**Images: Political & Photographic**

*Two OLLI instructors, Historian Kevin Peterson and Technology Expert Gary Smaby, share an illuminating conversation about the marriage of politics and photography— from Lincoln’s first campaign to the present.*

**A POLAND:** Gary Smaby is a respected expert in many fields. From architecture to supercomputing, but the one closest to his heart is photography, especially its history.

**G SMABY:** I can set the stage for those who may not know much history of photography just by saying it is a very short history.

**A POLAND:** Kevin Peterson has always loved history and all it’s variations, but the one close this his heart is the colorful narrative that weaves through American politics.

**K PETERSON:** Everybody saw Lincoln that he was tall and skinny that he was a little bit of a freak. Mat thought that his height was his most important asset and took his picture standing up. Nobody had ever done that before.

**A POLAND**: Today these two OLLI instructors engage in a conversation about images. Photographic and political and how they’re danced and interplay has helped craft 200 years of American history.

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**A POLAND:** Welcome to *In Conversation: The Voices of OLLI*. OLLI, O-L-L-I is an acronym for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute located and networked with the Palm Desert Campus of California State University San Bernardino.

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**A POLAND:** Historian Kevin Peterson and photographer Gary Smaby had never met before they recorded this podcast. To their surprise these two OLLI instructors discovered they enjoy highly competitive careers. They once played called, wait for it, *High Finance*.

**G SMABY:** How did you get from there to here?

**K PETERSON:** Oh,how much time have we got here?

**G SMABY:** Yeah.

**K PETERSON:** I started out in life that I was going to be a history professor. To be quite frank, I decided I wasn’t really comfortable with the world of Academia and I discovered I really liked the world of finance. I met with some investment bankers and it looked like they made good money and had a lot of fun and looked like they didn’t have people breath down their neck all the time. So, I went that direction and for 25 years I was an investment banker. That was that but I never lost my love for history or interest in political science. When I ended up teaching at Osher at the University of Utah when I moved back to Utah. My wife and I moved to Palm Desert and found the organization here, and here I am.

**G SMABY:** You know I actually started a career as a photographer and quickly realized that that was not a world where people can make a living or at least the kind of living I wanted and—

**K PETERSON:** Kind of like being a college professor.

**G SMABY:** Yeah, exactly. When both of us ended working for firms with stellar reputations. Making money is nothing if you don’t maintain your integrity.

**K PETERSON:** Right. You have to look yourself in the mirror every morning.

**G SMABY:** Exactly.

**A POLAND:** After Kevin and Gary shared a few war stories, their conversation turned into another form of combat, America’s Civil War. It was there it might be said where history and photography first joined forces. The battlefield of Guerra type by Mathew Brady sets the stage of photographic art back then.

**G SMABY:** The first photograph, permanent photograph was in 1825. It really was by the time of the Civil War; a very new technology and it was very technology and chemistry dependent at that time. It was mostly within the realm of the rich because you needed to buy a lot of equipment in order to play the game. The art community typically looked down at Brady at that time. People who can’t draw, sculpt, or paint, they think those who take the magic box and think they’re producing art. That opinion persisted for at least 100 years. In many realms it still does exists. Old time photographs opened up a whole new chapter for photography.

**K PETERSON:** I mean, before photography, no one knew what war was really like. They thought it was heroic which it was at times but it was bloody, ugly, messy, and awful. I think photography was the one that ushered in that knowledge and theedom. Brady and the dead of theedom and all that, people were really sober at seeing that because it was the first time they saw war large (revise)

**G SMABY:** I think you think about cameras, all of us were alive and conscious and disturbed by what went going on at Vietnam during that period of time. You think about the nightly news and those photographers and film makers that were risking their lives to bring us information. Frankly those forms of journalists are risking their lives today. People that do that tells you that the photograph whether it is moving or still is woven into our civilization now and I think that is the democratization of it while it obviously has impacted people who do photography for a living and many of those have been hurt by it. Many won’t be able to make a living from it anymore and in terms of what the iPhone has done or to speak generically phones in particular in all realms. You look at the recent protest videos in Minneapolis with the Floyd video and the global impact it had. It was shot from a cellphone and it is an important part of culture.

