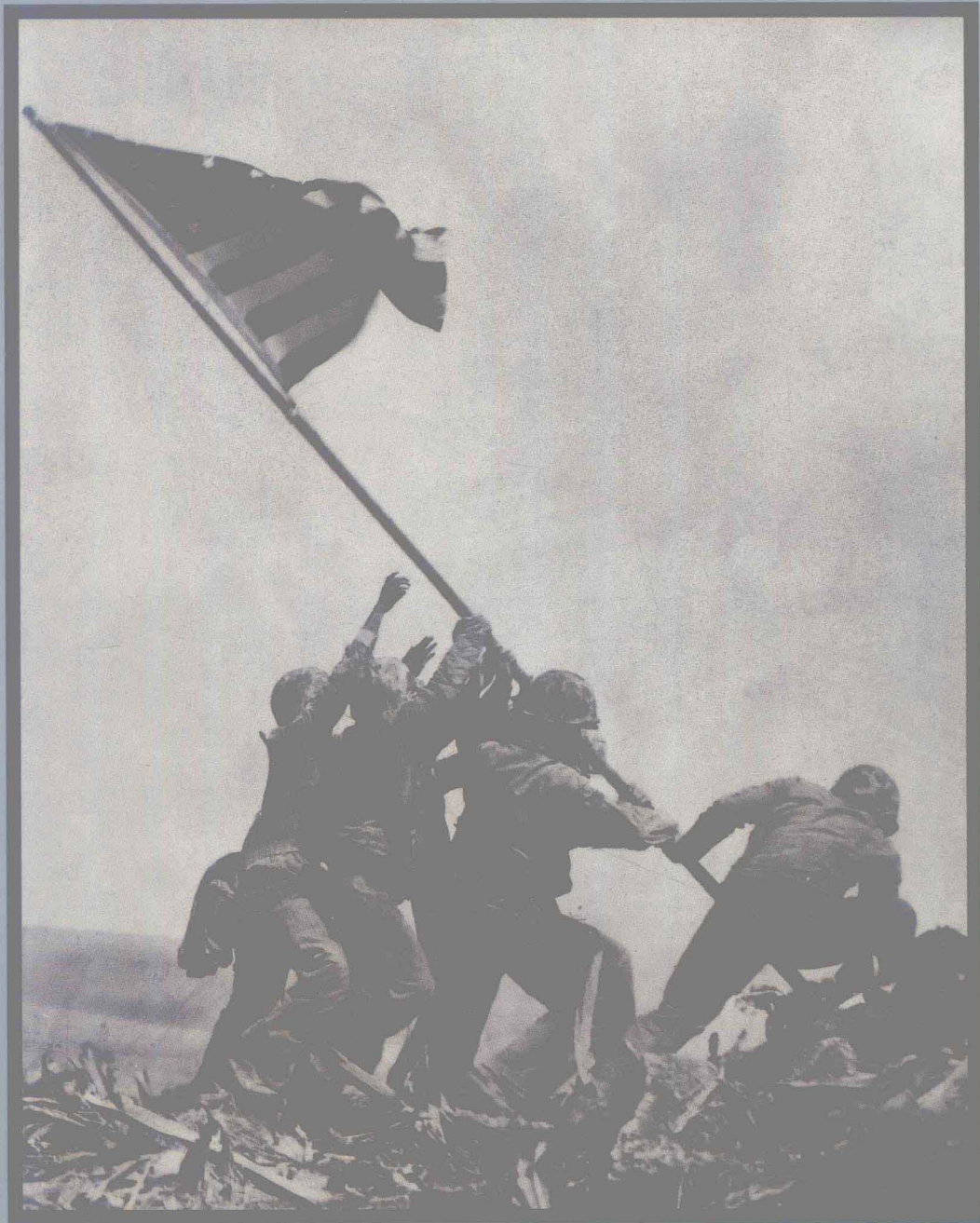


EYEWITNESS



150 YEARS OF PHOTOJOURNALISM

Richard Lacayo and George Russell

TIME

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1975/108

TIME

EYEWITNESS: 150 Years of Photojournalism

First edition 1990

Second edition 1995

1995 Edition

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Published by TIME Books

1271 Avenue of the Americas

New York, New York 10020

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ISBN: 1-883013-06-2

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
I. BEGINNINGS: 1839-1880 <i>Richard Lacayo</i>	9
II. GLOBAL NEWS: 1880-1920 <i>George Russell</i>	31
III. CONSCIENCE: 1880-1920 <i>Richard Lacayo</i>	55
IV. MAGAZINE DAYS: 1920-1950 <i>George Russell</i>	67
V. NEW DIRECTIONS: 1950-1980 <i>George Russell</i>	125
VI. RESURGENCE: 1980-1995 <i>Richard Lacayo</i>	165
Photography Credits	190
Index	191

