

Chaos and speed: Reporting the Civil War

- Journalism 1002
- Christine Woodside
- Fall 2023

- (Photo is of New York Herald reporters and editors in Bealeton, Virginia)



Timeline

- 1830: U.S. population, 12.9 million
- 1831: William Lloyd Garrison brought out his anti-slavery newspaper, *The Liberator*
- 1845: Former slave Frederick Douglass published his autobiography showing “the bare face of slavery” (See Daly textbook, page 95)
- 1848: The Associated Press formed.
- 1850: 12,000 miles of telegraph wire in operation
- 1852: Harriet Beecher Stowe published her novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
- 1860: U.S. population, 31.4 million. Associated Press negotiated special rates with both Union telegraph operators
- 1860: 50,000 miles of telegraph wire crisscrossing the nation (see Sloan textbook “The Press and the Civil War” opening page)

The press influenced public thought leading to the Civil War

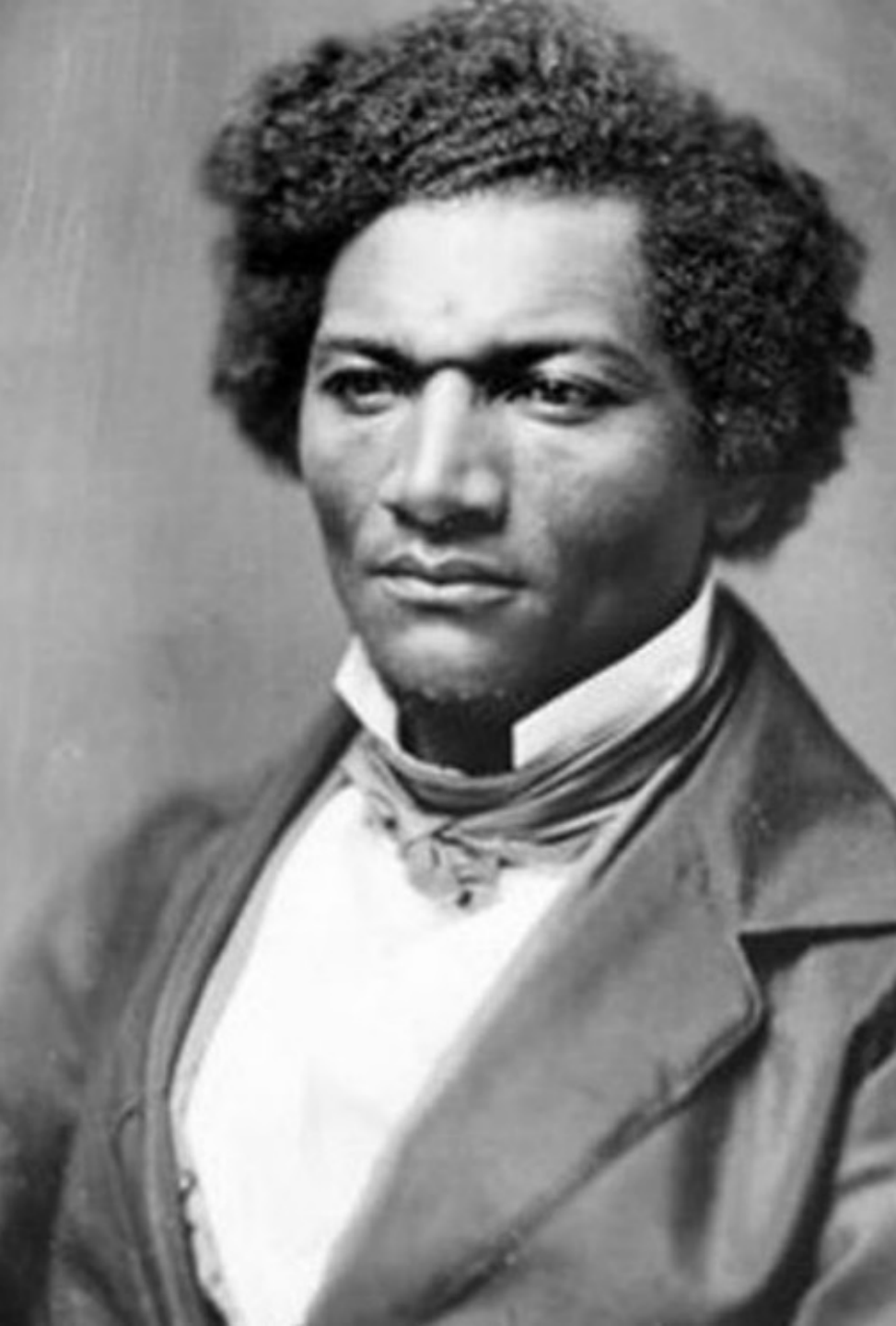
William Lloyd Garrison, militantly abolitionist
newspaper editor



Garrison started The Liberator, first abolitionist paper, 1831

- A slave, Nat Turner, led a bloody rebellion in Virginia same year; some blamed the paper for it.
- State of Georgia offered \$50,000 for capture of Garrison.
- Garrison admired Thomas Paine and often quoted the Declaration of Independence
- Garrison founded two anti-slavery societies
- He was mobbed and almost lynched in Boston in 1835





Frederick Douglass

- Garrison helped Douglass publish his autobiography in 1845, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*
- Douglass established a paper in Rochester, New York, *The North Star*
- The motto was: “Right is of no sex — truth is of no color — God is father of us all, and we are Bretheren.”

