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# Photographic Histories of the Civil War and the First World War and Rebirth

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- 1 In the photographs taken in wartime, used as news, sold as souvenirs and postcards, distributed as propaganda and collected afterwards as evidence for polemical arguments, as nostalgia or as the nation building memory, we would expect to find different kinds of rebirth. After all, those photographs can be captioned in different ways that change and give new meanings for all those different purposes. But will we always find national renewal or a “new birth of Freedom” in the sense that Abraham Lincoln meant when he used the phrase at Gettysburg in 1863? Two large collections of photographs, *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, published in 1912 in ten quarto volumes and *A Photographic History of the First World War*, published in 1933 in a single quarto volume, display similar titles, are of the same page size, and testify to a similar editorial desire to re-cycle war photographs.<sup>1</sup> Seen together, however, these two works lead to no easy conclusion about what will be re-born when war photographs find their way into commemorative volumes, except that rebirth, recasting, reinterpretation will certainly take place.
- 2 When Lincoln spoke of a “new birth of freedom,” on November 19, 1863 towards the end of his Gettysburg Address, he must have referred to literal freedom for African-Americans as well as the more philosophic and political freedom implied by the famous phrase “government of the people by the people for the people.” After all, he started the speech by saying that “our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” He does not mention this equality again in the speech, but only fourteen months after signing the Emancipation Proclamation of September 22, 1862 and less than a year after the beginning of the official policy of emancipation that the Proclamation put into motion, his meaning must be clear. The phrase “government of the people, by the people, for the people,” gives a hint of this as well. Lincoln took the phrase, according

to his biographer and sometime law partner William Herndon, from a text by the abolitionist, Theodore Parker who had defined democracy as “direct self government over all the people, for all the people, by all the people.”<sup>2</sup> *The Photographic History of the Civil War* ignored this. With an astonishing singleness of purpose given the huge and diverse number of its authors, the work threw itself into the task of building or birthing the American nation on the shared memory of suffering by white people in that war while doing its best to both forget slavery and deny that the war had brought about any change in the status of African-Americans. *A Photographic History of the First World War*, with its laconic captions by a single author, had a very different purpose. It set out to warn that war was nothing but death and destruction. At the time of publication in 1933 when only one world war was generally given the name World War, it warned that there was a Second World War on the way pitting forces stirred up by Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Kemal Pasha (Kemal Attaturk) against each other.<sup>3</sup> *The Photographic History of the Civil War* has turned the suffering of that war into a positive, even essential experience in building the nation. *The First World War* book turns a victory into overture for disaster to come.

- 3 When Abraham Lincoln used the words that the introduction to this collection of articles repeats, he was giving his “Gettysburg Address,” at the dedication ceremony, November 19, 1863, for the battlefield memorial that was being arranged at the time. Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” has been echoed ever since its first delivery in the graveside speeches of American presidents and others in time of war, and itself refers to Pericles’ Funeral Oration delivered in 430 BC, after the first year, of the Peloponnesian War. This kind of speech is part of a long echo of “our cause” against theirs, supported by “our” dead who cannot be allowed to have died in vain and against “their” dead who have most assuredly died in vain. Lincoln’s speech pointed out that it was the dead of the Battle of Gettysburg who had dedicated that place, “far above our poor power to add or detract.” His task, therefore, was calling for the re-dedication of his listeners to the cause of American freedom and to the cause of government “of the people, by the people, for the people.” The Civil War continued even as he spoke pitting the northern states and their populations against the southern states and their populations. And even as he spoke northern dead were being put in graves marked with headstones inscribed, where possible, with the identity of the dead soldier, marking them as counters in support of “our cause,” while southern soldier dead at Gettysburg, the enemy, were being put in long common pits erasing their identity and their possible use as counters in support of “their” cause. In other words, while Lincoln spoke of “a new birth of Freedom,” that new birth was going to emerge from a victory for one side and the destruction of the other, both results being actively assisted by the northerners who listened to him. What the introduction to his collection of articles refers to when quoting Lincoln’s ringing words, is something quite different. The introduction here refers to the ability of nations and of peoples, more specifically perhaps, the uncanny ability on the part of the citizens of the United States, to arrive at new birth and make a fresh start after the disasters of war, using the experience itself as a kind of springboard to something else: to forget and distort the experience and enmity of war and move on.
- 4 Lincoln, the North in general, and no doubt some who had been listening that day in November 1863, pursued the war vigorously. It ended a year and a half later in the only way it could given the weapons of the time, the difficulty of offensive tactics, the North’s determination and overwhelming superiority in resources and the South’s

refusal to capitulate. General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, defeated in its last offensive action at Gettysburg, July 2 and 3, 1863, fought on defensively in a war of attrition until it had no force left at all. The Confederate armies further west and south did the same. The northern strategy famously extended beyond military destruction and military attrition to include the destruction of a wide band of the South as General Sherman took his army from Atlanta, Georgia to the Atlantic coast and then north. Attrition as the main strategy that won the war is important because of its implication that all the gallantry and intelligence of one side or the other ended up counting for little as all men got reduced to cannon fodder and the side with the most fodder won. Birth of anything after such destruction would be an accomplishment, that it be achieved by a unified nation verges on the miraculous.

- 5 Yet that unified nation was illustrated, if not given birth, by *The Photographic History of the Civil War* when it appeared in its monumental form in 1912 with the bold advertisement "Semi-Centennial Memorial" on the title page. The ten volumes, published in New York by the Review of Reviews Company, each contained about 250 pages divided into multiple parts. These parts corresponded sometimes to battles or campaigns and sometimes to special aspects of the war: cavalry, artillery and forts, prison camps, hospitals, the war at sea, songs and poetry, portraits of important people. They provided a format in which editor-in-chief, Francis Trevelyan Miller (1877-1959) and managing editor Robert S. Lanier (1880-?) could be supported by hosts of preface, article and caption writers from North and South volume after volume and Part by Part. Multiple editors, sons of editors, Generals and sons of Generals, Presidents and sons of Presidents contributed—a younger Lee, a Grant, and Tad Lincoln all participated—along with congressmen, poets, song writers, cabinet secretaries and professors. The format, divided as it was between photographs, their captions and the many essays on different subjects written by many different hands, permitted the reinforcement of some subjects when text, photograph and caption agreed, but also permitted a kind of erasure or at least confusion, when these different parts were not in agreement.
- 6 President William Howard Taft's greeting in the first volume set the unifying tone: "We have reached a point, I am glad to say, when the North can admire to the full the heroes of the South, and the South admire to the full the heroes of the North." The dedication "To the men in blue and gray whose valor and devotion have become the priceless heritage of a united nation," underlined the point: bravery that could not win frontal assaults at Cold Harbor or Picket's Charge could nevertheless be reborn. An acknowledgement from the publisher thanked a host of military and veterans organizations and associations, commemorative groups and individuals for photographs, an "Editorial Introduction" by Francis Trevelyan Miller and no less than five prefaces on subjects like the state of photography at the time of the Civil War, the use of photographs as historical documents, the strategy of the war's military leaders and the state of war records in the North and the South were part of this front matter. The message of this multiple introductory framing, like the graphic framing of the many title pages and text sections showing silent canon and battle flags at rest, was double and harmonious. First, and emphatically, the war was over. No further animosity existed between North and South the reader learned again and again. The two Sections had fought and suffered and by 1912 they had been joined together in pain and the memory of common bravery. The second message of this framing was theatrical: the book arranged the war like a classical play according to a plan of rising

