

QUESTIONS¹

- What were the photographer's intentions at the moment of exposure?
- For whom was the visual image composed and reproduced?
- What purpose did it serve?
- How much in the evidence in new, how much deliberate, how much repetitive, how much the expression of unconscious desires and fears?
- Is the image representative or anachronistic?
- Is the depiction typical?
- Is the portrayed behavior natural or contrived?
- What are the people doing?
- Are they comfortable or estranged from their environment?
- Is there corroborative evidence beyond the visual image?
- How does captioning affect the message of the picture? Is it straightforward or euphemizing?
- Is the photograph taken a certain way to achieve a desired effect?
- Can a contrived image yield valid evidence?
- Does a photograph record internal (feel) as well as external (fact) experience?
- How did the photographer approach his subject matter? What were his motives?
- What is the photographer trying to say? Oscar Handlin: Portraits 'expose only part of the truth because they reflect the will of the (photographer) as well as the physiognomy of the sitter.'
- Does the photographer display respect for the subject?
- How can "official" ideology be distinguished from reality? What *lens* is being used?
- How are native people portrayed?
- Were photographs used to attribute legitimacy?
- Are cultural norms that have changed or vanished depicted?
- How were crowds portrayed?
- Do photographs mislead inadvertently?
- What kinds of photographs were produced to assure viewers that society was secure against deviant behaviour?
- What do photographs documenting political behaviour or events tell us about societal values and norms?
- What does the choice of focal point in landscapes or cityscapes reveal?
- Does the photograph reveal overt or covert culture?
- Does a photograph reveal unstated purposes?
- Is there information about racial status?
- Since photographs are documents of a particular era, what was that era's state of mind?
- What evidence do images provide about foreign influence?
- Does the photograph reveal something that society chose to deny?
- How did people conceive of themselves?
- What was the relationship between photographer and subject?
- How do members of different social groups relate to one another?
- What were the relationships between leaders and followers?
- Do photographic images penetrate posed decorum?
- What is the evidence of material culture?
- How did people live and die?
- How did people pose for the camera?
- How is status conveyed?
- Do people in a relaxed state show behaviour or a frame of mind differing from socially expected traits?
- What clues do facial expression and body language offer about status and self-image?
- What do photographs reveal about customs and dress?
- Is there unexpected visual detail?
- Does secondary detail provide information that contrasts with the primary object of interest?
- Does the photograph reveal telling emotion?
- Does the image offer clues to unstated circumstances?
- Does the presence of detail provide more than the photographer intended?
- Does the photograph reveal harsh working conditions?
- Does the photograph depict artifacts or activities which provoke speculation?
- Do photographs capture misery or suffering?
- What do poses of idealized types show?
- How did photographers translate social values?
- What does photographic satire suggest?
- What does cliché say about cultural perceptions?
- What changes show in sequences of images photographed over time?
- What's not in the picture?
- What does the environment in which the subject is photographed say?

¹ Robert M Levine, *Images of History: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Latin American Photographs as Documents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 75-146.