INTRODUCTION

This book grew from a special issue of TIME Magazine that was published in 1989 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of photojournalism. A gallery of many of the most memorable photographs ever taken, the issue was hailed by readers, some of whom wrote to suggest the contents should be collected in more permanent form. Following their advice, TIME published *Eyewitness: 150 Years of Photojournalism* in hardcover form in 1990. The book was a greatly enhanced version of the magazine, allowing the presentation of many more photographs and permitting writers Richard Lacayo and George Russell to expand their informed and insightful survey of their subject.

This second edition of *Eyewitness* updates the final chapter of the book to include new photographs from the 1990s. These new pictures include images that have already achieved the status of contemporary icons: the grief-stricken firefighter carrying a small child from the bombed federal building in Oklahoma

City, a crowd in Somalia jeering as the dead body of a U.S. soldier is dragged through the streets. The new material amply confirms Richard Lacayo's conclusion in the final chapter of the 1990 edition: despite the currency and availability of video images, the still picture retains a unique power to move minds.

In his introduction to the first edition of *Eyewitness*, Donald Morrison, then special projects editor of TIME, issued this warning to readers: "Photojournalism, the industrial-strength version of photography, is an untidy collision of art, reportage and commercial publishing. It is often not pretty. As a fair representation of the craft's 150 years, this book depicts a shocking number of wars and other tragedies." The new pictures in this edition of the book are no less troubling. Readers will find sorrow and misery in the images collected here—but they will also find courage and dedication on the other side of the lens.

—The Editors



I: BEGINNINGS 1839–1880

Here is a photograph of a Paris street, the Boulevard du Temple, on a bright day sometime in 1839. Taken from an upper-story window, it shows a tree-lined avenue that slants toward the top of the frame. The eye takes in chimneyed rooftops, the drawn curtains of an apartment, even the separate cobblestones of the pavement. But because photography is still in its infancy, a new process that requires an exposure time of several minutes, nothing that moves quickly has registered on the plate. None of the carriages, horses or pedestrians that passed before the lens on this day have left a trace—with one exception. On a street corner in the lower part of the frame, it is possible to make out the small, blurred silhouette of a man. He has lifted a leg to have his boot polished, which explains why he has been standing in one spot long enough to leave his image, but not quite still enough to be in good focus. This is the first known photograph of a human being.

Once that solitary marginal smudge has been recognized as a person, the whole picture seems to emanate from the point he occupies. It's impossible to look at this image now without feeling an urge to bring that anonymous man into focus. Which leads us to the challenge that has driven photojournalists from the beginning: how to make the human race visible to itself. That quest has led them to confront hostile surroundings, nature's challenges, censorship, fallible equipment, the conventional tastes of photo editors and readers, the distorting scrim of their own prejudices, the inherent limitations on what a photograph can convey, and all the complexities that surround the question of "What is truth?" Perhaps more than any other branch of photography, it is photojournalism that has tested the capabilities of the camera, the photographer and the viewer.

Photography was not the invention of a single person or moment. It arrived at the end of a long series of discoveries, summoned by a line of chemists, artisans and tinkerers. All of them shared the intuition that light could leave a permanent imprint on a flat surface that had been spread with some combination of chemical substances. Their discoveries culminated in the work of two men. One was Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, a Paris stage designer and entrepreneur who took

the picture of the Boulevard du Temple. The other was William Henry Fox Talbot, an English squire with a comfortable income and a multitude of interests, which included mathematics, optics and drawing.

Daguerre perfected his method, which produced an image upon a silver-coated copper plate, on the basis of research pursued first by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, a prosperous gentleman-inventor with whom Daguerre had joined in partnership in 1829. When Niépce died four years later, Daguerre went forward on his own until he arrived at a technique that produced clear, stable images. At that point, François Arago, a friend and member of the French Academy of Sciences, persuaded Daguerre to make his method available free of charge to the world, while he encouraged the French government to provide lifetime pensions for Daguerre and for Niépce's son.

The French Academy announced Daguerre's discovery in January of 1839. Later that year, the legislature in Paris finalized arrangements to share Daguerre's process with other nations (except Britain; even in this moment of global largesse, France was not about to oblige its perennial rival). The news was greeted by the press with instant enthusiasm and by the public with an excitement that came to be called *daguerreotypomanie*. "Opticians' shops were crowded with amateurs painting for daguerreotype apparatus," one observer would write later. "Everywhere cameras were trained on buildings. Everyone wanted to record the view from his window."