action, crowned by the suspenseful “Crisis” at the battle of Gettysburg and followed by the working out of the plot during General Grant’s campaigns of 1864 and 1865, when the superior numbers of northern soldiers ground away at the diminishing resources of the South. The volumes on subjects like prison camps and hospitals presented a tensionless denouement of sorrow equally spread between North and South and mixed with an assured patriotism underlined by the volume of portraits. In the graphic decoration of the title and text pages the draped flags of Union and Confederacy constructed so many theatrical or proscenium arches for the text.

- 7 This double strength structure could frame pain and sorrow and produce a unified country. Pain serving as unifying balm was applied in great quantities in *The Photographic History of the Civil War*. There were many photographs of the dead. The state of outdoor photography in the 1860s contributed to this. A dead man did not move. A photographer at the time required a portable darkroom near the subject where the photographer prepared his plates. He would carry this pane of glass coated with damp chemicals in a light-proof container to the place where it was to be exposed, expose it for the required amount of time in his camera, and then return to the darkroom. Photographers had tents and wagons for this purpose, but it was almost impossible for them to work on the battlefield while the battle raged. Furthermore, exposure times meant that many subjects were impossible or produced eerie effects. If an American flag was blowing in the wind over a color guard at attention, it appeared as a kind of striped ghost hovering over the rigid men. The volume of the *History* devoted to cavalry is strangely devoid of horses except standing still with men on foot holding them. Horses in movement were too fast. Even on the brightest days, at attention on parade, there are blurred heads and tails. Men engaged in combat, even if the photographer could have his equipment nearby, were impossible too.
- 8 *The Photographic History of the Civil War* made up for this by animating pictures of still scenes using prolix captions. The volume on Cavalry shows “A Well-Equipped Horse of the first Massachusetts Cavalry,” (vol. 4, p. 53). The horse stood quietly with its trooper. The caption says “this is one of the horses and men that charged Stuart’s cavalry so fiercely on the night of the third day at Gettysburg.” A year has passed between that action and the photograph. There is no way now, and probably there was not then, to be certain that that horse was ever anywhere near Gettysburg. Yet the book acknowledged no loss for this necessity of asking readers to make the jump from the quiet horse to a horse in action. Why should the editors have worried about that act of imagination when again and again quiet stood for battle and the glint in the eye of a studio posed portrait stood for martial determination? The photograph was just a sign of the battle, that it contained a sign did it no harm.



In The Devil's Den (Vol. 2, p. 249)<sup>4</sup>

- 9 Still, among signs of battle, that could be reproduced later, some were better than others. The photographs of the dead had a special place. A horse could be caparisoned for war even where there was no war; buildings can burn for many reasons that have nothing to do with bombardments; but a field or dell strewn or draped with the dead, especially the dead grotesquely swollen, days after the event, must be the terrible and unmistakable result of war.
- 10 Alexander Gardner (1821-1882) had quit his association with Mathew Brady (1822-1896), the great photographic entrepreneur of the Civil War, in a dispute over photographic credits sometime after Brady's New York exhibition of photographs from the Battle of Antietam (September 16-18, 1862). In the summer of 1863, Gardner was directing his own operation out of Washington, D. C. He understood very well the special relationship between photographs of bodies and an impression of the immediacy of battle. It was his pictures of the dead after the battle of Antietam that had received considerable publicity. Almost a year later, in the first days of July, 1863, when he received the news of the battle in Pennsylvania between Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and General George Meade's Army of the Potomac, he hurried to the scene to repeat his success.
- 11 Upon arrival on July 5, a day after the battle, and a day after the Union army set about burying the dead, he immediately set to work photographing what he could see of the battlefield that still looked like evidence of an epic fight: the bodies of men killed July 2, the second day of the battle, at the Rose farm, near the road that approached the town of Gettysburg from Washington, the road Gardner was on. He needed strong light for his work, and so had to stop by five in the afternoon. The following day took him to the rocky northern approaches known as Devil's Den and Slaughter Pen. That is where Gardner spent most of July 6, and that is where the picture above was taken.<sup>5</sup>



- 12 Little Round Top eventually anchored the extreme left or western end of the north facing Union Army. On the second day of the battle, southern officers had become aware of the importance of this topographic feature at the same time as their northern opponents. Southerners moved towards it through the very difficult terrain of Devil's Den and fought fiercely with Union men up the rocky slopes and in the dell beside Little Round Top (the "Slaughter Pen" of Gardner's photographs, a name perhaps invented by Gardner for dramatic effect). Had the Union forces not been able to hold onto the position, and several times they were pushed off its summit, it is quite likely that they would have lost the battle, as from those heights their line to the east was exposed. But Union men prevailed and the southerners retired back down the hill to Devil's Den, which made a good position for snipers. A deadly duel ensued where northern soldiers sent exploding shells into the rocks and southern marksmen tried to pick off northern officers. The photograph caught a victim of this important duel during the last battle in which the South might have demoralized the North to the point of threatening the northern cause politically. Victory might also have helped the South obtain European recognition and aid. North and South, though unequal in population, wealth and industry, were yet equal in the narrative of the war at the war's climax as presented here in *The Photographic History*.
- 13 *The History* used the photograph twice, once on the title page of the Gettysburg section, under the words "The Crisis," and once where it appeared in the chronology of battle sites (vol. 2, pp. 227 and 250). The caption of the photograph made the book's dramatic intentions clear.
- Upon this wide, steep hill...was a chasm named by the country folk, "the Devil's Den." When the position fell into the hands of the Confederates...it became the stronghold of their sharpshooters, and well did it fulfill its name. It was a most dangerous post to occupy, since the Federal batteries on the Round Top were constantly shelling it in an effort to dislodge the hardy riflemen, many of whom, met the fate of the one in the picture. Their deadly work continued, however, and many a gallant officer of the Federals was picked off during the fighting on the afternoon of the second day. General Vincent was one of the first victims; General Weed fell likewise; and as Lieutenant Hazlett bent over him to catch his last words, a bullet through the head prostrated that officer lifeless on the body of his chief.
- 14 What the camera caught of the soldier's face was undamaged and his body, though awkward and a bit puffed up with decomposition, yet retained more animation than the grotesquely swollen bodies in many other photographs, for example "A Harvest of Death," attributed to Timothy O'Sullivan, who worked for Alexander Gardner at Gettysburg. The often reproduced, "A Harvest of Death" appeared in *The History* small, with another photograph on the same page, under the title "The First Day's Toll"(vol. 2, p. 239).<sup>6</sup> The featured "sharpshooter" was in better shape, perhaps, because he has been in the shaded ravine, and not out in the sun. A relative would have recognized him easily. Importantly for *The History*, in the narrative of the battle he was linked forever in a North/South symmetry with the officers he may have had a hand in killing: General Weed, perhaps, and the filial and attentive Lieutenant Hazlett, whose desire to hear the final words of his general placed his head in the path of a bullet. The "hardy" sharpshooter's marksmanship was no disloyal sneak attack. He too was exposed and paid for any damage he may have caused with his own life.
- 15 Alexander Gardner, or his assistants, recognized this dead man as a great find and photographed him maybe five times. Of the photographs he took on July 5 and 6, forty-

