

northwestern university  
DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

Quarter/Year

Winter 2018

Course Number

ART-HIST 101-6

Day/Time

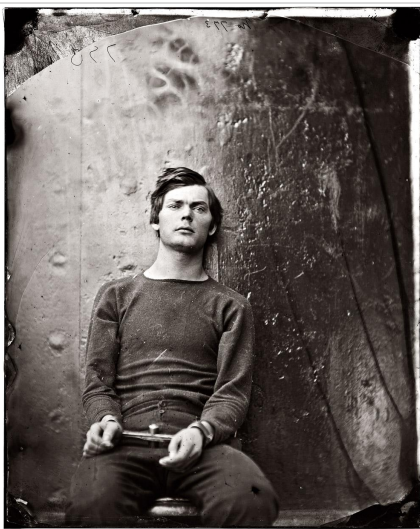
TR 3:30-4:50

Instructor

Bell

Course Title

Civil War Photography



The American Civil War (1861-1865) was an event that was relentlessly photographed. What roles did photography play in waging the Civil War? What kinds of images did noncombatants actually have access to during the war years? How did viewers of the time respond to images that were sometimes highly disturbing, bringing the “mutilated remains” of combat to their doorsteps for the first time in history? And how did photographs participate in the revolutionary changes of emancipation?

In this course, we’ll be looking primarily at two categories of Civil War photographs: portraits; and images of battlefield casualties. We will start from the position that Civil War-era photographs cannot be fully understood apart from the wartime context in which they circulated. The most numerous types of photographs dating from the 1860’s were portraits of common soldiers and of celebrities of the period (e.g. Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass). This course will expand this familiar archive to include photographic portraits of less well-known figures such as African-American soldiers, enslaved Americans, and even prisoners, examining the meanings of these images to contemporaries. Unlike portraiture, battlefield images constitute a small percentage of Civil War photographs, but they mark the first time that the

aftermath of combat was made visible to a civilian audience while a war was underway. We will be considering the significance of the appearance of images of combat death at specific moments during the conflict.

Civil War photographers, publishers, and even sitters themselves, exploited pose, props, caption, composition, framing, and point of view to create images that contributed to the political culture of civil conflict. Despite the camera’s perceived neutrality, we will learn in this course that the photograph is first and foremost a manipulated object.

#### Required Textbooks

William A. Frassanito, *Gettysburg: A Journey in Time*. Thomas Publications, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1996). ISBN-13: 978-0939631971. Alexander Gardner, *Gardner’s Photographic Sketchbook of the Civil War*. Dover Publications, 1959. ISBN-13: 978-0486227313. Additional readings will be posted on Canvas.

#### Assessments

3 short papers analyzing a photograph or group of photographs; longer paper summarizing research on a Civil War photograph; class presentation of your research; attendance and participation.