

**MEDIA**

# CAN YOU BELIEVE YOUR EYES?

**PEOPLE HAVE MANIPULATED IMAGES SINCE BEFORE THE INVENTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY. TODAY'S DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY HAS SIMPLY MADE IT EASIER AND MORE COMMON THAN EVER.**

By Bill Marsh

**H**ow amazing the first photographic images must have been to their early-19th-century viewers—the crisp, unassailable reality of people and events, without the filter of an artist's paintbrush.

And what an opportunity for manipulation.

It didn't take long for schemers to discover that with a little skill and imagination, photographic realism could be used to create manufactured realities.

"The very nature of photography was to record events," says Hany Farid, a computer science professor at Dartmouth College and a detective of photo fakery. "You'd think there would have been a grace period of respect for this new technology."

But in fact, fakers had already had practice before photography became widespread in the second half of the 19th century. A famous engraving of President Lincoln from the 1860s is actually Lincoln's head stuck on top of a senator's

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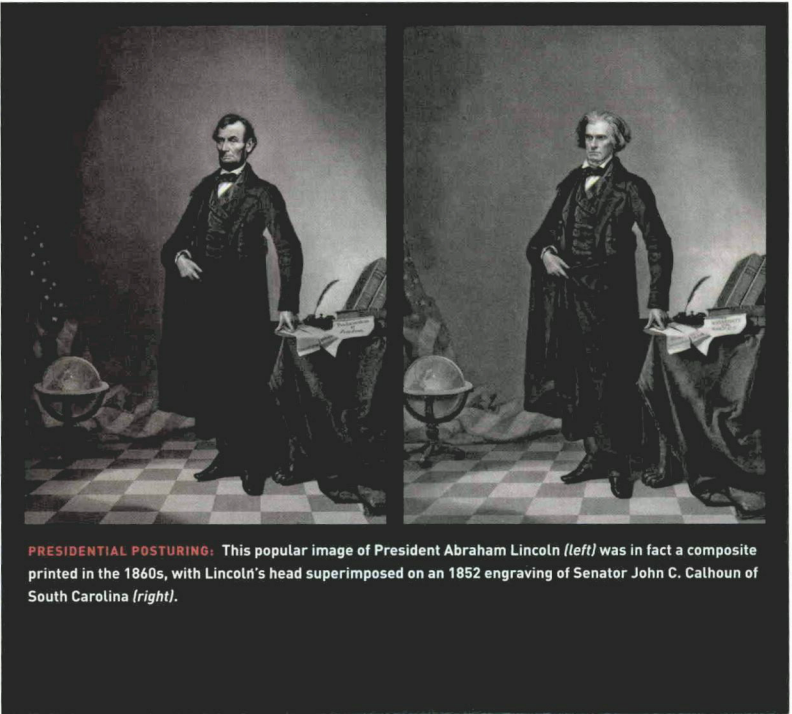
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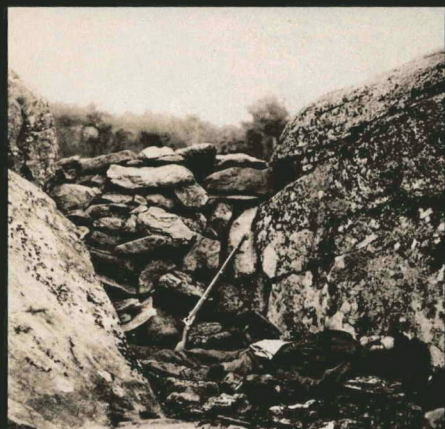
**OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE:** Magazine covers often use composite images or otherwise retouched photos. In 1989, *TV Guide* put Oprah Winfrey's head on the body of movie star Ann-Margret without permission from either. In 2005, *Newsweek* used a headshot of Martha Stewart on the body of a model. The cover image was identified inside the magazine as a "photo-illustration," but readers still complained that the image was misleading. In 2007, *Men's Fitness* enlarged the biceps of tennis star Andy Roddick on its cover. Roddick himself said he was "pretty sure I'm not as fit as the *Men's Fitness* cover suggests."