five out of sixty, or 75%, were of cadavers. The views of this man included the present view, a stereoscopic double exposure of the same pose, and two versions of a pose Gardner and his assistants invented near a sharpshooter's stone shelter some tens of yards away, and a stereoscopic view of that pose ("Home of a rebel sharpshooter").<sup>7</sup>

- 16 To say posed, is a matter of degree. The photographer always chooses the approach to a subject, after all, and in all the photographs of this man, and others on the Gettysburg battlefield, Gardner had most likely supplied the gun. According to William Frassanito, from whom much technical information for this article comes, no sharpshooter used the kind of gun in the photographs, and it is unlikely that two days after the battle, such an exposed souvenir would have remained. The second pose, however, included an elaborate story that Gardner entirely invented. He had the sharpshooter await his death, stoically, with a knapsack under his head for a pillow. For *Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the War*, published in 1866, he described finding the body turned to a skeleton, and the gun rusted and rotted, but still leaning on a rock, months later.<sup>8</sup>
- 17 Through either intuition, or restraint, the editors of *The Photographic History* chose not to use the more heavily posed picture, but used instead the one here. They ignored Gardner's attempt to push the moment of history, represented by the body, across months to the time of Abraham Lincoln's visit to the battlefield and the moment of his famous address. Instead they contented themselves with a moment extended over space in the narrative that maintained the balance and an emotional tie between the deaths of northerners and southerners. They placed the anonymous sharpshooter in Devil's Den in the same story as General Weed and Lieutenant Hazlett. Was Lieutenant Hazlett as handsome and young as this soldier?
- 18 Some subjects, however, did not lend themselves to this elegiac treatment and it is with those subjects that *The History* exercised its ability to erase even while showing. Neither volume titles nor table of content entries mentioned black people directly. In the ninth volume, however, the one devoted to "Poetry and Eloquence of Blue and Gray," the entry, "The Lighter Side" (vol. 9, pages 173-184), turned out to announce little that could produce a laugh from today's readers, but rather the presentation of black Americans' side of the war in a tortured humorous vein for eleven pages. The heavy ironies and startling contradictions of these pages demonstrated the profound difficulties inherent in discussing the participation of African American soldiers on the winning side of the war in a book that celebrated the pictorial proof of the discovery of what it called "a shared heritage of valor."
- 19 To call the section about black soldiers "The Lighter Side," may have recalled the black-face minstrel tradition of the Jim Crow period in which African Americans, in order to appear on stage with white actors and actresses and in front of white audiences, wore heavy makeup that disguised them as white people disguised as black people. Of course the section title also frames as comedy the very real accomplishments and sacrifices of black soldiers in military actions mentioned there. One of the most convoluted paragraphs in American historiography, written as a caption (vol. 9, pp.174 and 175) and included in this humor section, explained photographs of two plantation houses with black soldiers standing in smart formation nearby. The caption's title, "To Illustrate 'Sambo's Right to be Kilt'" is also the title of a poem (found in vol. 9, p. 176 and 177), written by Charles Graham Halpine (1829-1868), a northern journalist of Irish origins turned soldier then staff officer in the Union Army. He versified in Irish dialect under the name of Private Miles O'Reilly. The poem that appeared near the



photographs expressed his willingness to have black Americans included in the army and killed in his place. The picture caption explained the verse, as well as the photographs of black people and white mansions:

A beautiful Southern mansion stands in flickering shadows of walnut and elm and white oak, and in front are some of the negro troops that have been formed from "contrabands." The passions of the period waxed particularly bitter over the question of employing Negroes in warfare. Charles Graham Halpine comes to the rescue, in his poem that follows on page 176, with a saving sense of Irish humor. He suggests that, "men who object to Sambo should take his place and fight." As for himself, he will object not at all "if Sambo's body should stop a ball that was coming for me direct"...The human side of this problem helps to solve it, as with others. Certainly, the line above presents a firm and soldierly front. Many of the colored regiments came to be well-disciplined and serviceable. Their bravery is attested by the loss of life at Battery Wagner and in the charges at Petersburg crater.

- 20 The "beauty of the Southern mansion" was contrasted with "contrabands," the term for former slaves before any judicial or Constitutional determination had been made about their status. "Contrabands" implied illegitimacy, and so the soldiers needed explaining, even an apology, in the context of the handsome houses. "Contrabands" may be former slaves, but they are still Sambos, which is to say they still conform to the stereotype of the foolish happy "darkie," a word often used in this section. Many photographs of destroyed and partially destroyed southern buildings decorated the pages of the *History* without captions drawing attention to their beauty. When the white northern army destroyed something, apparently, it could be part of that great test of shared valor and pain that the book created. When black people seemed to take possession, as in these pictures, images of that possession, or merely presence, were viewed by *The History* as a desecration. The poem so well condensed by its title, "Sambo's Right to be Kilt," means that a Negro in warfare could be legitimate only as cannon fodder, taking a ball in the place of a white man. Today this might be interpreted as a cruel or self serving idea on the part of a white writer, but in the context of shared white memory of the war that the book presented, the poem could be read as self-deprecating humor: as "the human side," which is to say, a momentary lapse from that uniform valor that North and South should share. North and South can now share this human weakness too. Thus the "line above" that "presents a firm and soldierly front" may just as easily refer to stead-fast scorn for black people combined with indulgence of human (white) weakness shared by northerners and southerners represented in the line "Sambo's right to be kilt," as it can refer to the lines of black soldiers in the photographs. By the time a reader arrived at the "facts" of the bravery of African American soldiers, mentioned at the end of the quote above, they are an embarrassing shadow, well behind the new identity of white people.
- 21 Halpine published several volumes of poems and articles he wrote during the Civil War before his death in 1868. His work was popular or important enough to be reprinted in 1926, and again in 1973. According to *The History*, some of that work came from what he wrote for the *New York Herald* while a major, serving on the staff of General David Hunter on Hilton Head, South Carolina, in 1862. Hilton Head, one of the southern Sea Islands, was among the first southern territories taken by the Union forces. General Hunter trained members of its large freed slave population into the first African American unit in the Army. Halpine must have been part of that training program. Presumably his dialect poetry was part of a propaganda effort to make black soldiers acceptable to New Yorkers, especially Irish New Yorkers, whose racism and resentment

of participating in a war that would free black slaves, contributed to the New York draft riots of July, 1863, in which black neighborhoods were destroyed. The poems, that seem to us either cynical or racist or both and were presented in so equivocal a fashion in *The History*, were probably carefully calculated during the war to promote the cause of black fighting men.

