

Mathew Brady

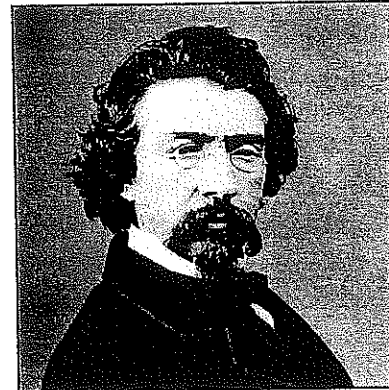
c. 1823–1896



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Mathew Brady was a pioneer of photojournalism in America. His images documented the Civil War.



As you read the biography below, think about Mathew Brady's reasons for photographing the Civil War. What was the result of his investment in documenting the war?



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Mathew Brady was born in New York, probably in 1823. Little is known of his early childhood. In the late 1830s Brady became interested in art and painting. Painter William Page took Brady to New York City in 1841 to meet artist and inventor Samuel F.B. Morse. Morse was teaching a class on a new photographic process. During this time Brady worked as a salesman.

In 1844 Brady became a professional photographer and opened his own gallery in New York City. He applied his skill as a painter to retouching photographs. Soon he was winning awards for his portraits. Brady became known for his portraits of leading Americans, including Daniel Webster, Edgar Allen Poe, James Fennimore Cooper, and 18 presidents.

Brady opened a second gallery in Washington D.C. in 1858. In 1860 he photographed Abraham Lincoln for the first time, in New York City before a major campaign speech. Later, Lincoln credited his election to his speech and to Brady's photograph.

When the Civil War started, Brady decided to use his camera to record history. He hired 20 teams of photographers and sent them to the sites of major conflicts. Brady took credit for all the photos taken. However, it appears he photographed only occasionally on battlefields including Bull Run, Antietam, and Gettysburg. Brady's crews produced over 3,500 images of the Civil War.

Brady's photographs captured soldiers and their leaders, bridges, battlefields, and military camps. One photograph shows President Lincoln in his black top hat visiting General McClellan after the Battle of Antietam. Another shows the burying of Confederate dead after the Battle of Fredricksburg. Other photographs show the aftermath of battles at places like Richmond and Frederick, Maryland. Brady's most famous images are photographs of Lincoln and Gettysburg. Together, his images document the horrors of war, realities that could not be captured completely in words.

The Civil War**Biography**

To show people that he had actually been at the site of his photographs, Brady sometimes inserted himself in the picture. In one of his images, Brady stands, leaning against a tree, a little to the right of a group of Union soldiers.

The Civil War project ruined Brady financially. He had used \$100,000 of his own money to finance his work, confident that the government would buy his images at the end of the war. In the end, the government purchased only 7,000 negatives for \$25,000. Brady eventually lost his galleries. He died in 1896, forgotten in a hospital charity ward. Today, thousands of Brady's glass plate negatives are in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Describe** Who or what were the subjects of Mathew Brady's photographs?

2. **Draw a Conclusion** Why did Mathew Brady invest so much in photographing the Civil War?

ACTIVITY

Choose some of Mathew Brady's photographs from the Civil War to create a visual display. Prepare labels with information about each photo. Present your display to the class and talk about the impact of each photo. Why did you choose the photos you included?