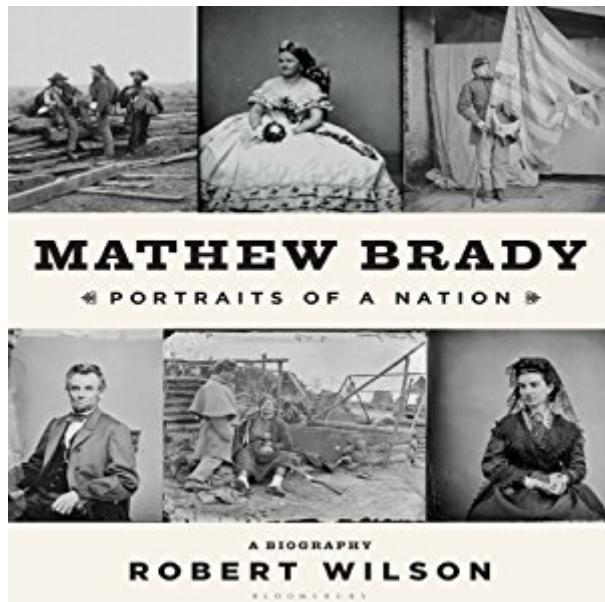


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Mathew Brady: Portraits Of A Nation



Synopsis

In the 1840s and 1850s, "Brady of Broadway" was one of the most successful and acclaimed Manhattan portrait galleries. Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, Dolley Madison, Henry James as a boy with his father, Horace Greeley, Edgar Allan Poe, the Prince of Wales, and Jenny Lind were among the dignitaries photographed in Mathew Brady's studio. But it was during the Civil War that he became the founding father of what is now called photojournalism and his photography became an enduring part of American history. The Civil War was the first war in history to leave a detailed photographic record, and Mathew Brady was the war's chief visual historian. Previously, the general public had never seen in such detail the bloody particulars of war - the strewn bodies of the dead, the bloated carcasses of horses, the splintered remains of trees and fortifications, or the chaos and suffering on the battlefield. Brady knew better than anyone of his era the dual power of the camera to record and to excite, to stop a moment in time and to draw the viewer vividly into that moment. He was not, in the strictest sense, a Civil War photographer. As the director of a photographic service, he assigned Alexander Gardner, James F. Gibson, and others to take photographs, often under his personal supervision; he also distributed Civil War photographs taken by others not employed by him. Ironically, Brady had accompanied the Union army to the first major battle at Bull Run, but was so shaken by the experience that throughout the rest of the war he rarely visited battlefields, except well before or after a major battle. MATHEW BRADY is the biography of an American legend - a businessman, an accomplished and innovative technician, a suave promoter, a celebrated portrait artist, and, perhaps most important, a historian who chronicled America during its finest and gravest moments of the 19th century.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you think of images of America's Civil War, you are undoubtedly seeing in your mind memories of pictures made by Mathew Brady. Brady was America's first great photographer, and his images of soldiers in camp or soldiers in death are an indelible part of the war's legacy. He was also a photographer to celebrities, and thus played a larger role in documenting the nation's nineteenth century. His photographs are his legacy, for he didn't leave much else. In *Mathew Brady: Portraits of a Nation* (Bloomsbury), biographer Robert Wilson tries to fill out missing parts. Even Wilson admits that "Brady is someone we cannot know in whole." He left no journal and few letters. His business records are scant (though Wilson seems to have mined them for all they can tell us). He gave a few interviews late in his life, though their reliability is of course questionable. Many of the thousands of photographs attributed to him might not be by him at all; they might be by his staff or they might simply be someone else's photo he collected. Wilson has gone far by telling the stories behind the photos, as well as can be known, and his biography (the first attempt at a full length life of its subject) provides welcome insight into American society and in particular the war in which Brady's role will always be significant. We do not even know when or where Brady was born. His studios in New York and Washington were where he became the photographer of celebrities. Michael Faraday, Henry James (and son), the Prince of Wales, General Tom Thumb, Jenny Lind, and countless others came to his studio for their portraits.

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