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Photography was a powerhouse medium from the date of its birth in 1839 and was already on steroids and flexing its muscles when it was barely out of its teens. In 1860, Mathew Brady took a photograph that proved the medium had the power to affect events. His earliest portrait of Abraham Lincoln was the first photograph in history that influenced the election of a nation's President, and it did so because of a change in the distribution of photographs.

Mathew Brady:

Abraham Lincoln, 1860
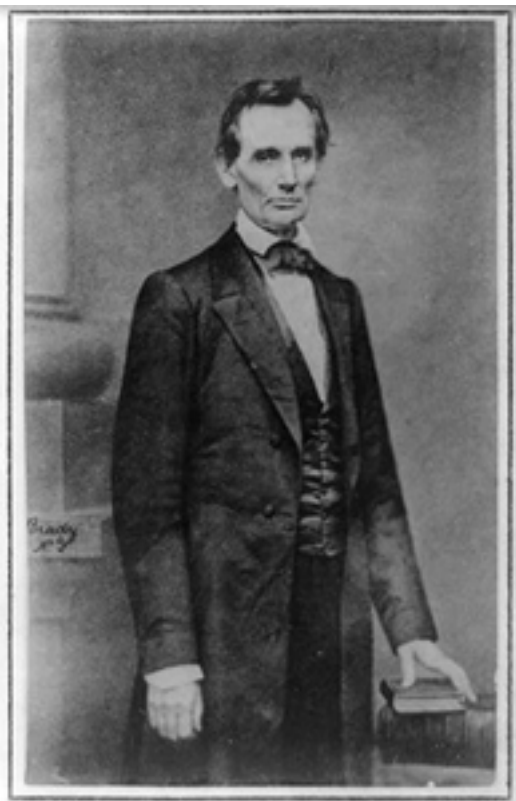
Brady took this picture the day that Lincoln arrived in New York from his home in the middle of America to seek the Republican nomination for President. Almost no one in the east of America knew much about Lincoln or had seen a photograph of him, but he was rumored to be very ugly. He was uncommonly tall and awkward, and his dark skin was heavily lined. His opponents sang a song that ended, "Don't, for God's sake, show his picture." A politician's face was extremely important then, for Americans firmly believed that a man's face revealed everything about his character.

Brady pulled Lincoln's collar up to make his neck look shorter, posed him to look serious, dignified and wise, and retouched the lines of his face. He gave Lincoln a good character and made him look presidential.

Later that day, Lincoln spoke at the Cooper Institute in New York. He was a charismatic speaker; a listener once said, "While I had thought Lincoln the homeliest man I ever saw, he was the handsomest man I ever listened to in a speech."   After the Cooper Institute speech, one reporter said he was the greatest man since St. Paul. Lincoln later said, "Brady and the Cooper Institute made me President."

The photograph worked because it could be, in effect, mass reproduced and widely distributed. By 1860, photographic negatives had pushed aside the unreproducible daguerreotype, and the recently invented visiting card photograph was tiny and cheap. Everyone wanted to know what the greatest man since St. Paul looked like, and tens of thousands of Brady's photograph were sold in inexpensive versions. Magazines printed engraved copies of it too, and a lithographic company, **Currier and Ives**, copied the image. They reversed it, cropped it, and colored the image -- a lot of changes, but lithographic copies of photographs were often what people saw, because small prints could be bought for as little as 20 cents.

CAMPAIGN BUTTON

The tintype came along at about the same time, and the Lincoln photograph was made into tintype buttons, the first campaign buttons ever to appear on men's lapels – the predecessors of Mao buttons.

Because of Brady's photograph, voters really knew what a candidate looked like for the first time. In effect, photography was creating celebrity. At the same time it created the emphasis on appearance that today makes a candidate who looks good on television have a better chance at winning than one who does not. Already in 1868, a magazine wrote that "The advantages which a handsome candidate…has over his competitors are … infinitely greater than they could have been before the invention of photography."

----- Photography registers all kinds of appearance, and its potential for surveillance was established way back in the 19th century. Police photography began almost when photography did, in the 1840s, and surveillance really came into its own with the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. When the Prussians defeated France, the French government agreed to let them occupy Paris for 48 hours, but Parisians were so bitter about this that they rebelled and established the Commune, the first socialist government in history. The French government then laid siege to its own capital city. During the siege of Paris, the Communards, proud of their cause, posed for photographs.

Braquehais: Communards

Here is a group portrait of Communards, eager to have a memento of their rebellion. After the French government defeated them, the police commandeered any photographs they could find,

distributed copies to railroad stations and ports to prevent escapes, and imprisoned and even executed men they identified from the pictures.

