

Entry #1 (AP)

Even from early on, photography was applauded for its ability to document people, places, and things. But with the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, American photographers were faced with the challenge of documenting events. One such photographer, Timothy H. O'Sullivan (1840-1882), presented a battlefield's devastation in his *A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, PA, 1863*. The photograph evokes a certain sense of hopelessness due to its selective focus. The foreground achieves an uncomfortable clarity on a dead man's lifeless face, as other dead bodies continue far into the distance. Disregarding the grave content for a moment, O'Sullivan's composition is surprisingly agreeable. The repetition of the lines of the bodies creates a certain rhythm that is carried up to the horizon line. It is important to mention that the aesthetics of this composition were not quite by chance. O'Sullivan is known to have moved some of the bodies in order to capture the image as it appears now. The manipulation within *A Harvest of Death* would have been accepted during its time, as it would have been assumed that it conveyed the essence of the scene. After all, even a manipulated photograph would have been "more true" than the other available mediums such as painting or lithography. With this knowledge, does O'Sullivan's representation now seem less accurate? Either way, O'Sullivan was successful in conveying the death and loss associated with the Civil War, so in that respect, *A Harvest of Death* does seem to fulfill its role.

Entry #2 (MS)

Photography has had a major impact on our world. It has allowed us to record and capture history, whether it is during times of happiness and excitement or during hard times of trouble and sorrow, like in war. With the amazing and astonishing works by early photographers like Mathew Brady, Alexander Gardner and Timothy O'Sullivan, we are able to experience detailed accounts of the horrors and anguish that our great country faced during the American Civil War.

Perhaps one of the most moving and regretfully truthful photographs during one of America's most trying of times is O'Sullivan's "*A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1863.*" Taken after the bloodiest and most devastating battles our country has ever seen, O'Sullivan was able to capture and express to his audience what was actually happening to our fellow countrymen: that death was seemingly inevitable in this war. The success of O'Sullivan being able to really connect with and move people through this photo can be attributed to way he manipulated the battlefield scene. O'Sullivan placed the bodies of the fallen men in such a way that creates perspective, showing what appears to be a never-ending view of dead soldiers. Although the bodies farther out are lacking detail, the fact that they are scattered all the way up to the horizon shows the endless amount of death that our country faced. There closest soldier however, gives us detail, showing the lack of shoes and evidence of their pockets picked, leaving us with a feeling of sorrow and horror and anger at the lack of sympathy.

O'Sullivan also turned his head towards us so we can see his pained face, which is extremely powerful. Although the moving and manipulating of bodies is controversial, we must respect O'Sullivan for his creativity because without it, this image would not be as informative or effective, lacking the emotional response he wanted and needed the people to feel.

Entry #3 (SN)

As technological advances improved the photographic process, with the result of shorter exposure times and higher quality, more easily reproducible images, photographers swiftly realized the documentary power and potential societal impact of their rapidly expanding medium. For the first time, historical events could be recorded nearly instantaneously. This does not, however, mean that the images captured were the exact truth of the scene at hand. Photographers such as Timothy O'Sullivan (1840-1882), and Alexander Gardner (1821-1882), often manipulated their shots by adding or moving bodies, and introducing weaponry that would not necessarily been used in that particular battle, all to achieve a desired effect on the viewer.

This manipulation of the scene, however, proved highly effective at influencing the response of the viewer. One of the most recognizable and reproduced images of the American Civil War, *A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1863*, by Timothy O'Sullivan, was manipulated in such a manner. Bodies were posed and positioned differently than they had lain as they fell, and heads were turned towards the viewers to engage them in a more personal and gripping manner. War photography of actual dead bodies and war torn battlefields stripped away for the first time, the glamour and romanticism of war. No longer was it simply valiant young men marching bravely to their beautiful, heroic deaths, it was bloating distended bodies, torn limbs and bloodied wounds. Photography brought into stark focus the hardships and grit of war. The initial photographs of wars such as the Crimean War (1846-1848) and American Civil War (1861-1865), set the precedent for how war would be viewed through the photographers lens long into the future, reaching to the Vietnam War and beyond to current world conflicts.

Entry #4: (HG)

A revision of Fred Kleiner's paragraph concerning
A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1863

Photographs taken during the Civil War were meant to be objective depictions of the reality that the soldiers had endured. Photographers moved away from glorifying the war heroes and instead set their sights to the tragedy of death. In order to create an effect towards the greater truth of war, photographers had to manipulate their photographs by rearranging the scene. In doing this act, however, the image is no longer objective, but instead becomes a narrative. A perfect example would be a widely reproduced image, *A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1863* captured by

Timothy O'Sullivan. In this picture, there are corpses strewn all over the battlefield with their shoes missing and pockets turned inside out. Also, the main focus sets on a dead soldier lying in the middle of the scene with his face turned toward the camera. O'Sullivan arranged this scene in order to narrate the true horror of death on the battlefield to his viewers.

This manipulation does raise questions as to how far a photographer can alter his image before the truth is lost. Some believe that any changes made to a scene would present a false image, while others accept alterations as long as they support the greater truth. The changes made in this photograph made the message more effective. Every corpse in this image has been "harvested" for money, clothes, and other personal belongings. To add to the horror of their fates, O'Sullivan arranged the soldier in focus so that he was facing the camera to remind viewers that these corpses were not just objects laying in a field, but rather people. Would viewers be struck so deep by this image if it had been left in its original state or would the narrative be muffled by a poor vision?

Entry #5 (SW)

Timothy O'Sullivan Photographers were quick to realize the subversive power of their new, allegedly documentary medium. Thus began the story of photography's influence on modern life and of the immense changes it brought to communication and information management. Historical events could be recorded in permanent form on the spot for the first time, and framed in such a way as to spin the viewer's interpretation of the events to suit the photographer's sensibilities. The photographs taken of the Crimean War (1856) by Roger Fenton (1819-1869) and of the American Civil War by Mathew Brady (1823-1896), Alexander Gardner (1821-1882), and TIMOTHY O'SULLIVAN (1840-1882) remain influential as early examples of incisive accounts of military life, sometimes honest, but often staged to make up for war's lack of conduciveness to early photography, and to suit the compositional aesthetic or social agenda of the artist.

Of the Civil War photographs, the most moving are the seemingly objective records of combat deaths. Perhaps the most reproduced of these photographs is O'Sullivan's *A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1863* (FIG. 22-55). Although viewers could regard this image as simple news reportage, O'Sullivan sought to impress on people the high price of Civil War, and of civil disobedience on the part of the Rebels. *Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War*, in which this photo appears, describes the dead soldiers as having "paid with life the price of their treason, and when the wicked strife was finished, found nameless graves, far from home kindred." Corpses litter the battlefield as far as the eye can see, but the picture's accompanying text belies the implication that this is a true scene of soldiers who fell where they lay. Not only does the caption reveal the corpses were relieved of their boots and belongings, admitting they were manipulated, but the retributive tone, implying they got what they deserved, draws into question whether

the death toll was as high as the photographer would have you believe. This “harvest” is far more sensationalistic and admonishing in its supposed veracity than is achievable in a painting such as Winslow Homer’s *Veteran in a New Field* (FIG. 22-37). Though it would be many years before photolithography could reproduce photographs like this in newspapers, photographers exhibited them publicly, furthering a more effective mode of propaganda than newsprint engravers ever could.