of the photo and there is no guidance for the photos outside, so I do not feel very strong sense of substitution.

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Gardner's Deceptions

by Spencer Kellar - Wednesday, February 1, 2017, 11:50 PM

I had completely forgotten about Alexander Gardner’s moved-body picture. I remember being pretty surprised the first time I read that a Civil War photographer had purposefully moved the body of a deceased soldier in order to take a better photograph. Honestly, I’m still astounded even after reading about it again. To me, the fact that Gardner and Timothy O’Sullivan moved a body forty yards to another location is more upsetting to me than the

case of confused identity. The two men completely violated any ethical bounds, simply to fabricate a story. A fabrication that I would argue is completely unnecessary. Gardner is certainly a master of powerful prose, so I doubt he would have had too much trouble writing a poignant narrative about the soldier where he lay. The article mentions the possibility that Gardner was running out of dead subjects to photograph, and that would help explain why he felt the need to shoe-horn in the sniper angle. I suppose he may have had that story already completed in his mind; the fact that he carried around a prop sniper rifle certainly adds evidence to that line of thinking. At the very least, he certainly had a flair for the dramatic.

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Early Photoshop

by Jacob Micheli - Wednesday, February 1, 2017, 11:53 PM

Of the two case studies I believe the moved body was the worse. Confused identity at its least could have been an honest mistake. It could have also been a grotesque action to stay interesting. Regardless, it's probably the lesser of two evils. The most egregious being the case of the moved body. The contrived and insulting manner in which the two photographers documented their lie is unholy. A better, more romantic and patriotic version of war had to be fabricated. This kind of nonsense relies more on seduction and false heroism than brutal, unbridled hell. Opportunistic doesn't even describe the crimes committed in the moved body.

I do believe truth in media is still possible. Especially during the period of the civil war. To some degree a small fabrication can be a good thing. It forces use to examine everything assumed to be trustworthy just because of its age. It's important to realize that information has been altered or rewritten since the beginning of civilization. So even if pictures for example are altered they still hold truthful information. Several things are evident in the moved body. Particularly early photoshopping techniques and common corpse abuse in the 1800's. The examination of false media is an indirect method of learning.

When it comes to altering images or text which is worse? It has to be the altering of text. The idea of text or data being corrupted is much more common and manageable. A picture really is worth a thousand words. Recorded information on the other hand is less subjective and more dangerous. While the altering of both are bad one is certainly worse. Especially when it transcends time.

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Re: Early Photoshop



by Joseph Miller - Thursday, February 2, 2017, 10:12 AM

I don't know about confused identity. maybe if they just finished a bottle of low budget whiskey. They literally just moved the camera to the other side. But is it really worse, moving your camera around a bunch of dead guys, or moving a dead guy. They were just left out there to bleach in the sun anyways. Sounds cold, but they didn't have the warrior ethos that we do now. Just leave them, burry them, or burn them. In this case they left him and the photographer used him as a prop for his propaganda for the Union. I know it sounds like I'm for the rebels or against the Union. Only in Star Wars. I'm merely trying to state, is it really all that bad. You have to move him to bury him or cremate him. It's not like they had digital camera's either. Every shot had to be a good one. You can't just whip through 200 pictures in a minute. I think he was doing his job and did a good job at it. Made some money, supported himself, didn't realize it would have such an affect, but, hey, we can thank him for not making it boring. What isn't scripted anymore?

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Re: Early Photoshop

by Jacob Micheli - Sunday, February 5, 2017, 10:02 PM

You make a really good point. I keep trying to impose 21st century human rights on 18th century photographers. I think thats one of the main challenges of understanding history. What is normal and acceptable today was just as likely immoral and illegal in days past. Considering our societies emphasis on technology its hard not to punish our ancestors. I think just the fact they made it to a battlefield is praiseworthy. Had this occurred in 2017 it would be a different story. Considering everything that was going on its almost forgivable to a degree. Given the state of technology, the economy, and constant death its reasonable to see how a meager profit could relax morality. The photographers probably used humor to help complete their work. Whatever the case I'm happy we have the pictures. Even if they are subjective.

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"Which is worse, changing what is written or revealed in print, which relies on the comprehension of the reader, or when images are involved, which relies on the sense of sight, the eyes of the viewer? Is there a difference?"

by Holly Olson - Friday, February 3, 2017, 1:56 AM

I was looking up other doctored photographs from history and came upon this article that was pretty interesting and really had me going back and forth with this question.

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20121213-fake-pictures-make-real-memories>

The author, Rose Eveleth, writes that, "Doctored images can affect what we eat, how we vote and even our childhood recollections. The question scientists are asking is why there's nothing we can do to stop it." Obviously doctored images of the Civil War probably won't affect the things you eat. It was fascinating, though, the experiments that were described and how memories can be so easily manipulated into having these effects on people. There were two she talked about, however, that I think really hit the forum question:

"But like a balloon ride or Bugs Bunny, these fake images can have very real effects on memory. In 2010, the online magazine Slate ran an experiment showing readers a handful of political photographs. Some of them were of real events, while others were doctored. Readers were then asked whether or not they remembered those events happening. Nearly half of Slate's readers claimed they remembered the fake political events happening. And that's in an uncontrolled setting, where they could have easily cheated and looked up the answers. Many people are adamant that John Kerry and Jane Fonda protested together, simply because they saw that photograph."