**NOW YOU SEE HIM . . .** The top photo of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin (with hand in coat) and other officials was taken in Moscow in 1936. After the man on the right, Nicolai Yezhov, fell out of political favor and was arrested in 1938, he was airbrushed out of future printings of the image.

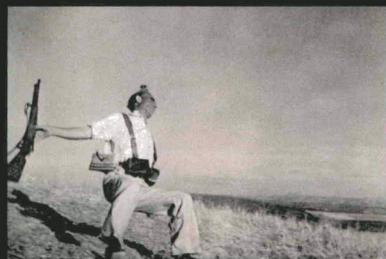


**PRESIDENTIAL POSTURING:** This popular image of President Abraham Lincoln (left) was in fact a composite printed in the 1860s, with Lincoln's head superimposed on an 1852 engraving of Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina (right).





**CIVIL WAR:** The image at left, of a dead Confederate sharpshooter at the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, became famous. But the image at right shows the scene as the photographer apparently found it before rearranging it for a better composition.



**"FALLEN SOLDIER"** was taken in 1936 by Robert Capa during the Spanish Civil War. This famous photograph is either one of the greatest war images ever—showing a soldier as he's being fatally shot—or just a staged scene. Accusations that it was staged first surfaced in the 1970s. A Spanish researcher recently scrutinized the terrain in the background and concluded that the picture was taken about 35 miles away from where previously thought. This new information has reignited debate about whether the photograph is genuine.

more regally posed body from an earlier engraving. The manipulation continued in the early days of photography: re-arranging the guns and bodies on Civil War battlefields to look more dramatic for the camera, and later, erasing political enemies, literally and figuratively, from the picture.

In recent years, with digital technology, it's become easier than ever to manipulate photographs. Now, anyone with a computer and Photoshop can do it.

"With just a few keyboard strokes and a click of the mouse, any of the imperfections that may come along with the reality of life may be removed," says Kenny Irby, head of visual journalism at the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Fla. "Aesthetics now drive the value of an image more than the authenticity."

That's made it hugely tempting, Irby says, for photojournalists to retouch and "improve" their pictures in sometimes

subtle and often powerful ways. Most news organizations have strict rules prohibiting this.

Less clear-cut, however, are "photo-illustrations," which typically involve pasting together several images for editorial effect rather than deception. News organizations generally require that images be clearly labeled as photo-illustrations so that readers know they're not single photographs. But even when those rules are followed, such composites can be controversial since many people fail to read the fine print, and the overall effect can be misleading.

The fashion industry has never been subtle about retouching images, with skin blemishes removed and bodies frequently slimmed down (or enhanced in the case of fitness magazines). In 2003, actress Kate Winslet posed for the cover of *GQ* magazine. The image was so extensively retouched that



**IRAN, 2008:** Both of these pictures are from a government-owned news agency in Iran. The image at left shows three missiles being launched in Iran. The photograph at right was apparently altered to show a fourth missile lifting off. Analysts said the photo was altered to conceal the misfiring of one missile—and to make Iran's military seem more powerful. (See "The Problem with Iran," p. 14.)



**BEIRUT, 2006:** Lebanese photographer Adnan Hajj was working for the news agency Reuters when he took a photo (left) of smoke billowing up from Beirut after an Israeli airstrike in August 2006. It was soon discovered that Hajj had apparently added dark smoke (right) to the image. Reuters said the manipulation was a violation of its standards and it would no longer accept pictures from Hajj.

the actress herself complained. "I can tell you they've reduced the size of my legs by about a third," Winslet said.

In France, where fashion is big business, the government is currently considering legislation requiring publications to disclose when images have been altered.

### REWRITING HISTORY

Historically, however, governments have more frequently been the offenders, rather than the monitors, when it comes to image tampering. During Joseph Stalin's brutal rule of the Soviet Union in the 1930s and '40s, he routinely had his political enemies arrested and killed. Then the government would meticulously erase any photographic evidence that they had ever existed. The Soviets weren't the only ones to do this.

