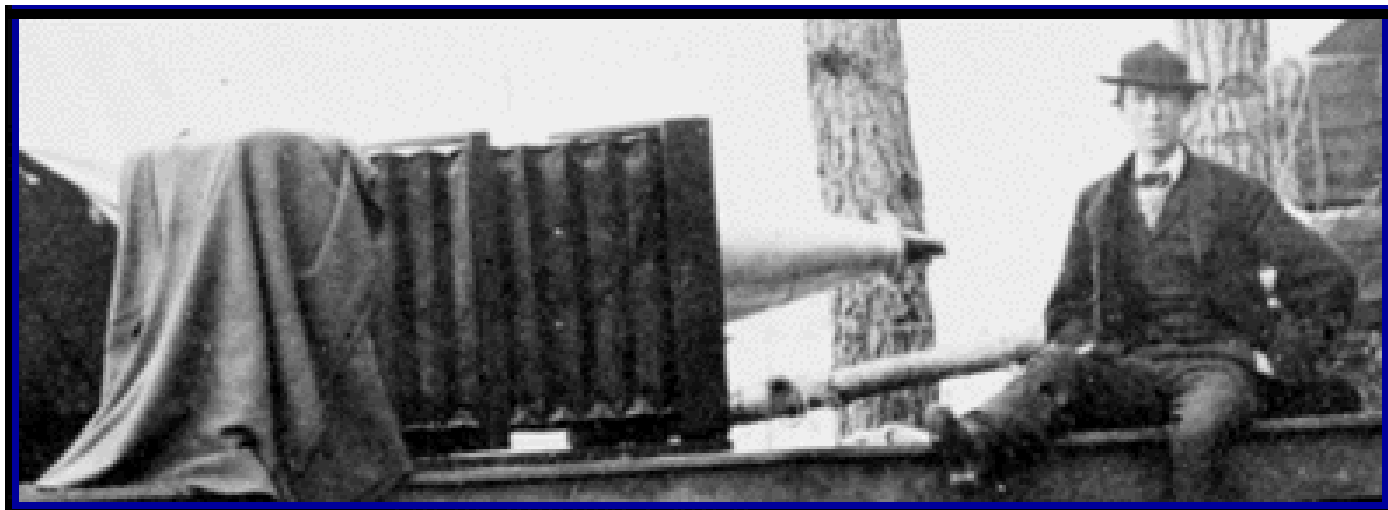


Does the Camera Ever Lie?

You've probably heard the saying "a picture is worth a thousand words", but can we always trust what we see? Photographers often want to communicate a thought or emotion with their work. Although the camera lens views the world impartially, the photographer constantly judges, deciding what to photograph and how to photograph it -- focusing on creating a strong image that will communicate the desired message. The words that accompany a photograph may also influence the way we "read" the picture.

The examples in this activity have been drawn from Alexander Gardner's 1865 [*Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War*](#). They reveal that in order to achieve a more striking effect or to cater to the interest of the public, Gardner sometimes rearranged the elements in his photographs or departed from the facts in his writing.

In the following activities you will compare the photographer's 1865 narratives with a contemporary analysis in order to discover if seeing is believing...



Complete the following activities:

1. The eye of the camera does not pass judgment on its subjects. Yet Civil War photographers could stir patriotism with their photographs, praising their compatriots while pitying their foes. Photographer Alexander Gardner wrote poignant narratives to accompany his photographs, occasionally inventing stories to make his point. In his *Sketch Book*, Gardner used two photographs of dead soldiers, identifying them first as Confederate and then as Union.
 - Look at “A Harvest of Death” and “Field Where General Reynolds Fell” and read Gardner’s narratives for the photographs then read the analysis.
 - Discuss whether you believe Gardner was right or wrong to “invent” history. What do you think made him change facts about the photographs? How could this type of journalism be dangerous today? Try to think of real-world examples.
2. Like other Civil War photographers, Alexander Gardner sometimes tried to communicate both pathos and patriotism with his photographs, reminding his audience of the tragedy of war without forgetting the superiority of his side's cause. Sometimes, the most effective means of elevating one's cause while demeaning the other was to create a scene -- by posing bodies -- and then draft a dramatic narrative to accompany the picture.
 - Look at “A Sharpshooter’s Last Sleep” and “The Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter” and read Gardner’s narratives for the photographs then read the analysis.
 - Discuss your feelings about the appropriateness of moving bodies to create a particular shot. How would you have felt about it if this had been your family member? Which photograph conveys a more powerful emotion? Why? What do you think would happen today if a photographer did something similar with a soldier?
3. Go to the following web site <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphhtml/cwphome.html> . Browse the Selected Civil War Photographs 1861-1865 collection. Choose a photograph to analyze using the “Photo Analysis Worksheet”. Be sure to print your picture and copy any information about the photograph. Once you have analyzed the photograph write your own caption (a paragraph) describing the events leading up to the image.