- 22 *The History* hardly mentioned slavery and certainly not in any overt political way: neither as abolitionism, the cause that would have put an end to slavery, nor as states rights that made it possible for some states to permit slavery while other states forbade it, nor as the political prohibition of slavery's expansion, which was the successful campaign position of Abraham Lincoln's 1860 election that precipitated the war. This author has seen one photograph of slaves among all those volumes. "De Darkies got so Lonesome," again in the "Lighter Side" (vol. 9, p.183). It illustrated the song "The Year of Jubilee," by Henry Clay Work (1832-1884) who made his reputation with "Marching Through Georgia," (1865) and "My Grandfather's Clock," (1876). Work was the son of abolitionists in Connecticut and his dialect song (this time African American dialect) told of slaves taking possession of a plantation house when the master went off to fight. The former slaves lived in the parlor and drank up the wine and cider.

De massa runn, ha, ha!  
De darkey stay, ho, ho!  
It mus' be now de kingdom comin'  
An' de yar ob jubilo.

- 23 The paragraph about the song assured readers that though black soldiers sang it as they entered Richmond on April 3, 1865, it soon became a favorite among white southerners. That and the photograph of "slaves" enjoying an idle moment on a Mississippi plantation assured readers that African Americans, who, "had been supposed to be on the point of rising and inaugurating a race-war, remained quietly at work on the large plantations." The caption went on to negate any change that the war might have brought about for former slaves. "The picture...is typical of all the four years of the conflict and of *later negro life*." (vol. 9, p. 183, emphasis added). Southerners could simply laugh at the idea of African Americans taking possession of property, in this case, or having power over property, as in the photographs of former slaves in military formation at plantation houses. In the context of *The History*, northerners agreed with them.



"De Darkies Got so Lonesome" Illustration for "The Year of Jubilee" (Vol. 9, p. 183)<sup>9</sup>

- 24 The other notable gap among all these photographs are the shocking images of prisoners at Andersonville, Georgia, taken from photographs and published as engravings in *Harper's* and *Leslie's* magazines in the summer of 1865, just after the war's end. Those pictures show starving prisoners, unable to stand, some with their lower limbs literally rotting away. Man for man, the images show bodily harm as haunting as any picture from Nazi death camps, but with the important difference that they are evidence of inhumanity to a number of soldiers, and not evidence of mass extermination. Neither the fate of African Americans, nor the extreme inhumanity demonstrated by those Andersonville images could be included in these volumes that sought reconciliation. Instead we have white heroes, dead and alive.
- 25 The reason for all this obscurity must have been that African Americans represented the unfinished business of the Civil War and a great political and social question that the United States would not face satisfactorily before the 1960s, and that has only been put to rest bit by bit, the last important moment in this long history being the inauguration of President Obama in 2009! The volumes of *The Photographic History of the Civil War* were intended to unite white Americans with a heroic past and a shared heritage, to use the words of the dedication, against the anxieties engendered by the possibility of someday changing the suppressed status of the former slaves and their descendants. Photographs of black soldiers with a caption that said clearly what they had accomplished, like the terrible photographs from Andersonville, might have proved destabilizing to an equality of suffering important to the birth of that unity.
- 26 Mathew Brady, Alexander Gardner, and the others who took the photographs of the Civil War did it as a business. The photographs were sold individually to put in albums and in stereoscopic pairs in great numbers during and after the war. So anxious were soldiers to have a studio portrait that William Frassanito reported them lining up for

this purpose outside Gettysburg's photography studio during the first day of the battle there. So common were photographic portraits of individual soldiers that the United States Military History Institute at Carlisle, Pennsylvania numbers among its projects the collection of a photograph of every single military participant in the war. Conceivably they will succeed.

- 27 Photographs published in collections in books were too expensive to have so wide a distribution as stereoscopic views or the many individual portraits. *Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book* of 1866, perhaps sold in the hundreds of copies. George N. Barnard's *Photographic Views of the Sherman Campaign*, also of 1866, was beautifully produced and expensive and probably sold fewer copies. *The Photographic History's* preface, "Photographing the Civil War" (vol. 1, pp. 30-52) told the story of Mathew Brady's \$100,000 investment in over 7,000 photographs to produce an archive or book. He lost his negatives—one set in payment to his photographic supplier in the 1870s, one set to the Library of Congress for \$25,000—before he could exploit them. He died poor and forgotten, the victim of over-confidence in the appetite for Civil War photographs in the period just after the war.
- 28 By 1912, when the huge project of *The Photographic History of the Civil War* reached publication, the editors, both of whom were born after the Civil War, thought that the appetite for these images had revived, crystallized around the idea of a unity of memory and peace rather than the memory of actual fighting. Using the photographs, the book expressed the linking of North to South and the celebration of that reunion made possible by a shared memory of pain and made possible by a shared forgetfulness of the reasons behind the wartime desire and necessity to destroy the army of the other Section. In his introduction, Francis Trevelyan Miller, who made a career of photographic war volumes up through the Korean War, remarked that "military writers have informed me that they cannot understand why the American people have been so little interested in this remarkable war," (vol. 1, p. 15-16). He concluded that Americans were peace loving and not military, and so he would give them a history of the war devoted to peace, notwithstanding the fact that the materials he had at hand had once served to rededicate populations to a military purpose of destruction.
- 29 Earlier this job of reconciliation with photographs would not have been possible. Oliver Wendell Holmes in his much-quoted article on photography in the *Atlantic Monthly* of July, 1863 (the month of the battle of Gettysburg) had tried to understand the photographs of the dead at Antietam. "Let him who wishes to know what war is, look at this series of illustrations," Holmes had written of the Brady/Gardner photographs. "It was so nearly like visiting the battle-field to look over these views, that all 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 remains of the dead they too vividly represented." Holmes had visited the field of Antietam shortly after the battle, searching for his son, the future Supreme Court Justice, who had been wounded there. His presence on the field almost certainly coincided with the visit of the photographers because bodies were buried as quickly as possible. His sensibilities and emotions were hugely strained by the experience, but he could yet face the necessity of winning the war even at the cost of what he saw. "The end to be attained justifies the means, we are willing to believe but the sight of these pictures is a commentary on civilization such as a savage might well triumph to show

its missionaries.” Holmes cast himself as among the missionaries, and though shaken, could still answer the savage with the sanctity of the northern cause.