Garrison and Douglass fought over whether the Constitution supported slavery or abhorred it:

* Douglass said Constitution was “in its letter and spirit an anti-slavery instrument.”

* Garrison said Constitution was (as Daly writes on p. 96) “formal expression of a corrupt bargain ... designed to protect slavery as a permanent feature of American life.”

Virginia outlawed journalism calling for the end of slavery

- March 1836, “An Act to suppress the circulation of incendiary publications”
- “Garrison and other abolitionists were having an impact”
- Pro-slavery U.S. Senator John C. Calhoun joined with President Andrew Jackson to make it harder for the U.S. Post Office to deliver papers

Timeline

- November 1860: Abraham Lincoln elected president with less than a majority of the vote
- December 20, 1860: South Carolina seceded from the United States
- April 12, 1861: Bombing of Fort Sumter, which started the Civil War
- Lincoln administration began censoring the news and telegraph dispatches
- Reporting thus became chaotic. Reports sounding favorable to Union Army would get past the censors.

Lincoln won against three opponents. He did not win a majority in the popular vote.

1860 Presidential Election Results [1]

| Political Party | Presidential Nominee | VP Nominee | Electoral College | Popular Vote |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Republican | Abraham Lincoln | Hannibal Hamlin | 180 | 1,865,908 |
| Democratic (Southern) | John Breckenridge | Joseph Lane | 72 | 848,019 |
| Constitutional Union | John Bell | Edward Everett | 39 | 590,901 |
| Democratic | Stephen Douglas | Herschel Johnson | 12 | 1,380,202 |

Lincoln at Antietam

Look at the composition of this photo. The president is on the warfront. He is posing. He is in a camp – with the soldiers. He is checking out what's going on ...
23,000 soldiers were killed, wounded or missing after twelve hours of savage combat on September 17, 1862.

The Battle of Antietam ended the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia's first invasion into the North and led Abraham Lincoln to issue the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.

(National Park Service)



