

Life before Photoshop: Erased from the Past

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Sources

Source A

In February 1990, the first version of Adobe Photoshop appeared. That extensive program for the creation and editing of raster graphics is a product without which the contemporary world of media is unimaginable [...]. The very word has also found its way into informal language and it functions in the consciousness of people from various social strata as a synonym for the 'improvement of body imperfections'. Youth and adults alike say 'we will photoshop it' meaning improving some aspects of a photograph they have found unwelcome, obsolete or not looking good. [...] Retouching was already commonly used in the 19th century, when photography was invented. It comes as no surprise as in principle the first photographers were also portrait painters. [...] Consequently, idealization was used taking the form of interfering with the film from which 'manually enriched' photos were later developed. [...] before digital, analogue photography also existed, and in order to obtain a photo a negative had to be developed first and then an enlarger used to expose the photographic image onto paper. For that, a specially equipped darkroom was needed as well as a whole range of chemical agents. [...] When photography [...] became accessible to all, the photographer would take a picture and its editing was handled by someone else. Typically, skin defects like freckles or wrinkles were retouched, diluting and smoothing out that bodily aspect [...] The editing would take approximately six hours. Before the Second World War special textbooks for retouchers were even published. Manipulations related to photo-retouching were used particularly to present the history of countries and political systems [...] Photographs of Elizabeth, the Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, were subject to retouching and then made public as her official portraits. Some of them were quite peculiar as the face of the duchess of Bavaria was cut out and fitted onto

another photograph showing her in different clothes. In the 1860s, one of America's most famous photos was taken, as well: [...] Abraham Lincoln's portrait, and 35 years later by means of simple tools, such as a surgical lancet, scissors and a brush, the president's head was combined with the body of the American politician John Calhoun. Ironically, the president supported the abolition of slavery while his political opponent Calhoun quite the opposite [...].

FOTO4U blog, *Retouching photos before the invention of Photoshop [Retuszowanie zdjęć przed wynalezieniem Photoshopa]* [accessed 5 December 2020]. Available on FOTO4U blog: <https://www.foto4u.pl/blog/artykul/retuszowanie-zdjec-przed-wynalezieniem-photosopa>.

Source B

A juxtaposition of two photographs. On the right, a manipulated photograph (around 1865) of US President Abraham Lincoln, a co-author of the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution (an amendment to the American Constitution abolishing slavery), whose head was pasted in place of that belonging to the Senator John C. Calhoun, a supporter of slavery who died in 1850.

John C. Calhoun / painted by T. Hicks; likeness from a dag. by Brady; engraved by A.H. Ritchie, New York; A.H. Ritchie & Co. c1852 [accessed 5 December 2020]. Available in the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003679757/>



↑ John C. Calhoun

Abraham Lincoln / engraved by William Pate, New York, William Pate, 58 & 60 Fulton St. (1865?) [accessed 5 December 2020]. Available in the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003654314/>



↑ Abraham Lincoln

Source C

Vladimir Lenin speaking in Sverdlov Square, Moscow, 1919

The upper photograph was taken during his public address. On the steps leading to the rostrum, can be seen Lenin's two closest collaborators – Lev Kamenev (above) and Leon Trotsky (below). There is no trace of them in the photograph below. The erasure most likely took place in the 1930s during the greatest Stalinist repressions.

Vladimir Lenin speaking in Sverdlov Square, Moscow, 5 May 1919, photographer: Grigory Petrovich Goldstein [accessed 5 May 2021]. Available on Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alter_Lenin_Speech_1920.jpg



Masha Cessen, *The Photo Book That Captured How the Soviet Regime Made the Truth Disappear*, 15 July 2018; photographer: Grigory Petrovich Goldstein [accessed 5 May 2021]. Available on New Yorker: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-book/the-photo-book-that-captured-how-the-soviet-regime-made-the-truth-disappear>.



