

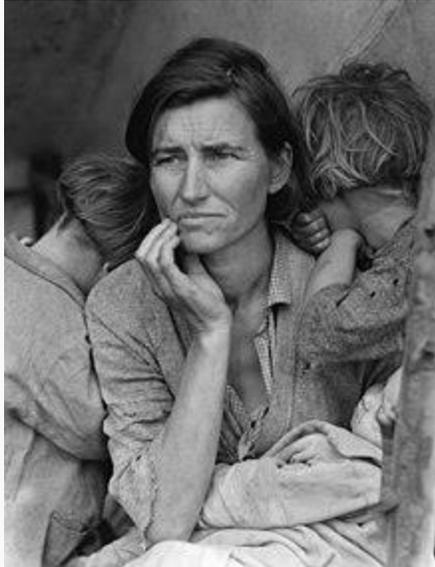
The term *document* applied to photography antedates the mode or genre itself. Photographs meant to accurately describe otherwise unknown, hidden, forbidden, or difficult-to-access places or circumstances date to the earliest daguerreotype and calotype "surveys" of the ruins of the Near East, Egypt, and the American wilderness areas. Nineteenth-century archaeologist [John Beasley Greene](#), for example, traveled to Nubia in the early 1850s to photograph the major ruins of the region;^[1] One early documentation project was the French [Missions Heliographiques](#) organized by the official *Commission des Monuments historiques* to develop an archive of France's rapidly disappearing architectural and human heritage; the project included such photographic luminaries as [Henri Le Secq](#), [Edouard Denis Baldus](#), and [Gustave Le Gray](#).

In the United States, photographs tracing the progress of the [American Civil War](#) (1861-1865) by photographers for at least three consortia of photographic publisher-distributors, most notably [Mathew Brady](#) and [Alexander Gardner](#), resulted in a major archive of photographs ranging from dry records of battle sites to harrowing images of the dead by [Timothy O'Sullivan](#) and evocative images by [George N. Barnard](#). A huge body of photography of the vast regions of the Great West was produced by official government photographers for the [Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories](#) (a predecessor of the [USGS](#)), during the period 1868–1878, including most notably the photographers [Timothy O'Sullivan](#) and [William Henry Jackson](#).^[2]



Power house mechanic working on steam pump (1920) by [Lewis Hine](#)

Both the Civil War and USGS photographic works point up an important feature of documentary photography: the production of an archive of historical significance, and the distribution to a wide audience through publication. The US Government published Survey photographs in the annual *Reports*, as well as portfolios designed to encourage continued funding of scientific surveys.



Migrant Mother (1936) by [Dorothea Lange](#), during the [Great Depression](#)

The development of new reproduction methods for photography provided impetus for the next era of documentary photography, in the late 1880s and 1890s, and reaching into the early decades of the 20th century. This period decisively shifted documentary from antiquarian and landscape subjects to that of the city and its crises.^[3] The refining of [photogravure](#) methods, and then the introduction of [halftone](#) reproduction around 1890 made low cost mass-reproduction in newspapers, magazines and books possible. The figure most directly associated with the birth of this new form of documentary is the journalist and urban social reformer [Jacob Riis](#). Riis was a New York police-beat reporter who had been converted to urban social reform ideas by his contact with medical and public-health officials, some of whom were amateur photographers. Riis used these acquaintances at first to gather photographs, but eventually took up the camera himself. His books, most notably [How the Other Half Lives](#) of 1890 and [The Children of the Slums](#) of 1892, used those photographs, but increasingly he also employed visual materials from a wide variety of sources, including police "mug shots" and photojournalistic images.

Riis's documentary photography was passionately devoted to changing the inhumane conditions under which the poor lived in the rapidly expanding urban-industrial centers. His work succeeded in embedding photography in urban reform movements, notably the [Social Gospel](#) and [Progressive](#) movements. His most famous successor was the photographer [Lewis Wickes Hine](#), whose systematic surveys of conditions of child-labor in particular, made for the [National Child Labor Commission](#) and published in sociological journals like [The Survey](#), are generally credited with strongly influencing the development of child-labor laws in New York and the United States more generally.