Word of Daguerre's triumph came as a less welcome surprise to Talbot, who had been working separately on a different method for producing images. Unaware of the Frenchman's research, he had put aside his experiments in 1837, though not before obtaining a series of promising results. With Daguerre now being lionized, Talbot rushed to perfect his process.

He called his method the calotype, from the Greek words *kalos* and *tupos*, meaning "beautiful picture." Its great advantage was that it produced a paper negative from which any number of prints could be made. (Though it was technically possible for daguerreotypes to be duplicated, it was so difficult that nearly all of them remained one-of-a-kind pictures.) A disadvantage was the rough texture of the paper, which deprived the calotype of the mirror-surface clarity that was the daguerreotype's chief fascination. Even that seemed attractive to Talbot, a sometime artist who prized the atmospheric blurring of edges that his method produced. ("Rembrandtish," he called

Boulevard du Temple, Paris (detail)

Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, 1839

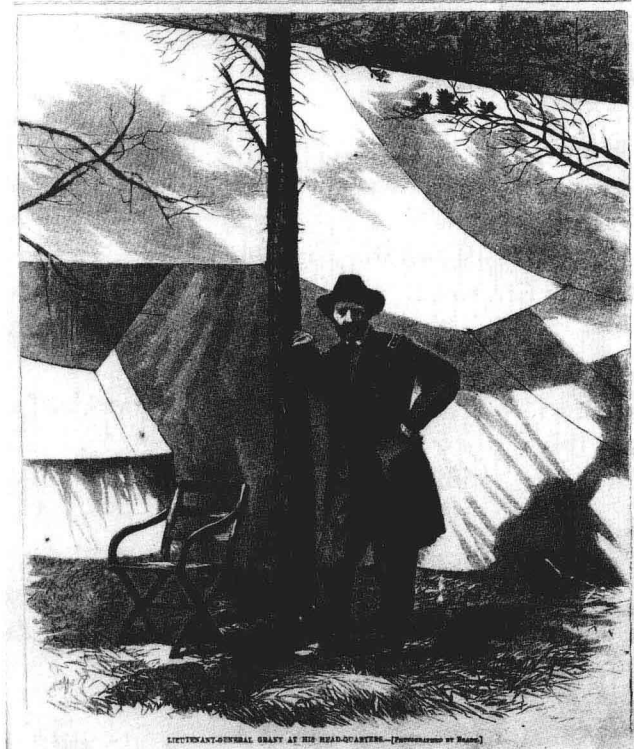
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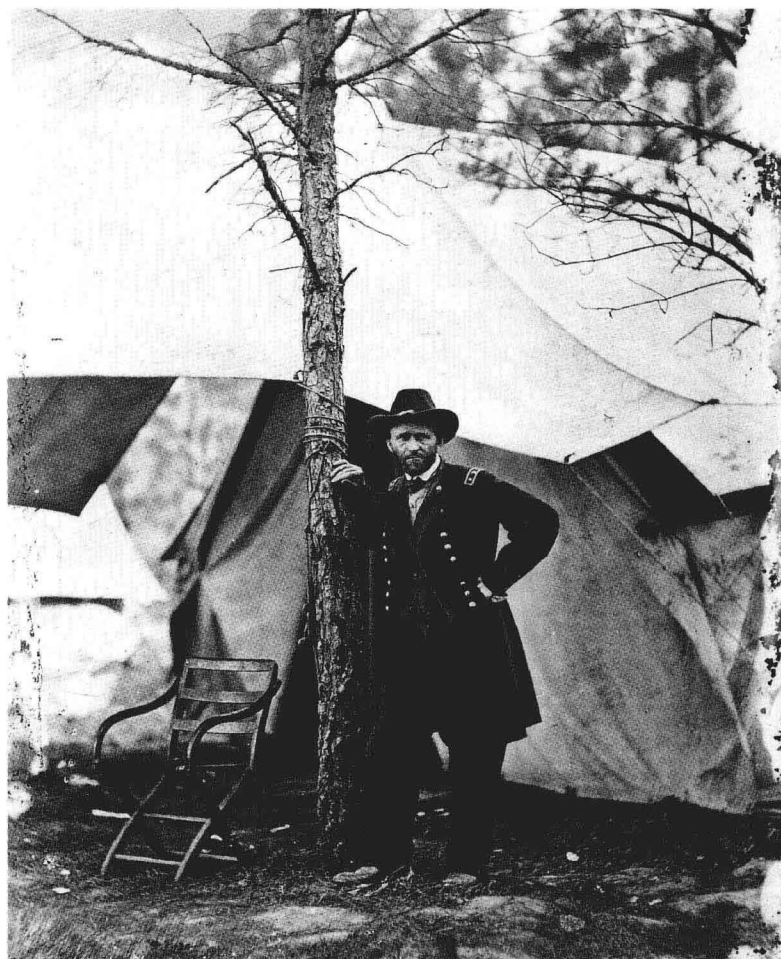
Vol. VIII—No. 394.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JULY 16, 1864.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the Year 1864, by Harper & Brothers, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Southern District of New York.