Source D

Lev Kamenev's summary biography

[...] In 1900, he married Leon Trotsky's sister Olga Bronstein [...] He took part in the 1905 Revolution. In 1908, he came to Geneva, where together with Lenin and Zinoviev he edited a journal titled Proletarian (Пролетарий). Together, they were the top leaders of the Bolshevik movement known as 'the troika'. [...] In January 1918, Lenin sent Kamenev on a mission to London, from where he was deported after a week. [...] Then in 1919 he became a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee and in 1923 deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. Between 1918 and 1926 he also chaired the Moscow city council. In 1923, he made a pact with Zinoviev and Stalin against Trotsky, helping Stalin gain unlimited power. In 1926, Stalin turned against Kamenev, removing him from the top posts: for some time, he had been a people's commissar for trade, an ambassador in Italy and a director at a publishing house [...] On 16 December 1934, he was detained and sentenced to five-years' imprisonment (the trial of the 'Moscow Centre'), and soon to ten-years' imprisonment charged with having attempted to assassinate Stalin [...] In 1936, he was sentenced to death and shot dead on 25 August [...]

Lev Kamenev [accessed 5 December 2020].

Available on Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Kamenev.

Source E

Leon Trotsky's summary biography

As of 23 September 1917, he chaired the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. He was one of the key links in the Bolshevik Revolution. Once it was over, he formed his own faction within the Bolshevik movement. He was one of the organizers of the Red Army and commissar of Military and Naval Affairs. [...] Lenin died in 1924. At that time, Trotsky was already in conflict with Stalin [...] he lost the fight for power to Stalin, along with all the posts he had held before [...] he had to leave the USSR, and was also stripped of Soviet citizenship. Trotsky was constantly under surveillance by Soviet agents, and there were several attempts to assassinate him. Stalin decided to erase Trotsky from the history of USSR so that no memory of

him was left [...] he died on 20 August 1940: on Stalin's order, he was murdered at his home by a blow on the head [...]

Leon Trotsky [accessed 5 December 2020].

Available on [zyciorysy.pl](https://zyciorysy.pl/biografia/lew-trocki/): <https://zyciorysy.pl/biografia/lew-trocki/>.

Source F

The surname of the former commander of the North Korean army has been deleted from official documents after his dismissal and removal from power [...]

A year ago, Vice Marshal Ri Yong-ho became a victim of a purge, possibly related to the consolidation of the young dictator Kim Jong-un's grip on the powerful armed forces [...] In July 2012, he was removed from his post and he vanished from official communications. [...] The marshal was to be 'erased' from official documents, as evidenced by the list of mourners taking part in the funeral celebrations for Kim Jong-il in December 2011. Ri Yong-ho occupied a highly prominent fourth place there, suggesting his high position in the dictatorship's hierarchy. However, in a special yearbook of December 2012 obtained by journalists of Daily NK, the marshal had already been erased from the list [...] Surnames would disappear from official documents, and sometimes even official photographs were retouched, the best-known example being that of Nikolay Jezhov, head of the NKVD [Soviet security service] in the period 1936–38, that is, the bloodiest time of Stalinist terror. When Stalin decided to operate in a slightly milder fashion, the collaborator was found inconvenient and fell victim to the terror machine. Ultimately, he found himself in an NKVD execution room and was killed. One of the images from which he was removed is a well-known photograph showing Stalin walking in the company of his closest comrades along the embankment of the Moscow–Volga Canal [...]

Just like under Stalin. He fell into disgrace and his name disappeared from documents [Jak za Stalina. Popadł w niełaskę i jego nazwisko zniknęło z dokumentów], 25 March 2013 [accessed 5 December 2020].

Available on [tvn24.pl](https://tvn24.pl/swiat/jak-za-stalina-popadl-w-nielaske-jego-nazwisko-zniknelo-z-dokumentow-ra335359-3436196): <https://tvn24.pl/swiat/jak-za-stalina-popadl-w-nielaske-jego-nazwisko-zniknelo-z-dokumentow-ra335359-3436196>.

Source G

[...] This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound-tracks, cartoons, photographs – to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance. Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date. In this way every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have been correct, nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record. All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary. In no case would it have been possible, once the deed was done, to prove that any falsification had taken place. The largest section of the Records Department, far larger than the one on which Winston worked, consisted simply of persons whose duty it was to track down and collect all copies of books, newspapers, and other documents which had been superseded and were due for destruction. A number of 'The Times' which might, because of changes in political alignment, or mistaken prophecies uttered by Big Brother, have been rewritten a dozen times still stood on the files bearing its original date, and no other copy existed to contradict it. Books, also, were recalled and rewritten again and again, and were invariably reissued without any admission that any alteration had been made. [...]

George Orwell, *1984* (Adelaide: eBooks@Adelaide, The University of Adelaide Library, 2016), p. 48–49.