- 30 When Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous address at Gettysburg (November 19, 1863) he would have agreed with Holmes. His audience was northern. He spoke of the deeds of the northern soldiers. If anyone had cared to look, northern soldiers were being arranged in graves with markers on the battlefield. The task would be completed by the spring of 1864. Southern soldiers meanwhile, remained in the mass graves where northern soldiers had been quick to heave them right after the battle. They remained in those mass graves until 3,320 of their unidentifiable bodies were removed to southern locations through the efforts of a southern women’s organization between 1870 and 1873. Oliver Wendell Holmes, close to the time of battle and in the midst of war, like Lincoln, had seen and understood this at Antietam. “These wrecks of manhood thrown together in careless heaps or arranged in ghastly rows for burial were alive but yesterday...An officer, here and there, may be recognized; but for the rest, if enemies, they will be counted, and that is all.” While in the utterly human act of searching the battlefield for his own son, he could still refer to the dead sons of others as enemies and acknowledge, clear eyed, their anonymous fate.
- 31 By 1912, however, the message of the photographs had changed with the meaning of the dead bodies they so often portrayed. *The Photographic History* included a section on “The Meaning of Battle Losses” (vol. 10, 117-138). The author, Hilary A. Herbert (1834-1919), a southern colonel and later Grover Cleveland’s Secretary of the Navy and a congressman from Alabama, produced statistical evidence to show that northern and southern regiments had sometimes lost great percentages of their men in battles, and yet managed to prevail. The statistics for the Civil War showed more courage in this way than any of Napoleon’s regiments before the Civil War or the Japanese regiments in the war of 1905 against the Russians, which in 1912, was considered the acme of fortitude under fire. “Waterloo is eclipsed by Gettysburg; Gettysburg is eclipsed by Sharpsburg, and Sharpsburg eclipsed by Chickamauga,” wrote Herbert (vol. 10, p. 122). Chickamauga, the gold standard of bravery according to this science, cost the Confederate victors 27% of their men. The Japanese victors at Lio-Yang lost a mere 18.5%.
- 32 Not unexpectedly in a military context in 1912, the message took on a Darwinist nationalism. The Civil War had proved that Americans were ready to face the world. “The forces here credited with these ‘brilliant achievements’ in 1861-65 are now thoroughly united, and would stand shoulder to shoulder against a foreign foe. Our population has increased threefold, while our military resources, our capacity to equip and convey food to armies, to manufacture arms, and to build ships...has increased tenfold,” Herbert said on the way to his conclusion (vol. 10, p. 136).

The war has made the country unite in valor and the losses, the photographs of the dead along with memorials and ceremonies, were essential elements in bringing the birth of that union about. “The meeting of the Philadelphia Brigade and Pickett’s men at Gettysburg, the visits of Massachusetts soldiers to Richmond, and of Virginia Confederates to Boston...these coupled with the strewing of flowers, in 1867, by Southern women at Columbus Mississippi, on the graves of Union soldiers...Presidents Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft have each and all, by deeds and words, had their full share in the work of perfect union.”(vol. 10, p. 138).
- 33 Since 1912 the photographs have had other meanings still. William Frassanito insisted in 1975, that the photographs should bring history into the present and bring the past



to life. In this his words were not unlike the prefaces to *The History*. But with remarkable energy, he reconstructed the history of *taking* the photographs against the background of the photographers' desire to document and exploit the war. He succeeded very well. But by studying the photographers he placed Alexander Gardner and his colleagues, their ambitions and needs, between readers and the events of the battle and made the photographs into documents in the history of photography and the biographies of a handful of men, more than documents in the history of the Civil War. Alan Trachtenberg in an Article of 1985 placed those same photographs in a rich cultural setting and invited his learned readers to "recapture and recaption such images, to win them from authorized functions..." in other words to do the work of analyzing the photographs themselves, giving them the freedom to bring about the re-birth of those documents with every new generation, rather than privilege any moment in history with that task.<sup>10</sup> *The Photographic History of the Civil War* had done the job too well and turned the photographs into a representation of "The Birth of a Nation" with the message of white unity against a black minority that just three years later D. W. Griffith's iconographic movie of that name would capture on film.

- 34 A *Photographic History of the First World War* in a single quarto volume of 298 pages of photographs along with a few pages of front and back matter, was a far more modest work of editing than *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, but it still managed to recast the documents at its disposal in as dramatic a way as the Civil War work. With the slight difference in titles, *A Photographic History* as against *The Photographic History*, it is easy to believe that author and his publisher were very aware of the similarities and the differences between the two enterprises. The comparison shows just how different the uses of photographs from the two wars could be. *The Photographic History* had multiple prefaces, introductions, articles and long titled captions written by a host of well-known or scholarly persons from both the North and the South. *A Photographic History* had but one author and editor who wrote laconic captions and introduced his volume with just a couple of double spaced pages of curt argument. For *The History of the Civil War* underlined the fact that the war was over by the theatrical arrangement of the themes in the many volumes and by the proscenium graphics and funereal flags that decorated so many pages. For *A History*, the war was not over. There was no rising action coming to a crisis and denouement and no proscenium barrier to push the horror of war back into the past or into a theatrical structure away from the spectators. The First World War pictures were almost always bled to the edges of pages, with only a space for the brutally printed block capital captions on a strip of white paper at the bottom. Sometimes the small captions were pasted or cut into a white rectangle in an insignificant part of the picture. These captions do not attempt elaborate arguments like the caption described above entitled "To Illustrate 'Sambo's Right to be Kilt.'" The Civil War volumes went to great interpretative and rhetorical length to put the war in the past, ignore freed black people and join northern and southern whites into *This Republic of Suffering*, to use the title of a recent important Civil War book that borrowed the phrase from Frederick Law Olmstead as he watched the wounded arriving at hospital ships after a battle in 1862.<sup>11</sup> The lone editor and author of *A Photographic History of the First World War*, Laurence Stallings (1894-1968), had only one consistent if many-faceted anti-war message to recount in the briefest of captions he attached to the photographs: suffering caused by war had not welded people into any kind of republic, the soldiers all died in vain, and by 1933, the date of the book's confection, there was every reason to believe that Europe would drag the world into an even worse debacle

