

**On Alexander Gardner's "Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War"**/ Anthony W. Lee and Elizabeth Young.--(Defining moments in American photography, 1).--Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, January 2007.--114 p.: ill.--ISBN: 978-0-520-25151-9: \$19.95 (pa.).



*On Alexander Gardner's "Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War"* is the first volume of a new University of California Press series, that examines anew key American photographers and images. To date, it has been followed two volumes, *Lynching Photographs* by Doral Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith and *Weegee and "Naked City"* by Anthony W. Lee and Richard Meyer. Each book includes introduction, essays, acknowledgements, notes, works cited, index, and ample illustrations and is written by scholars in the areas of art history, literary, literary, gender, cultural, or American studies. Measuring 8 x 6.1 x 0.7 inches, the books are small in size and have sturdy paper, which holds the images well.

This first in the series contains two short essays, one on the visual meaning of the photographs and the other on their textual content. Written by Lee, associate professor of art history and Young, associate professor of English, both at Mount Holyoke College, the text is clear, concise, and informative as regards the history of photography during the Civil War and the impact of Gardner's *Photographic Sketch Book* on perceptions of the war, then and now.

We have all seen Mathew Brady's photographs of Lincoln and Civil War battles; many of these photographs, now part of our national memory, were actually taken by Gardner for Brady, who recorded places of importance during the war such as battle locations, bivouacs, people, and, of course, the dead. Gardner as well as Mathew Brady, Timothy O'Sullivan, and other photographers, sketchers, and artists traveled with the troops as recorders of battles and life in the camps. Their works were sent to national magazines to keep the public informed.

The authors provide readers with new scholarship for interpreting and connecting the photographs and text to the meaning of the original historical document. For example, they present a closer reading of Gardner's choice of images, the text he used to describe them, and the design conception of the original work. Gardner manipulated dead bodies for the photographs and the text that he painstakingly wrote for each image was not merely a description of the photograph, but a story he wanted to tell. In so doing, Gardner shared his moral message about the war.

Although this analysis by Lee and Young is amply illustrated, I often wished for a complete copy of the *Photographic Sketch Book* to complement my reading of this critique,<sup>1</sup> as there is much here to think about. The authors hint at racial overtones in and the homoerotic nature of the photographs and text, but do not adequately develop the thesis. Gardner was a staunch abolitionist and the lack of African-Americans in the *Photographic Sketch Book*, deserves to be examined more fully.

History of photography students, researchers, and faculty are the intended audience for this publication. Although this review does not include the other volumes thus far published in the series, I have browsed through them and consider them all worth purchasing for a college or research library. The series promises to be an excellent addition to the history of photography in American culture.

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<sup>1</sup>The historic visual document has been reprinted: Gardner, Alexander. *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War*. Reprint. New York: Dover, [1959]. The images, sans text, have been digitized and made available on the Web by George Eastman House: <http://www.geh.org/ar/sketchbook/sketchbook-intro.html>