Wood engraving from *Harper's Weekly* of Union General Ulysses S. Grant at his headquarters



Photograph on which engraving was based by Timothy O'Sullivan

it.) The calotype lends a gentle timelessness to many of the pages of *The Pencil of Nature*, the famous volume of photographs he published in segments between 1844 and 1846. Setting up his camera in various spots around his country estate, Lacock Abbey, Talbot made pictures—of a haystack, a solitary bush, a broom propped by an open doorway—that possess an air of the picturesque and the immemorial. There is no hint of any turmoil in the wider world.

Talbot's process never became as popular as Daguerre's. As late as the mid-1840s, there were probably no more than a dozen practitioners of the calotype anywhere in the world, while daguerreotype studios were appearing by the dozens on both sides of the Atlantic. Because the calotype method was patented, any photographer using it was obliged to pay Talbot a fee, giving professionals one more reason to prefer the daguerreotype. And the slight foggiess that made the calotype attractive to artists made it less satisfying to the typical customer for a portrait—a major drawback, since portraiture rapidly became the most common and profitable use for photography.

It would be fair to say that neither of photography's two

inventors was entirely sure just what this new discovery would be useful for. It did not take long, however, for some of their contemporaries to pose an obvious question. Why shouldn't this pencil of nature serve as a pencil of history too? If lace and flowers could inscribe themselves on the photographic plate, why not battles, ribbon cuttings and earthquakes? In 1852, in a review of the first all-photographic exhibition held in England, the *Times* of London recognized the larger potential of the camera. "It secures precise and charming representations of the most distant and the most evanescent scenes," the paper's correspondent wrote. "It fixes, by almost instantaneous processes, the details and character of events and places, which otherwise the great mass of mankind would never have brought home to them."

To the 19th century mind, with its penchant for the scientific and the mechanical, the camera quickly came to be regarded as the supreme mechanism, a kind of trap for facts. Able to capture a scene in high detail, operated with a minimum of human intervention, it seemed from the first to have a special purchase on the truth. But while dozens of illustrated period-

icals in Europe and the United States would have liked to adopt the new form, none was able to. For decades there was no practical means to print photos and text on the same page. The first workable method, called the halftone process, would not enter into widespread use until the 1890s. Until that time, newspapers and weeklies could at best publish engravings copied from photographs—sometimes copied closely, sometimes altered to make them more lurid, patriotic or sentimental.