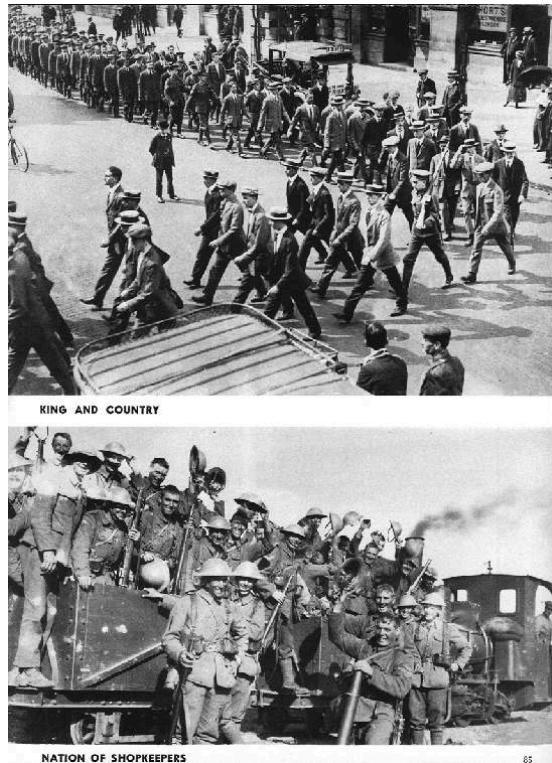


soon. In his title and in his introduction, after all, he perhaps coined the name First World War implying that there would be at least a second. The words receive lower case letters in the introduction, an indication that this idea was in its formative stage in Stallings' hands.<sup>12</sup>

- 35 The introduction set the stage for his position, which he made crystal clear on just about every page of photographs.

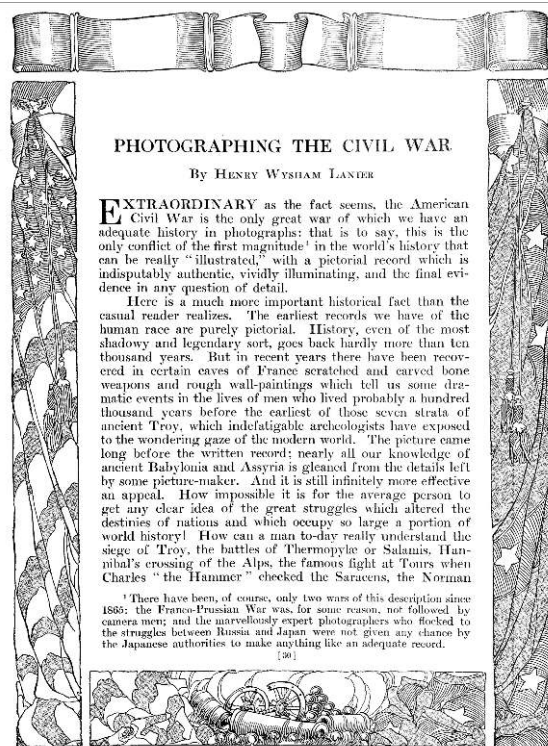
In this anthology of pictures of the first world war there was no effort to satisfy any special interest or taste. A militarist will be disappointed in them for there are not enough pictures of guns and tactical groups. A pacifist will not find enough horror, nor enough of cadavers. And a student of war can hardly follow, from these pictorial representations, the methods of infantry combat slowly evolving from close-packed slaughter of the trenches to the loosely-held butcheries later on...The editor is conscious of his short-comings in the matter of captions. Many should be more expert, more military. A military expert, to paraphrase, is one who carefully avoids all the small errors as he sweeps on to the grand fallacy. This book, at least, avoids that fallacy. There is no conclusion to it. Man made this world in four years, and saw that it was good, if we are to believe Versailles. Well, here it is in the making, just as man made it, caught by many a camera eye. The pictures are placed more or less chronologically, but for the most part in a senseless fashion...If this picture book survives, doubtless it will get in time another preface, and one which will make sense out of chaos.

- 36 Stallings has set out to present his interpretation of the war, which, by 1933, was shared by all people disappointed in the Versailles settlement and disillusioned with propaganda machines that had promoted the cause of the war while it was being fought. The photographs, with brutal artlessness, show first the breakdown from European concert to aggression. The first picture is a reproduction of the well-known print of elegant diplomats in Vienna in 1814 settling the affairs of Europe after the defeat of Napoleon and the disturbances of the French Revolution. Next comes a series of prints and photographs of the less and less harmonious and less and less elegant meetings of the "concert of Europe" through the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Page 2 shows photographs indicating the German, British and French arms race leading up to 1914. Franz-Ferdinand's bloody tunic from June 16, 1914 gets a funereal black boarder and all of page 4.



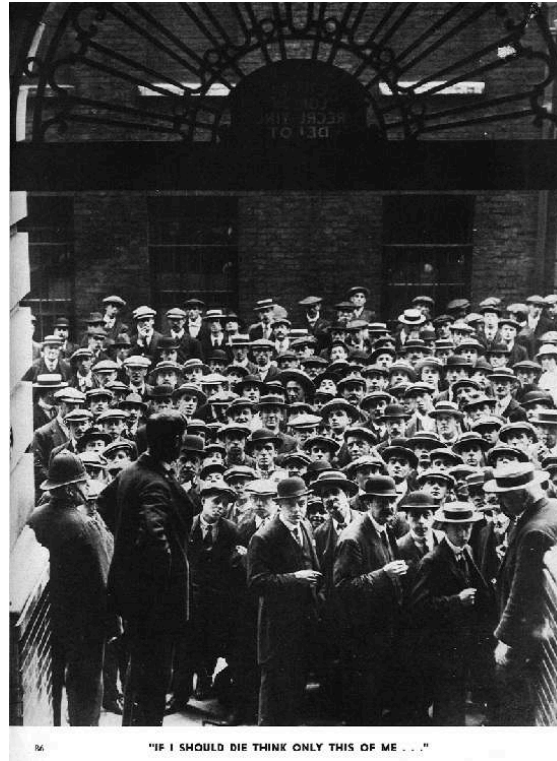
Pictures showing British soldiers enthusiastically enlisting or going off to war. Similar photographs of German and French soldiers appeared nearby. *A Photographic History of the First World War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1933), 85.

- 37 Then come pages of comparison: enthusiastic volunteers in the capital cities of all the belligerent countries; refugees heading in every direction; cheerful soldiers heading to the front; the waving Germans in a cramped car intended for live stock on page 10, will be echoed by waving Americans in the same cramped car on page 183. Human suffering made its appearance on all sides.
- 38 Given the slight difference in titles, *A Photographic History* as against *The Photographic History*, Stallings's publisher, Max Lincoln Schuster, no doubt aware of the similarities and the differences between the two enterprises and embarrassed by the lack of front and back matter and comparative editorial light weight in his book, wrote a page and a half of preface in which he insisted on the scholarly effort that had gone into what might otherwise have appeared as a slapdash exploitation of photographs. "Almost three years of research work," he said, went into the book. Archives from military colleges were examined. He gives credit in this brief preface to the known and unknown photographers, too numerous to be cited here, he said, and their publishers, and collectors who are simply listed in a nearly incomprehensible way at the end of the volume. There the corporate sounding Acme News Pictures appeared near the seemingly private individual Paul Thomas; Mrs. Cockburn-Lance rubbed against *The New York Times*; and expressions like "Italian Official Photos" or "French Official Photos," distress now, and no doubt distressed then, the spirit of any scholar. The self conscious assurance of *The Photographic History of the Civil War* has been replaced by opinion that the author has the modesty to think may change with time: "If this picture book survives, doubtless it will get in time another preface, and one which will make sense out of chaos," Stallings had written in his introduction. The contrast with the heavy definitive editorializing in *The Photographic History* could not have been greater.