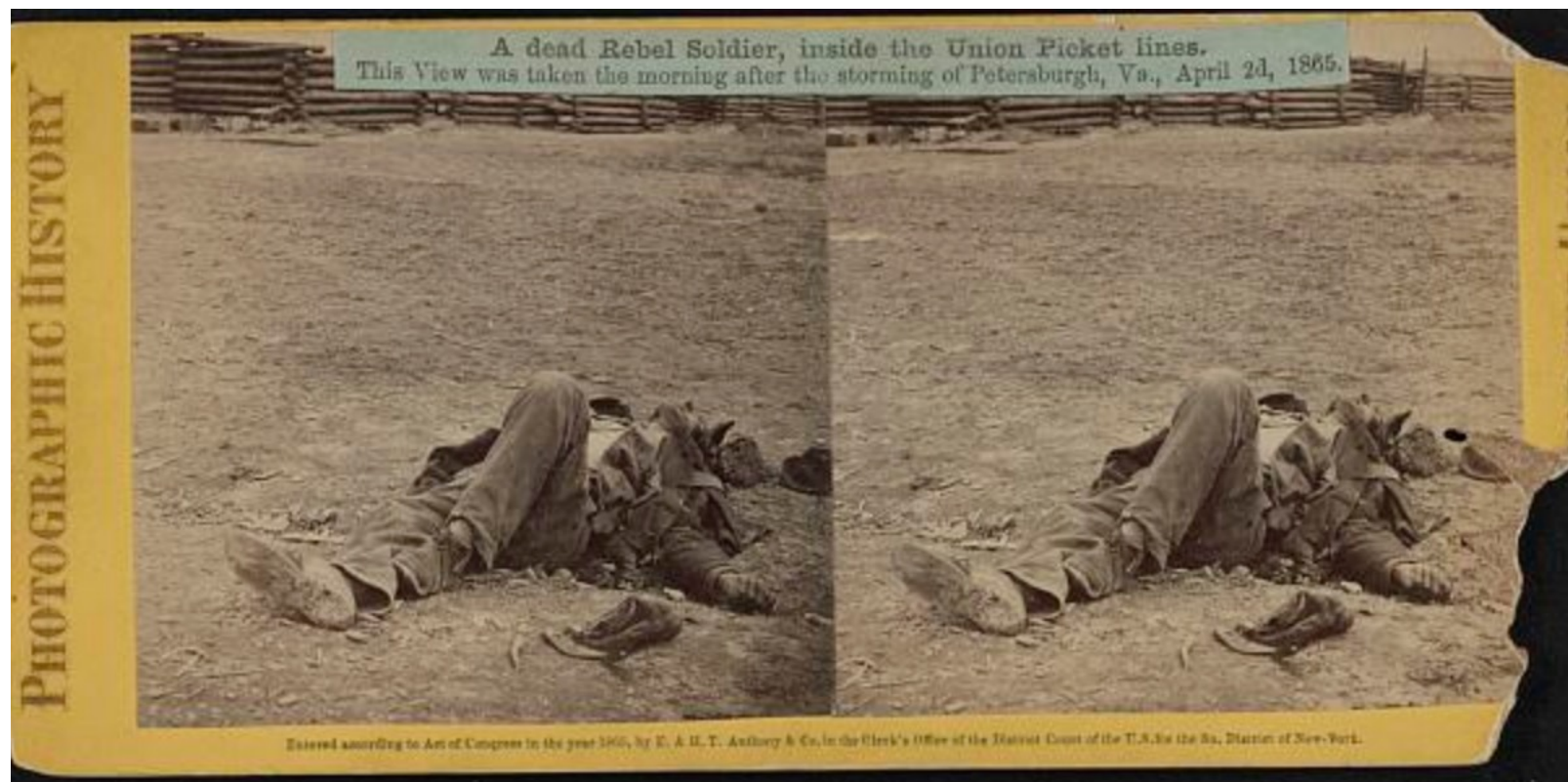
Civil War's northern journalists

- Henry Villard witnessed 12,000 Union casualties at Fredericksburg. Lincoln called him to the White House for eyewitness account.
- George Alfred Townsend of the NY World wrote vivid battlefield accounts: “I hear the sobs and howls of the weary, and note, afar off, among the pines, moving lights of burying parties....”

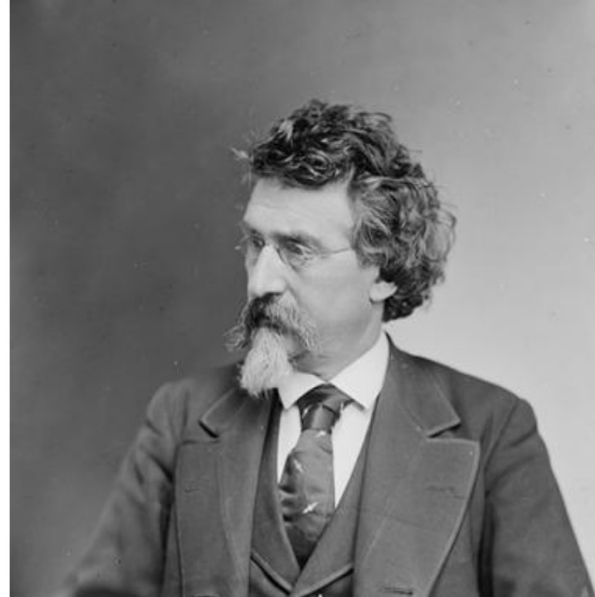
Telegraph messages: fast and problematic

- Lincoln used telegraphs to communicate with the Union troops.
- But... his administration censored telegraph dispatches to keep the newspapers from writing about war maneuvers.
- Reporters in the North did get a fair amount of information, sometimes publishing war maneuvers ahead of time, which in a few cases affected the battle outcomes.
-

Photography!



Source:
American
Battlefield
Trust



Mathew Brady

TITLE

Photographer

WAR & AFFILIATION

Civil War / Union

DATE OF BIRTH - DEATH

c.1823- January 15, 1896

Mathew Brady is often referred to as the father of photojournalism and is most well known for his documentation of the Civil War. His photographs, and those he commissioned, had a tremendous impact on society at the time of the war, and continue to do so today. He and his employees photographed thousands of images including battlefields, camp life, and portraits of some of the most famous citizens of his time including Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee.

1861 The War For the Union. 1865



1861 Photographic War History. 1865

1291. Confederate Dead at Fort Robinette, Corinth.
[FOR DESCRIPTION OF THIS VIEW SEE THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS CARD.]



An infantry unit with bayonets marched down Pennsylvania Avenue in May 1865. They are followed by three ambulances. (Mathew Brady/Library of Congress)



Dead Confederate soldiers lie in a ditch in Antietam, Maryland. Images from this battle “received more media attention at the time of the war than any other series of images during the rest of the war,” according to the Trust. (Alexander Gardner/Library of Congress)

Legacy of Civil War journalism

- Reporters used the **telegraph**. This sped up and changed the way information got out to the public.
- Therefore, journalists started working faster – getting the story out quicker because they could.
- **Censorship**: President Abraham Lincoln ordered dispatches censored, perhaps the strongest control of the press ever.
- **Photography**: Although the photos weren't published immediately in the papers at that time, photojournalism was born in this era.