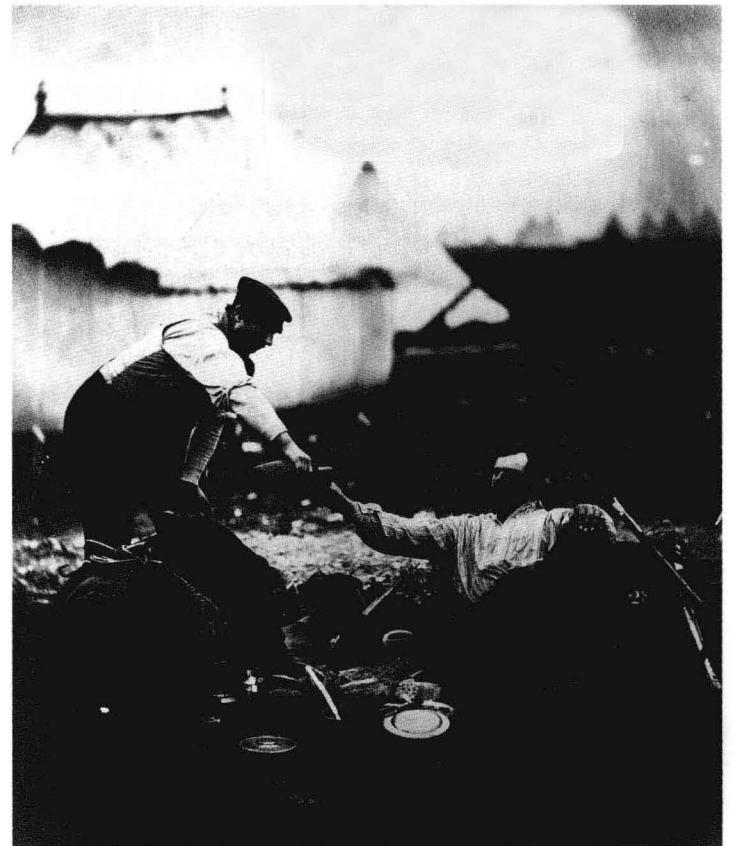
In any case, the bulky camera gear of the 19th century hardly lent itself to stop-action coverage. By the mid-1850s, both the daguerreotype and the calotype were being abandoned by photographers in favor of a new method, the wet-plate process. It combined the clarity of a daguerreotype with the calotype's ability to produce duplicate images from a single negative, opening the way to a crucial advance, the mass production of images. In other respects the new process was more cumbersome than its predecessors. Each negative was formed upon a sheet of glass that had to be coated with an emulsion before it was inserted into the heavy box camera. After the picture was taken, the plate had to be developed at once. That obliged photographers working out of doors to travel with a darkroom, usually a horse-drawn van or a tent that could be pitched at the site. Action shots were ruled out because the wet-plate process could require exposure times of 15 seconds or more. And while history might be made at night, photographs almost never were. Flash powder did not come into use until the 1880s.

In its early decades, photography was best suited not so much to fast-moving events as to the motionless rubble and corpses left in their wake. The photographers who worked in that era did not think of themselves as photojournalists, even though their pictures might sometimes be picked up by the illustrated press. The appearance of the first self-described photojournalists would wait until the last decade of the century, when the necessary technologies were all in place and the mass-circulation press had evolved into the tabloid world of scandal and circulation wars. Hoping that photographs would provide an edge over the competition, press lords like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst hired the first full-time news photographers. Yet through all the early years of the camera's history, there were photographers who, while they never took the name "photojournalist," understood themselves to be pursuing timely subjects for a wide audience—in effect, to be reporting. Though they may have been souvenir peddlers, artist-entrepreneurs or just camera-equipped adventurers, they were also photojournalists.

The first event memorialized by a camera was a typical news subject—a disaster. After fire destroyed much of Hamburg, Germany, in 1842, two German daguerreotypists, Hermann Biow and Carl Ferdinand Stelzner, made a series of views of the

charred remains. Neither man's pictures were widely seen at the time, however, and Biow's have since been lost. In the United States the first photograph of a public event was made two years later, when Philadelphia was shaken by anti-immigration riots. William and Frederick Langenheim, two of the city's most enterprising photographers, aimed their daguerreotype camera out the upper-story window of their studio to capture a scene of the unruly crowd assembled outside a bank. That image too received little notice at the time.

That was to be the fate of most of the earliest photographs of current events—to disappear before reaching much of an audience. During the Mexican War of 1846-48, an anonymous daguerreotypist made a series of pictures that did survive, mostly portraits of officers and enlisted men. Though they are probably the first photographs from a war zone, it appears that they were never displayed. Yet the audience for such pictures was growing. With the press embarking upon a period of quick expansion—the result of increasing literacy and advances in rapid printing that made it possible to produce huge editions—"the people" were becoming "the public." Civil life would be transformed. Popular prejudices were magnified by the press, leading to a louder clamor and intensified passions. In such a climate the Mexican War became a hugely popular campaign of expansion, at least on the American side, inspir-



British officer at ease in the Crimea *Roger Fenton, 1855*



Union artillery at Fredericksburg *Timothy O'Sullivan, 1863.* O'Sullivan, one of some 20 photographers employed by Mathew Brady during the Civil War, took this picture just as the heavy guns went into action, and had to hurry his equipment wagon out of the line of fire.

ing newspapers to send off the first war correspondents. One sign of photography's growing prestige and impact was that editors took to promising their readers "daguerreotype reports," stories with a photograph's immediacy and detail—without the photographs themselves.

It took another decade before a significant body of war photography was at last brought before a wide audience. Perhaps it's only fitting that the pictures—scenes of the Crimean War made in 1855 by the British photographer Roger Fenton—demonstrate not only the capabilities of the camera but also the pitfalls. Fenton worked with the cooperation of the British government, and he served its purpose: to make pictures that would dampen public outcry about the mismanagement of the war. His pictures open the history of photojournalism with a cautionary tale, an episode of original sin.