The first page of an explanatory article in *The Photographic History* showing not only the elaborate memorial graphics that decorated the book, but also an historic awareness of the place of photography in the writing of history, an awareness forgotten or not considered in the First World War book. Digitized by the Boston Public Library.

- 39 Changes in the interpretation of Stallings photographs had already taken place, as he well knew. When he captioned the photograph reproduced above, “FOR KING AND COUNTRY,” he intended irony so heavy that readers can easily hear the echo, “poor deluded young men.” But the young men of the photograph were not considered deluded at the time of their enthusiastic enlistment and the photograph might easily have been used as propaganda to motivate others like them. To another photograph of enlisting young Englishmen he attaches the title, “IF I SHOULD DIE THINK ONLY THIS OF ME,” referring to the opening line of the famous poem by Rupert Brooke (1887-1915), “The Soldier” published in 1914 and *Other Poems*, within a month of Brooke’s death and reprinted many times, sometimes with patriotic motives, on the part of Brooke’s literary executor, Edward Marsh, who as an assistant of Winston Churchill’s during and after World War One, had a sideline in patriotic propaganda.



Determined men of military age preparing to enlist early in the war with a caption from Rupert Brooke's poem, "The Soldier."

- 40 The Brooke poem is again evoked, later in the book and later in the war in a photograph captioned, "...some corner of a foreign field that is forever England." The photograph, this time of two stunned looking soldiers sitting in the bottom of an enormous bomb crater while comrades look down on them from a blasted forest, has turned the wistful and unspeakably sad poem into a nightmare. In Brooke's verses of 1914, the soldier poet imagines that upon his own death in a foreign field, "There shall be/In that rich earth a richer dust concealed," that is of course himself, a cell of English beauty, modesty, genius and content. But here, the English sappers have left destruction instead. Their own dead and the dead of the enemy, no matter how "Washed by rivers, blest by suns of home," cannot possibly sanctify this wreck.





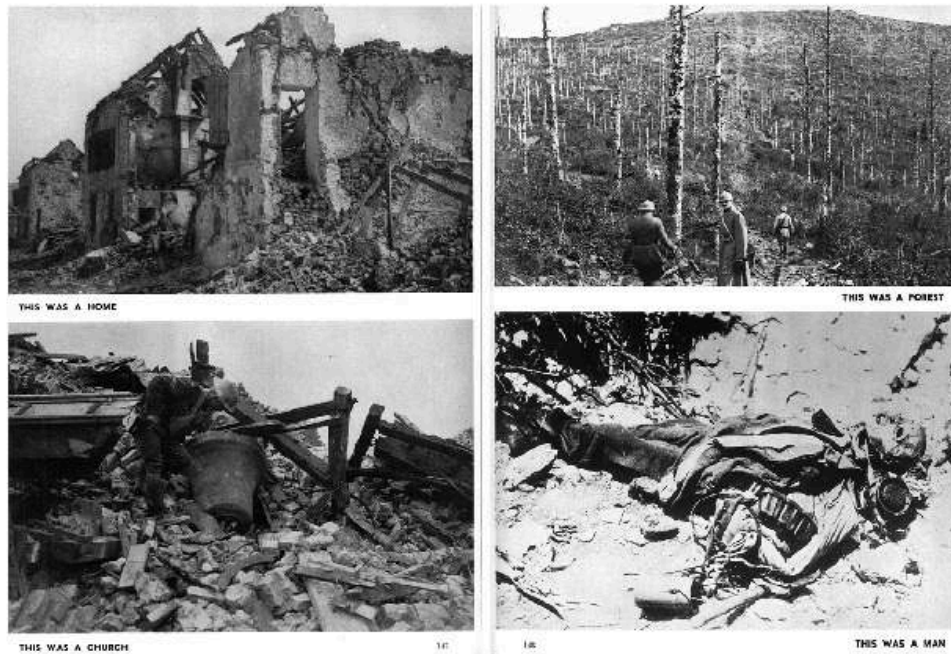
A bomb crater (pages 119 and 120 of *A Photographic History of the First World War*) using the continuation of the verses of Rupert Brooke to make the meaning thoroughly ironic.

- 41 The poetry of John Masfield was used in a similar way. His poem, “August 1914” was used in a caption of page 6, a collage of newspaper reports and refugees. “How still this quiet corn-field is tonight,” the Masfield line, finds itself overwhelmed by the unquiet disruptions early in the war. Titles from after the war, which shared Stallings’s disappointment in the accomplishments of the war and the Versailles Treaty, became captions. Thus, “All quiet on the eastern front,” echoing Erich Maria Remarque’s 1929 novel, captions a picture of German machine gunners (p. 31); “Death in the Afternoon” used Ernest Hemingway’s 1932 novel to comment upon bodies of men and horses strewn across a railroad station or factory yard (page 194); and “Italian Farewell to Arms” employed the same author’s 1929 title to underline the grim pathos of a trench full of dead Italian soldiers (p. 204). Lines from well-known hymns and popular songs, lines from Shakespeare and discredited slogans were all used this way. Stallings deliberately played with the literary record. He came down on the anti-war side building up a consensus by 1933 that would not have existed during, or just after the war. In a sense he betrayed the gentle spirit of early patriotic poems that he turns to heavy irony.
- 42 He had come to this position by stages. In 1924 he had helped write the very successful play, “What Price Glory,” that mocked any romantic notion of war but did not condemn the enterprise of World War One beyond that. In the same year he wrote his autobiographical novel *Plumes*, that mocked wartime romance and wartime rhetoric too. The novel must have struck a chord: it enjoyed nine printings in its first year and its screen adaptation was MGM’s greatest box office success until “Gone with the Wind.” But what Stallings and John Dos Passos, like E. E. Cummings and the other “disillusioned” authors of the 1920s, tapped into was a literary rebellion against the staid optimism and provincialism of the pre-war and moralizing “Victorian” culture of the United States, or what George Santayana had already criticized in 1910 as “The Genteel Tradition.” Historian David Kennedy quoting Malcolm Cowley, Alfred Kazin,

Ramon Guthrie and others explained this connection between literary rebellion and disgust with the way World War One had been carried out by an older generation of late Victorian generals in a few succinct pages. These young literary men, Kennedy pointed out, had enjoyed the excitement and adventure of the war. Hemingway and Stallings continued to seek out and celebrate this sort of adventure all their lives.<sup>13</sup> In spite of age and the leg he lost in 1922 because of a war injury (he would lose his second leg to his World War One injuries later), Stallings managed to involve himself actively in World War II. After the experience of World War One, American authors put that same sense of adventure into the project of re-creating American letters. Stallings, a member of the Algonquin Round Table along with the creators of both *The Stars and Stripes* and *The New Yorker*, World War One veterans Harold Ross and Alexander Woollcott, was very well placed to see how a new critical point of view could be created out of the experience of the successful propaganda machinery of the war. What is extraordinary about Stallings is that he followed these literary permutations in spite of his terrible injuries. The one group almost certain to finish World War One disillusioned and remain thoroughly “disillusioned” by the war in a age of uplift, were those with serious injuries.<sup>14</sup> But Stallings followed the literary and critical trends, births and re-births with unfailing energy.