**K PETERSON:** Right. Another aspect I found is that Brady also is that he went to Gettysburg after the battle and took photos of Hindenburg. There are some pictures of dead confederates laying around and it was pretty much agreed that people send a message that the photographs of dead these dead soldiers were probably staged because corpses tend to swell up and these people did not look like corpses. It is pretty much agreed that he staged the corpses.

**G SMABY:** You know I have to bring up the Holocaust photographs—

**K PETERSON:** Yeah.

**G SMABY:** and the importance of that to people that denied that it happened. You know, that could not be staged in the way Mathew Brady staged that photograph. They are an indelible record and then you have to look at the flip side and see what Hitler did to use it as propaganda. He made top film makers and photographers to craft images at his direction. So, it can be used both ways.

**K PETERSON:** And George Marshall the chief staff of the army was shocked that a lot of the soldiers coming in really didn’t know what the world was about. So, they tried to hurry the heel that the was a good guy. They didn’t really zero down on what this war was about. So, the Marshall engaged Frank Capra to make these series of films to show why we fight to show soldiers when they were in training. My father told me he never really realized what the war was about until he got over there of course. He said these Frank Capra movies had an impact. Two years later he is landing on Utah beach in Normandy. Right?

**G SMABY:** When you mention that in Normandy the famous photographs of that period were the Robert Capa one of the photographers and how difficult it is to shoot and most of that role was destroyed as I recall in the processing of it. So, there are very few of the pictures from the ones he took during that period and that is why some of the ones you see are grainy or a little bit out of focus but that adds to the drama of them. You think of the Hindenburg as an example of both —

**K PETERSON:** Right.

**G SMABY:** We hadsound and picture and amplify each other. The sound amplifies the other.

**K PETERSON:**  It was a total surprise about the Hindenburg and took the fault of the picture of the movie, how it was a regular landing and suddenly the Hindenburg explodes in flames and as I recall he was kind of panicky in his narration of the whole thing.

**G SMABY:** Yeah, he was. You can go back to the Zapruder film where there were 13 frames that became history. Again, you think about images that are etched on the human brain. Those who have watched TV and I still remember watching some of those scenes of Selma and a lot of people form the north that were aware and did not want to deal with it finally ended up having to deal with the fact that something had to be done there.

**K PETERSON**: I think that people didn’t realize until television came along and people like Martin Luther King came along that they realized that life in the south was not what they thought it was. I don’t think that without the visual image it would have made much difference, Frankly.

**A POLAND:** There is one word common to the vocabulary of politics and photograph, image. That confluence first began with 19th century photographer Mathew Brady and an awkward homely candidate for president Abe Lincoln. Years before the Civil War Kevin Peterson picks up the story.

**K PETERSON:** He went to New York from Illinois. He spoke and the afternoon before he spoke, he went to Mathew Brady’s studio, the leading photographer of his era to have his picture taken. That was kind of unusual that somebody would do that. Everyone looked at Abraham Lincoln and saw that he was tall and skinny that he was a little bit of a freak. Most people did not look like Abraham Lincoln but Brady thought his height was most important asset. So, he took Lincoln’s picture standing up. Nobody had ever done that before. Another thing he did was that he combed Lincoln’s hair because Lincoln always had his hair messed up. Lincoln had a long skinny neck and he took, and pulled his collar up and Lincoln said “Oh, you’re trying to make my neck look smaller, aren’t you?” which of course he was.

