Photo Tampering throughout History

Though photo manipulation has become more common in the age of digital cameras and image editing software, it actually dates back almost as far as the invention of photography. Gathered below is an overview of some of the more notable instances of photo manipulation in history. For recent years, an exhaustive inventory of every photo manipulation would be nearly impossible, so we focus here on the instances that have been most controversial or notorious, or ones that raise the most interesting ethical questions.

We’ll continue to update this gallery as more incidents come to our attention, so if you come across any notable ones you think we should include, feel free to send us an e-mail at gallery@fourandsix.com.

This nearly iconic portrait (in the form of a lithograph) of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln is a composite of Lincoln’s head and the Southern politician John Calhoun’s body.

circa 1860  tagged Politics

This print (Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division) appears to be of General Ulysses S. Grant in front of his troops at City Point, Virginia, during the American Civil War. Some very nice detective work by researchers at the Library of Congress revealed that this print is a composite of three separate prints: (1) the head in this photo is taken from a portrait of Grant; (2) the horse and body are those of Major General Alexander M. McCook; and (3) the background is of Confederate prisoners captured at the battle of Fisher’s Hill, VA.

circa 1864  tagged Politics

In this photo by famed photographer Mathew Brady, General Sherman is seen posing with his Generals. General Francis P. Blair (far right) was added to the original photograph. The photo on the left is another image from the same sitting, at which General Blair was not in attendance.

circa 1865  tagged Politics

Stalin routinely air-brushed his enemies out of photographs. In this photograph a commissar was removed from the original photograph after falling out of favor with Stalin.

circa 1930  tagged Politics

In this doctored photograph, Mao Tse-tung (right) had Po Ku (left) removed from the original photograph, after Po Ku fell out of favor with Mao.
In this doctored photograph, Adolf Hitler had Joseph Goebbels (second from the right) removed from the original photograph. It remains unclear why exactly Goebbels fell out of favor with Hitler.

In this doctored photo of Queen Elizabeth and Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King in Banff, Alberta, King George VI was removed from the original photograph. This photo was used on an election poster for the Prime Minister. It is hypothesized that the Prime Minister had the photo altered because a photo of just him and the Queen painted him in a more powerful light.

In order to create a more heroic portrait of himself, Benito Mussolini had the horse handler removed from the original photograph.

A World War II photo published in the Russian magazine Ogoniok shows several Russian soldiers raising the Soviet flag atop the German Reichstag building. At the request of the editor-in-chief of the magazine, the photo was altered prior to publication to remove a watch from the right arm of the soldier supporting the flag-bearer. Because the soldier also had a watch on his left arm, there was suspicion that one of the watches had been looted.

It is believed that this doctored photograph contributed to Senator Millard Tydings’ electoral defeat in 1950. The photo of Tydings (right) conversing with Earl Browder (left), a leader of the American Communist party, was meant to suggest that Tydings had communist sympathies.