Victory notwithstanding, the Crimean War was for the most part a disaster for Britain, which had joined France, Turkey and Sardinia to block a Russian push against the Ottoman Empire. The British military establishment was unprepared

for modern warfare or for the harsh conditions of the Crimea, a Russian peninsula on the Black Sea. The fighting men suffered terribly from disease and hunger, the septic conditions of their field hospitals, the interruption of their seaborne supply lines and the incompetence of their officers. Cholera swept through the ranks, eventually killing even the British commander Lord Raglan (something of a blessing for the troops, given Raglan's maladroit battle tactics). The war found its perfect memorial in *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, a poem that blows a fog of sanctity around a lethal military blunder.

This was the war that Fenton documented and, in some measure, sanitized. Like Talbot, he was a well-to-do Englishman, the son of a mill owner and banker. Though trained as an artist, he pursued a legal career until the 1850s, when he put aside the law to indulge his passion for the camera. Fenton became one of photography's great early masters; his landscapes and architectural studies in particular are some of the most elegant products of the 19th century camera. A co-founder of the Royal Photographic Society, he also made por-



traits of the British royal family, a connection that would eventually gain him entrée to the battlefield. As the government's mishandling of the war came under fierce criticism from the press, Fenton embarked for the Crimea with a commission from the Manchester print seller Thomas Agnew and letters of introduction from Prince Albert.

The Prince, an enthusiastic promoter of British photography, understood the camera's powers of persuasion. Fenton's mission, in effect, was to counter the critics by bringing home pictures of a war zone more coherent than the one described in the *Times* of London. In March 1855, he arrived at the Black Sea port of Balaklava with 700 glass plates and an old wine seller's van he had converted into a traveling darkroom. Even at dockside, the chaos was so great that during the unloading of his equipment he broke several ribs. Though hobbled by his injury, Fenton was able to complete his project, returning to England four months later with more than 350 usable negatives—and a serious case of cholera. He recovered, though not soon enough to guide Queen Victoria through the exhibition

of his Crimea pictures that opened promptly in London. They were also seen in Paris, published as wood engravings in the *Illustrated London News* and sold singly and in volumes, though sales dropped off after the actual fighting ended.

Fenton's pictures were discreet by the bloody standards of battlefield imagery to come: no glimpses of combat, no punctured flesh that might offend Victorian sensibilities. There are scenes of officers at leisure and soldiers drowsing at a mortar battery. A viewer with an understanding of battlefield conditions might recognize that the flat plains of the Crimea were a soldier's nightmare, offering the enemy a clear line of fire in all directions. (Fenton himself was nearly shot several times, and shellfire once ripped away the roof of his van, which looked to Russian gunners like an ammunition truck.) But with the exception of one famously ominous scene—a stark gully littered with cannonballs—most of Fenton's pictures give the impression that the war was, if not quite ceremonious, then at least no more brutal or unsightly than a camping trip.

The images also suffer from a thinness common to much of

the early photography of events—a sense that the heart of the matter is elsewhere, just outside the range of the camera, just beyond the frame. Even so, no one can dispute that Fenton's pictures represented a watershed. Cameras had arrived on the battlefield. The curtain had gone up on the theater of war.

In the decade that followed, Fenton became deeply disillusioned with photography. Just 11 years after he took up the camera, he put it down. Selling off his equipment and his prints, he returned to the law, never to take another picture. Though his motives have never been entirely clear, there is some evidence that he was repelled by the growing commercialization of photography. This was a common sentiment among those in Britain and on the Continent who were eager to see photography granted the status of art. Scarcely had the camera been invented than there were complaints that it had fallen into the hands of philistines and opportunists. As early as 1857, the great French photographer Nadar was muttering about hustlers swarming into the field of portraiture. "Photography," he sniffed, "is now within the reach of the last imbecile."

There were fewer scruples on that issue in the United States, where the first generation of noteworthy photographers consisted largely of businessmen more worried about bankruptcy than commercialization. Yet it was one of those studio entrepreneurs—and eventual bankrupts—who was chiefly responsible for bringing photography to one of its greatest achievements, the chronicling of the American Civil War.

When the fighting began in 1861, Mathew Brady was already the nation's best-known photographer. The son of poor Irish farmers from upstate New York, he won fame as an early

practitioner of the celebrity portrait. At his studio on lower Broadway, Brady displayed the "Gallery of Illustrious Americans," a daguerreotype inventory of politicians, generals and men of letters.