(SLIGHT LAUGHTER)

**K PETERSON:** So, Lincoln understood the importance of media and took advantage of it.

**G SMABY:** Maybe Nixon. Obviously from a Tv perspective we all know what happened there with the sweaty upper lip and sweat screen cameras and some things that have not been used before and that made a difference. We can think back about recent elections where one statement or George Bush looking at his watch. In the days of respectful campaigns looked at one word or image could kill the chances of prospect. I think of Michael Dukakis sitting on a tank or a photograph of him riding in a tank or Ed Muskie shedding tears after giving a speech or whatever. In both of those cases, it really put their campaigns to a stop. As I recall anyways. I am not a historian but you probably know the truth in that.

**K PETERSON:** You were mentioning about the Kennedy Nixon, there were polls taken after that debate and people who watched in on TV said they believed Kennedy won the debate. People who listened to the radio thought Nixon won the debate.

**G SMABY:** Yeah.

**K PETERSON:** That tells you something about the power of images. Franklin Roosevelt was crippled by polio and yet he was never allowed to be photographed walking in his braces or being pulled in his wheelchair. A very large part of the Americanpeople did not know that he was handicapped. There were editorial cartoons of him running. You took pictures of him walking in his braces, they would take you off the train and you were done.

**G SMABY:** And took their camera. You know the same thing to a certain extent correct me if I am wrong was Kennedy. He was often in pain and in a back brace. He would not have been able to run a 100-yard dash as he was depicted as a lively active family participant in football games but truth of matter was that he was in real severe pain.

**K PETERSON:** One other thing I was going to point out is reverse photography. The timing is the Bolsheviks, especially during the Stalin era they would alter photographs. There’s a picture of Stalin walking down the street with a guy who he had fallen out of favor and he ended up in the Gulag somewhere. The photo would be doctored and they would take that person out of the photograph. This is reverse photography.

**G SMABY:** Now anybody can do that. You know the whole issue of trusting the photographed image is a very real one. There isn’t an image that I shoot that isn’t significantly processed, image process. Almost any picture can be fake today. That is disturbing.

**K PETERSON:** That is a cheery thought.

**G SMABY & K PETERSON:** Yeah.

**K PETERSON:** I think that water politicians well they’re not getting elected and they’re about getting people. The image you portray as a politician is very important. I remember somebody asked Ronald Reagan once “do you really think being an ex-actor—” he was also the governor of California, ““do you really think being an ex-actor that you’re really qualified to be president.”

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**K PETERSON:** And Ronald Reagan said I don’t know how I’d be president if I wasn’t an actor.

(LAUGHTER)

**G SMABY:** it was a great pleasure to meet you.

**K PETERSON:** Nice to meet you.

**G SMABY:** I’ll be sneaking on watching with Nanci when she’s in your course.

(LAUGHTER)

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC ENDS)

**A POLAND:** Kevin Peterson. Gary Smaby. Two of the empowering voices of OLLI. Here is the voice of others.

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**OLLI MEMBER 1:** The instructor core one word, passion. We are all full of passion.

**OLLI MEMBER 2:** They are not doing it to make big bucks, they are doing it because they love it.

**OLLI MEMBER 3:** I taught briefly undergraduates, hated it. Taught graduate students I liked it. I taught post-graduate and post-doctoral students and liked that better. And this is the best experience I’ve had, precisely because of the students.

**OLLI MEMBER 4:** I enjoy, more than I ever have learning.

**OLLI MEMBER 5:** It certainly does helps up your game when people listen to you closely to what you say and a very fixed amount of time to present your ideas. It means to be educational and means to have some style and be able to tell your story in an effective way.

**OLLI MEMBER 6:** They are just about making this a wonderful experience for each and every student.

**OLLI MEMBER 7:** it is not intimidating it is exhilarating.

**OLLI MEMBER 8:** It doesn’t get any better than that.

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**A POLAND:** This has been *In Conversation: The Voices of OLLI*. Our thanks to Cal State San Bernardino in Palm Desert. Along with the communications study professor, Lacey Kendall and her media students. This podcast was produced for OLLI by Lou Gorfain and I am Dr. Arlette Poland.

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