Introduction

In her blog post, "Picturing the Civil War 1," Professor Fahs explains that "the Civil War was the first war in American history to be illustrated as it occurred." The space between wartime events and their representation was contracted to such an extent that the events on the battlefield were made "present" to the civilians at home. This sense of immediacy may have been due to the method or medium employed by artists and photographers. Many artists, for example, sketched their works on site in an effort to render the war as unfolding; and photographers, whose medium afforded them new ways of embodying a moment in time, could process their images on the spot, mere seconds after creation.

This immediacy may also have emerged from Americans' sense of the war as a historical event and, as such, a moment requiring historical representation. To that end, they saw the war as both a lived reality in the present and as a defining past that shaped national identity. The proliferating images representing the war both identify the immediate wartime experience and signal the contingencies of time and place that historically frame those experiences.

Assignment

Pick an image that represents or critiques some component of the American Civil War (a photograph, an etching, a painting, an advertisement, a cartoon, etc.). Make an argument about how this image represented the Civil War for its contemporary audiences. What meanings of the Civil War did this image create?

To interpret your selected image, you must account for the cultural context in which the image was produced, as well as its medium, its mode of circulation, and how it was displayed. In addition, you will be required to incorporate at least one secondary source into your essay. Your secondary source should be a reliable, academic text that offers additional context for some component of your argument.

This paper will be 5-6 pages in length and will count as 40% of your writing grade. Be sure to cite the source of your image.