Brady's pursuit of the famous led him to maintain a second studio in Washington, so he was well situated to record the war's earliest clash of troops. The first Battle of Bull Run broke out on July 21, 1861, in the wooded areas about 25 miles from the capital. No sooner had news of the fight reached the city than Brady rushed toward the lines with his cameras and two wagonloads of darkroom equipment. All the glass-plate negatives he was able to expose that day were lost in the scramble of a Union retreat. Brady himself spent three days wandering lost in the woods. He returned to find press reports that blamed his camera for the Northern rout. "Some pretend, indeed, that it was this mysterious and formidable instrument that produced the panic!" one correspondent reported. "The runaways, it is said, mistook it for the great steam gun discharging five hundred balls a minute, and took to their heels when they got within focus."

Brady was not to be discouraged, however. As it would do for Ulysses Grant, a failed businessman who found unexpected greatness as a merciless general, the war mobilized Brady's resources. It led him to conceive a project that dwarfed all his earlier ambitions: to document the whole conflict through photography. To that end he fielded and equipped his own small army of about 20 camera reporters. The wooden darkroom vans of "Brady's Photographic Corps" became a familiar sight at the edge of battlefields. Soldiers even came to consider them a bad omen, a sign that fighting was imminent.

Brady's "corps" included three men—Timothy O'Sullivan, Alexander Gardner and George N. Barnard—who went on to become some of the best-known photographers of the century. That they are remembered at all owes much to the fact that they eventually left Brady's employ, angered by his practice of attaching his name to their work. Brady rarely operated the camera himself. His name on a photograph was more of a company trademark, a label that covered the work of his small army of operatives in the field.

It was an age that trusted the camera more than was deserved. The popular bi-weekly *Humphrey's* even went so far as to claim: "Brady never misrepresents." We now know that several pictures made by Gardner were falsifications. The most famous involves his use of the same corpse in separate pictures to represent both a Union and a Confederate soldier. After taking the picture *A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep*, a portrait of a dead Union soldier, Gardner dragged the body, already stiff with rigor mortis, about 40 yards to serve as a Confederate corpse in the picture *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter*.



Home of a rebel sharpshooter *Alexander Gardner, 1863.* To create this picture of a purported rebel casualty, Gardner used the same corpse he had represented earlier as a Union soldier (see page 24). He merely dragged the stiffened body to a new location and repositioned it.

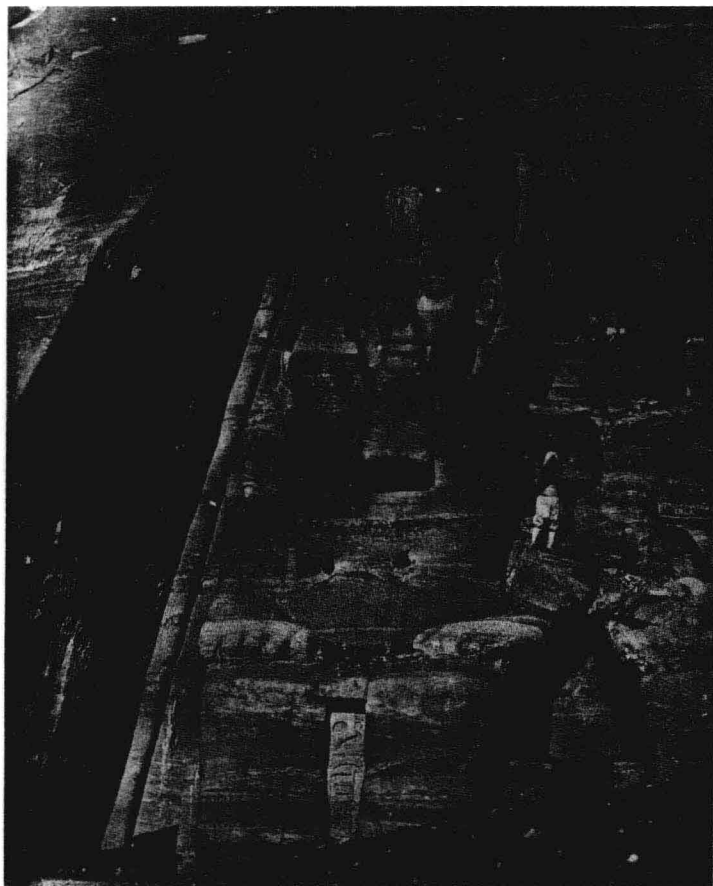


A British entrenchment during the Indian Mutiny *Félice Beato, 1858.* With his pictures from China and his earlier scenes from the mutiny—an uprising against the consolidation of British rule in India—Beato was a forerunner of the 20th century photojournalists who would witness the consequences of colonialism in the Third World.