Photographs were thus proved to be highly useful to the state for identification and control of its citizens. That such pictures may be imprecise was probably not conceded at the time by the authorities. Men can change their appearance many ways, most easily by growing beards and moustaches or shaving them off; it is quite possible that some people in the pictures managed to escape and that other, innocent men too closely resembled someone in the pictures and were unjustly condemned.

The usefulness of surveillance depends on the accuracy of interpretation. When aerial photographs of ballistic missile installations in Cuba were taken in 1962 and threatened nuclear war, one American military advisor said they were really pictures of baseball fields. **Back in the 19th century, people believed utterly in the truthfulness of photography and didn't**

question interpretations. Now we believe photographs lie. And at one point, even the 19th century wasn't so sure about that.

Edweard Muybridge:

Running Horse

1878

When Muybridge's camera arrested the motions of a galloping horse in 1878, it proved that thousands of years of art had been sorely mistaken. Horses did indeed, as some had

conjectured, have all four legs off the ground at one time, not before and behind the body like a rocking horse, as artists had always showed them, but gathered under the belly. This bit of news was shocking. **Muybridge proved that what people thought they knew because it was what their eyes saw was not true at all.**

A leading art magazine remarked, "To the great surprise of photographers and of all those who saw these prints, the attitudes are, for the most part, not only disgraceful but of a false and impossible appearance." Horses weren't supposed to look like Muybridge's photographs. They were supposed to look the way painters had always shown them. **Muybridge's photographs revealed that perception depends heavily on representation; we see what we have seen before, what we have been taught to believe, what we think we know. Photography was already changing the nature of perception.**

The pictures provoked an artistic quarrel between knowledge and vision.

Thomas Eakins

Bronze (of a horse) & The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand, (painting)

1879

When Thomas Eakins painted a carriage pulled by four horses, people objected that the wheel didn't look like it was moving, because no one could see the spokes of a moving wheel clearly. The photographs depicted facts so perfectly that realism no longer looked very real, so maybe the camera wasn't so truthful after all. Rodin said, "It is the artist who is truthful and it is photography which lies, for in reality time does not stop." Rodin, among others, thought it preferable for art to look truthful to experience than to be truthful to fact, but Muybridge's achievement had driven a wedge into the very definition of truth, long before we decided that photographs were liars anyway.

IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT

Muybridge devised a way to project his still images so rapidly that it looked like the horse was running across the screen; he has been called the father of the motion picture. Movies and movie stills always worked together, and at least once they had a great and even a measurable impact. Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert both won Oscars for their starring roles in the 1934 comedy, It Happened One Night. Colbert played a rebellious heiress running away from her rich father, Gable a reporter who joins her because he hopes to get a story. One night they're forced by lack of money to share a motel room, but in this more delicate era, Gable divides the room by hanging a blanket on a rope.

Both of them stubbornly insist on the same side of the curtain. She won't budge, so Gable decides to give her a lesson in how a man gets undressed. First he takes off his jacket – he's demonstrating -- then his tie, then his shirt. Then he takes off his shoes, his socks. When he's wearing nothing but trousers and doesn't show any signs of stopping, she zips as fast as she can to the other side of the curtain.

Gable became a major star and sex symbol with this movie. Women swooned over him, so

American men copied everything about him. Men who had been clean shaven suddenly sported moustaches. They went out and bought the kind of jacket, sweater and hat he wore, and they wore their trench coats as he did, with the belts tied rather than buckled. He simply set men's fashions.

In 1934, American men all wore undershirts, but when Gable took off his shirt in the motel, he wasn't wearing one. If Gable didn't wear an undershirt, then obviously undershirts were not truly masculine. Men stopped wearing them. Sales of undershirts reportedly plunged by 75 percent. Undershirt manufacturers complained to Hollywood that they were going bankrupt, at a time when the country was in a deep Depression. So in 1939, Hollywood made a movie in which Gable took off his shirt and was revealed to be wearing – you can probably guess -- an undershirt.

Gable and Norma Shearer:

Idiot's Delight

1939

That movie was Idiot's delight, with Gable and Norma Shearer. The movie wasn't that good, so I'm not sure that the undershirt industry entirely recovered.

Cinema and fan magazines and the new photographic magazines like Life in the 1930s heightened photography's power to create celebrity, influence fashion, fads, and behavior, and make a dent in the nation's pocketbook.

News photographs also got a big boost from the increasing dominance of the visual media. The Vietnam war has been called the first television war, but it is recalled all over the globe in the form of still images rather than television clips.

Eddie Adams:

General Loan Executing a Vietcong Suspect

February 1, 1968

Written by Vicki Goldberg

Abu Ghraib

China Power of Photography, 2006

Written by Vicki Goldberg

http://zonezero.com/magazine/articles/goldbergvicki/index.html