- 43 What is visible in his 1933 publication that was not visible in his earlier anti-war “What Price Glory,” (two amiable drunks fighting over a not very savory woman who maybe stands in for Europe), or *Plumes* (a story whose anti-war stance was really anti-heroic or a mockery of chivalry), is a political focus. In *A Photographic History of the First World War* Stallings focused his efficient literary energy upon a new approaching disaster. Stallings put the rhetorical heart of the book smack in the middle on pages 147 and 148. There he gave a picture of a farm village street reduced to rubble the title, “This was a home.” A British non-commissioned officer looking into an overturned church bell in a heap of stones and broken beams got the caption, “This was a church.” On the following page leafless, branchless broken trees with French officers among them, bore the title, “This was a forest.” The fourth picture in this quadrant, a picture of wreckage unrecognizable except for an eye socket as empty and haunting as the hole in a tragic mask, inevitably received the title, “This was a man.”





Pictures from the middle pages (147 and 148) of *A Photographic History of the First World War*. Stallings in his simplest and most brutal rhetorical mode.

- 44 If Stallings married words and pictures on these middle pages with a ferocious directness that is hard to find in Hemingway or Dos Passos where the story or the literature can always intervene and humanize, he put his reasons for this immediacy almost at the very end on pages 293 and 294. These last pictures (the two pages that follow are collages of newspaper headlines, pictures and statistics of war destruction) must have been uncanny in 1933. That date, “1933” is the simple caption of each of the four pictures. In each photograph, a crowd of enthusiasts, larger than any World War One crowd, is shown expressing rapt emotion. Over each crowd, cut out, pasted in, and outlined in white, hovers, like a malevolent angel, the hero appropriate to the crowd. Germans got a frowning Adolf Hitler; Russians a dour Stalin; Italians get a posturing Mussolini; and Turks, each in a fez, get Kamel Pasha in the biggest fez of all. Stallings may not have had all the enemies of World War II picked just right, but he had certainly seen the totalitarian writing on the wall. In 1933 he has brought about the re-birth of World War One disillusion strengthened by the terrible forces it has let loose in the world.



The last pictures of A Photographic History of the First World War, pages 293 and 294.

- 45 He has seen no “rebirth of Freedom,” or of comfortable unity that characterized the purpose of *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, but perhaps he solicits, implores, demands, a rebirth of Freedom to act against war and against the tragic inevitability of history.
- 46 His political anti-war position like his critical anti-romantic position, did not prove permanent. In 1963, five years before his death in 1968, Stallings published *The Doughboys; the Story of the A.E.F., 1917-1918*, a celebratory, nostalgic and largely anecdotal informal history of American involvement in World War One. This last book may have been calculated to capture the memory market of aging World War One veterans, but at the time of its publication, and even more when it was reissued in 1966, it seemed to underline a difference in point of view and quality of patriotism between Stallings’s World War One generation and the Vietnam generation. But any young Vietnam protestors who cared to look back at the publishing history would have seen that the lessons of World War One, like the lessons of other wars had been reborn several times already. Such a revelation might have made Vietnam protestors less convinced of the truths they thought their war revealed. But that is unlikely. Rebirth of war memories and war lessons seem inevitable while freedom from the thrall of war seems to elude us.

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## NOTES

1. Francis Traveyan Miller and Robert S. Lanier, eds., *The Photographic History of the Civil War* (New York: The Review of Reviews, Co, 1912); Laurence Stallings, *A Photographic History of the First World War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1933).
2. Quoted by Albert Shaw, ed. *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, vol. XXIII (January-June, 1901): 336. It is interesting to note that this will be the publisher of *The Photographic History of the Civil War*.
3. Stallings, *A Photographic History of the First World War*, 292-293. Portraits of these four men are cut and pasted over photographs of the great enthusiastic and sometimes uniformed crowds they stirred up.
4. The present image is taken from the Library of Congress Digital Catalogue: "Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Dead Confederate sharpshooter in 'The devil's den.'" CALL NUMBER: LC-B817-7096[P&P] REPRODUCTION NUMBER: LC-DIG-cwpb-03701 (digital file from original neg.)
5. I am much indebted to the analysis of Alexander Gardner's work and methods exposed by William A. Frassanito in *Gettysburg: Journey in Time* (New York: Scribners, 1975).
6. It can be found as Library of Congress reproduction: LC-DIG-ppmsca-12557 (digital file from original photograph).
7. Library of Congress reproduction: LC-DIG-ppmsca-12562 (digital file from original photograph).
8. Frassanito, *Gettysburg*.
9. ). The photograph was copyrighted to the *Review of Reviews* and has been taken from the book, digitized by the Boston Public Library.
10. Alan Trachtenberg, "Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs," *Representations*, 9, Special Issue: American Culture Between the Civil War and World War I (Winter, 1985): 1-32.
11. Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 2008), xiii.
12. The *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Webster's International Dictionary* give no indication that Stallings was not in fact the originator of the name "First World War."

13. David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980): 220-24.
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## ABSTRACTS

The article compares *The Photographic History of the Civil War* published in 1912, with *A Photographic History of the First World War*, published in 1933. The author is looking for similarities in the reworking of interpretations of war photography after the war and discovers that the photographs in conjunction with their editing can be made to cover up as much as they reveal. *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, published at the height of the Jim Crow era, with its hugely elaborate editorial structure, manages to deny the importance of slavery to the war and the importance of freed slaves afterwards. Even photographs of the dead of Gettysburg take on a meaning more appropriate to 1912 than to the event that produced them. The comparatively direct *A Photographic History of the First World War*, manages loyalty only to the thought of the author at the moment of its publication. Other interpretations were possible at other times as the author editor followed literary fashion and history.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Alexander Gardner, Civil War, First World War, History of Photography, Laurence Stallings, Matthew Brady, War Photography

## AUTHOR

**MARK MEIGS**

Université Paris-Diderot