It's not hard to understand the frustration that led Gardner to his ghoulish deception. One of the painful discoveries of the early photographers was reality's resistance to the human impulse to moralize. Painters could dramatize events and arrange scenes so that emotions like patriotism and pathos enveloped the image. The real world was less tractable. Then, as now, it couldn't be counted on to provide the camera with neat allegories of virtue triumphing over wickedness. As Gardner discovered, it could not even be counted on to provide a suitable Confederate corpse.

In the end, photography's bluntness proved to be a new

kind of resource. The camera changed the depiction of battle at a time when war itself was changing, and with it the public understanding of warfare. The Civil War was slaughter on an unprecedented scale, more highly mechanized, with larger numbers of men set against one another. It was the beginning of the end for the venerable notion that war was a glorious pursuit (an idea that has never been altogether dislodged from the public imagination, but that becomes harder to sustain with each new episode of slaughter). There was something about the candid, unflinching character of camera imagery that suited this emerging understanding and perhaps helped draw it out.



Colossus of Ramses II at Abu Simbel *Maxime Du Camp, 1850*

The pictures that came out of these battles gave war a new face, stark and squalid.

The Civil War photographers were not the first to display combat casualties. That distinction probably belongs to James Robertson, a British photographer who succeeded Fenton in the Crimea and documented the captured city of Sevastopol. There were even partially decomposed bodies in pictures made by Robertson's colleague Félice Beato during the Indian mutiny of 1857-58, in which Sepoy regiments rebelled unsuccessfully against their British officers. Two years later, during the Second Opium War, Beato photographed the swollen remains of Chinese defenders who had died during a British assault on their fortress.

To the Western viewers of Beato's images, it made a difference that the dead were Asians; their remains were not accorded the reverence that Westerners reserved for white corpses. But there was no escape for Americans looking at other Americans sprawled dead across the rain-soaked field of Gettysburg. Newspaper editors could cushion the pictures with soothing phrases, rolling out conventional sentiments about the gallantry and nobility of those who fall in battle; the pictures resist the consolations of wartime pieties. What fastens your eye to the page is not the nobility of the scene but its

wretchedness. These are plainly men who have fallen in the raw postures of death, mouths open.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, the American physician and man of letters, wrote frequently about photography. Holmes also knew the scenes of war firsthand, having searched for his wounded son on the battlefield of Antietam, an indecisive engagement that was the bloodiest clash of the war. Later, Holmes left a moving record of his first encounter with Alexander Gardner's photographs from the same site:

"It was so nearly like visiting the battlefield to look over these views, that all of the emotions excited by the actual sight of the stained and sordid scene, strewn with rags and wrecks, came back to us, and we buried them in the recesses of our cabinet as we would have buried the mutilated remains of the dead they too vividly represented."

In 1866 a number of Civil War pictures were collected in two important books, the first examples of photographers resorting to books as a way to organize their pictures into a historical account. The first of the books was Gardner's *Photographic Sketch Book of the War*, a leatherbound double volume that assembled 100 pictures taken by various photographers. All of them are carefully credited under their own names. Barnard's *Photographic Views of Sherman's Campaign* is a more curious and fascinating volume, an exercise in post-apocalyptic landscape photography that follows the path of the Union General William T. Sherman's merciless March to the Sea. On page after page, fire-gutted and shot-blasted buildings are silhouetted against a white sky.

Only a wealthy few were likely to have seen deluxe volumes like Gardner's, to say nothing of Barnard's, which sold for \$100. But the years just before the war also saw the rise of new methods for the mass distribution of inexpensive photographs. By the 1860s, photographic portraits of the famous and infamous became available in a cheap format called the *carte de visite*, after the French term for a visitor's calling card. Measuring about 3 1/2 by 2 1/2 inches, *carte de visite* portraits of victorious generals, fashionable women and the latest opera tenors proved enormously popular, becoming a crucial early step in the creation of the modern celebrity culture. The soprano Jenny Lind and the femme fatale Lola Montez owed much of their fame to the *carte de visite* in the same way that Madonna made her mark on MTV. In the aftermath of the firing on Fort Sumter, *carte de visite* portraits of Major Robert Anderson, a Union hero of the engagement, sold at the rate of 1,000 a day.

Another form of image making—the three-dimensional stereo-view picture—had also gained popularity in time to become a key format for bringing scenes of the war to ordinary households. To produce a stereo view, a camera with two lenses was used to take simultaneous pictures of the same subject