"All of the great dictators throughout history did this—

Castro, Mao, Hitler," says Professor Farid. "What's interesting is that it speaks to the power of photography. They knew that photography made history. They weren't just removing them for a personal vendetta; they were removing them to change history."

As photo manipulation has become commonplace, it's had a huge impact on the public's willingness to trust the images they see. Farid says he sees this in courts where he is sometimes called on to testify about the authenticity of photographs that people used to take as irrefutable proof.

"I'm concerned about this backlash that suddenly we don't believe anything," says Farid, who is designing a computer program to detect doctored photos. "That's where my work comes in, trying to bring back some semblance of trust into things we see." •

## CAN YOU BELIEVE YOUR EYES?



### CRITICAL THINKING

Display several famous photographs for students to see, such as the first moon walk, a protester blocking tanks near Tiananmen Square, and Martin Luther King Jr. speaking in front of the Lincoln Memorial.

→ What is the historical importance of these

photographs?

→ What is the role of photos in telling a story or sharing news? What can photos do that words might not?

→ How would you feel if you learned that any of these photos were manipulated, either before the picture was taken or after?

Look at the photographs in the article. What was changed in each case? How do those changes tell the story in question a little differently, and why were the changes made? Which changes do you think are the most grievous, and why?

### WRITING PROMPT

Write an essay responding to this quote from the article: "Aesthetics now drive the value of an image more than the authenticity." Do you

### WEB WATCH

[nppa.org/](http://nppa.org/)

For a journalists' guide to ethics in the age of digital photography, click on "Professional Development" → "Self-training Resources" → "Special Reports"

agree or disagree? Why? examples.

### DEBATE

Take a side: Publishing altered photographs without disclosure should be illegal.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Is there a difference in the ethics of retouching photographs in news publications versus in ads or fashion magazines? Explain.

Do you think a photograph can affect, or even change, history? Why or why not? Provide

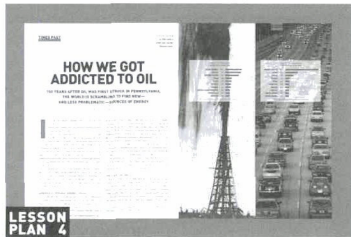
How has technology changed the way that news is relayed, both in words and in pictures? Is news more trustworthy now or less, and why? How can someone know what information can be trusted?

### FAST FACT

The first permanent photograph was taken by French inventor Joseph Niépce in 1827. It depicted farm buildings and took eight hours to expose. ●

## TIMES PAST

## HOW WE GOT ADDICTED TO OIL



### CRITICAL THINKING

As a class, create a list of energy sources.

→ Which are renewable? Which are nonrenewable?

→ Which energy sources have negative effects on the environment?

→ Which are expensive, in terms of the costs to produce and costs to the environment?

→ Why have billions of dollars been spent on developing new energy sources worldwide?

Four of the Top 10 oil-producing nations are in the Middle East. How do you think America's relations with and goals in that region would change if oil weren't so valuable?

### WRITING PROMPT

Write an opinion essay responding to the global addiction to oil. Topics to explore: American dependence on foreign oil, the rapid industrialization of China and India, global warming, and the development of renewable and "green" energy sources.

### DEBATE

Support or refute: The U.S. should not buy oil

### WEB WATCH

[eia.doe.gov](http://eia.doe.gov)

The Energy Information Administration provides the public with information about different forms of energy and their interaction with the economy and the environment.

from nations that don't respect human rights or that hinder American foreign-policy goals.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What effects are China's and India's rapid industrialization having on the oil industry, OPEC, and the environment?

Why are SUV's and other big gas-guzzling cars so popular with Americans? How have changes in gas prices affected buying decisions?

For industrialized nations, are the benefits of oil worth its negative effects?

What can people do to decrease their oil use? What would you be willing to sacrifice to lessen your dependence on it?

### FAST FACT

The U.S. is responsible for nearly a fourth of the 84 million barrels of oil consumed around the world daily. ●