"Another study showed participants images of two different protests – some from the 1989 protests in Tiananmen Square, others from 2003 anti-war protests in Rome. The researchers doctored some of the images to make the protests more crowded and violent than they really were. When asked about the events later, not only did the participants remember the protests being violent, but they also expressed more hesitance to attend a protest in the future. And when asked for comments about the events, people wrote about conflicts, damage to property and injuries from the police and participants that were never documented at the time of the event."

I think this would definitely help the case of which is worse, changing written or print. In one case it was said that even after being told that they'd seen doctored footage, the participants would still sometimes recall the event that never happened. She quotes Kimberly Wade, a memory researcher from the University of Warwick, "Images are really good at fooling our memories for a number of reasons. Wade says, "A big part of it is because people trust photographs. We still think of them as frozen moments in time," she says, even though most people know that photographs can be, and often are, doctored. In fact, people trust photographs so much that they actually place more weight on information that is accompanied with an image, regardless of how related or useful that image is. If you show participants a statement, and an image that provides no proof of that statement, they are far more likely to find that statement true than if it had no image alongside it

And there are certain things that make a fake image more believable and more likely to be imprinted on our memories. People are more liable to be persuaded by false images that add weight to their beliefs."

Think of how many people saw those Civil War photos and how they might have shaped their memories of the war and the stories they would tell about it. Someone had mentioned that they rely on written accounts over pictures...what if some of those written accounts come from memories shaped off these doctored photos and the captions that went along with them? Wade said that, "people put more weight on information with a picture." And also, "images that add weight to their beliefs." I bet the picture of the fallen "Confederate" soldiers being described as having, "paid with life the price of their treason" struck a chord with many who saw it and had them agreeing that, this is somehow what these men deserved. This in turn, may alter how they might describe what had happened in the future.

I was thinking that it was worse to change the picture over print. This argues that having a picture, regardless of its validity, attached to information is proof enough for some to believe it though. So I guess the worst wouldn't necessarily be altering the picture, but what information you choose to print that you accompany with a picture.

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Re: "Which is worse, changing what is written or revealed in print, which relies on the comprehension of the reader, or when images are involved, which relies on the sense of sight, the eyes of the viewer? Is there a difference?"

by Josh Myhre - Friday, February 3, 2017, 7:17 AM

This "fill in" effect happens with more than just images though, it can happen through text or verbal communication as well. Human memory is highly faulty and very susceptible to errors when we're asked to remember a specific event (that didn't actually happen) and then given contextual information (that might actually be true) about the made-up event. Many, many psychological studies have indicated this to be true. Photo's just have an exaggerated effect in this domain because we're such visual creatures.

I think the question here has to be whether or not we should even consider a photograph a primary source of information when studying history. The thing about photographs is that they take time to develop and distribute (especially back in the 1860's). A photographer has to snap the picture, take it to the lab or studio, have it developed, put it in sequence with other photographs, and then write out the context for whatever occurred and sent it out for distribution. Once developed and put into context, the photo functions almost like a memoir. The image itself means something to the photographer, but s/he then has to re-communicate that meaning to an audience. Contrast this with the diary of a soldier the night before or after a battle, or Lincoln's personal diary. An individual writing about his immediate experience at that exact point in time has unmitigated access to what is happening around them, and the writing

captures exactly what they are thinking and feeling at that exact point in time. It is direct access to that person's subjective experience of the situation, unaltered by political agendas or pandering for better sales.

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Which was more egregious?

by Randi Carlton - Friday, February 3, 2017, 8:03 PM

Both cases are definitely annoying as far as the idea that someone who has the power and tools to accurately capture and record the past decides instead to sensationalize things. It casts a lot of doubt, and it definitely makes it obvious that any form of recording history, even as simple as just written word, is subject to the biases and imagination of the one recording it. I definitely find the moved body case much more egregious though; not only was it altering the truth and the integrity of the scenery for a simple story, but it was also desecrating a body and disrespecting the memory of that person. A dead body is not a prop; they could have done something to try and identify the person or bury them rather than toting them around and posing them. And who knows, maybe the body really did stay there and was left unburied until it was a skeleton, despite Frassanito's doubts, and maybe that was entirely because of the presumably out of the way rocky niche they dragged it off to.

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Comprehension vs. Senses

by Alexandra Zakett - Sunday, February 5, 2017, 10:54 PM

In the articles and video presented the idea of confused identity was more deferential to me than the idea of moved body. Comprehension relies on the reader assessing the data and then creating an idea from that data. The idea of the moved body relies truly on the senses, which does not require any comprehension. We look at what we see and immediately form an opinion. When that photographs or image is photoshopped it also simultaneously changes our opinion on the image, which cannot be a true reasonable thought. However when the reader is presented with false data through confused identify it allows the reader to step outside the box and form their own opinion. The reader may comprehend false data and take it to the next step by researching similar historical accounts to find more factual results. Overall I think it benefits the reader to have to research their article to prove its' historical accuracy.

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