In 1900, Englishwoman [Alice Seeley Harris](#) traveled to the [Congo Free State](#) with her husband, [John Hobbis Harris](#) (a missionary). There she photographed Belgian atrocities against local people with an early [Kodak Brownie](#) camera. The images were widely distributed through [magic lantern](#) screenings and were critical in changing public

perceptions of slavery and eventually forcing [Leopold II of Belgium](#) to cede control of the territory to the Belgian government, creating the [Belgian Congo](#).

In the 1930s, the [Great Depression](#) brought a new wave of documentary, both of rural and urban conditions. The [Farm Security Administration](#), a common term for the Historical Division, supervised by [Roy Stryker](#), funded legendary photographic documentarians, including [Walker Evans](#), [Dorothea Lange](#), [Russell Lee](#), [John Vachon](#), and [Marion Post Wolcott](#) among others. This generation of documentary photographers is generally credited for codifying the documentary code of accuracy mixed with impassioned advocacy, with the goal of arousing public commitment to social change.^[4]

During the wartime and postwar eras, documentary photography increasingly became subsumed under the rubric of [photojournalism](#). Swiss-American photographer [Robert Frank](#) is generally credited with developing a counterstrain of more personal, evocative, and complex documentary, exemplified by his work in the 1950s, published in the United States in his 1959 book, *The Americans*. In the early 1960s, his influence on photographers like [Garry Winogrand](#) and [Lee Friedlander](#) resulted in an important exhibition at the [Museum of Modern Art](#) (MoMA), which brought those two photographers together with their colleague [Diane Arbus](#) under the title, *New Documents*. MoMA curator [John Szarkowski](#) proposed in that exhibition that a new generation, committed not to social change but to formal and iconographical investigation of the social experience of modernity, had replaced the older forms of [social documentary photography](#).

In the 1970s and 1980s, a spirited attack on traditional documentary was mounted by historians, critics, and photographers. One of the most notable was the photographer-critic [Allan Sekula](#), whose ideas and the accompanying bodies of pictures he produced, influenced a generation of "new new documentary" photographers, whose work was philosophically more rigorous, often more stridently leftist in its politics. Sekula emerged as a champion of these photographers, in critical writing and editorial work. Notable among this generation are the photographers [Fred Lonidier](#), whose "Health and Safety Game" of 1976 became a model of post-documentary, and [Martha Rosler](#), whose "The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems" of 1974-75 served as a milestone in the critique of classical humanistic documentary as the work of privileged elites imposing their visions and values on the dis-empowered

Although we have covered [documentary photography and its close relationship with photojournalism](#) before, there are still some loose ends, and many people still lack a clear idea of the main difference between the two genres.

Today, our main goal is to establish a more solid concept for each genre and leave us with a clear understanding of what documentary photography and photojournalism are and are not.

The line that divides both genres has become extremely thin for people who are not plugged into photography. That's why this topic deserves a deeper dive.

But before we start talking about each of them, we need to recognize acknowledge that these genres usually get along very well with each other and are not mutually exclusive.

They simply encompass certain things to different degrees, and hence the confusion in defining both.

This is the genre of photography that includes all photographic work that aims to chronicle events and circumstances relevant not only to history but also for us as human beings.

The purposes for pursuing a documentary photography project are quite broad, and include:

- Complaints
- Research
- Awareness
- Entertainment

Some of the most iconic works of documentary photography stem from an initiative led by [Roy Stryker](#) and the Food Safety Administration of the United States during the Great Depression.

Popularly known as “[New Deal Photography](#)“, this project was able to demonstrate that a significant portion of the United States population was suffering during that dark time and had decided to migrate to other states to pursue better opportunities for making a living

When creating documentary work, several questions related to what you want to show, and the result you want to achieve, must be answered. The process of creating a documentary work usually takes much more time than photojournalism-related work. After finding a relevant topic, the photographers must go through a key process: the research phase. Depending on the curiosity of the photographer, the amount of available information and the availability of resources (money and time), this phase can take a long time.

The research phase not only gives the photographer context about what is happening in relation to the topic he has chosen but also provides access to other documents on the same subject.

Research should not discourage anyone. Although genuinely new topics may seem scarce, there’s always a different way to approach old ones. The important thing is to know how issues have been developed in the past and to find a new way to present them and make them relevant today.