

Beginners' Guide to

digital photography



Part 12: Social Documentary

Digital Photography

And what it has meant for the archiving of images

Knowing the Laws

Will you need release forms and permission
when shooting members of the public?

part twelve



Part 12: Social Documentary

The Lighter Side of Life

Social documentary images serve to document social behaviours typical of a period that can be looked upon by future generations as a historic record of changes in society. The way we live our lives change from year to year and from generation to generation. With each new technological leap, or every change in law or political agenda, come changes in lifestyle. We experience change through trends in fashion and hair, advances in automotive and architectural design and more. Some changes impact upon us

more than others, but in most cases we barely notice them as we go about our day-to-day lives. We only really become aware of how much we've changed when revisiting our old images and memories.

We all take photographs that fit into the social documentary category, whether we specifically set out to do so or not. Whether it be a group of friends at a BBQ, a community event or concert, the construction of a new bridge or the repercussions of natural disasters, they are all records of how we are as a society.



Digital Technology

As far as recording our day-to-day lives is concerned, the introduction of digital cameras has been extremely beneficial. These easy to use devices have made photography more attractive to a greater number of people than ever before, and they have massively increased the number of images taken around the globe every day.

The downside to digital technology is that it is also far more easily to lose or delete images. Files stored on the computer can be lost when a computer crashes and those stored on thumb drives and discs can become corrupt. Because images can

now be viewed so easily, many of today's photographs are never printed and as the process of image capture has little cost associated with it, the product is not valued and treasured as it once was. When people become bored with their images, or need more space on their storage devices, images are simply deleted and valuable historic records are lost. Even photo journalists cull their images, keeping only a selection of their coverage. Cast aside are images that, in some cases, provide historic evidence of activities leading up to or surrounding an event.





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What You Will Need

You don't need to invest a lot of money in expensive equipment to undertake this kind of photography but you do need a number of personal attributes in order to do it well. Excellent communication skills, an interest in people and an ease with strangers are all essential, as well as a friendly, compassionate nature and a sensitivity to people's feelings. Never become obtrusive with your photography.

Use long focal lengths in order to zoom in from a distance, turn off any unnecessary camera noise and use natural light whenever possible rather than flash.

Documentary images don't necessarily need to contain people however we are naturally drawn by our curiosity to the lives and struggles of others and its for this reason that we are more deeply effected by images that contain people.



The Law of Photography

There are several laws governing the photographing of people in Australia, and especially the photographing of children and cultural groups. You should familiarise yourself with these laws before using your images for publication, particularly if they are likely to be controversial. Whereas taking

photographs of people in public places is generally permitted, if you intend on using these images for commercial purposes you need to obtain a model release.

For more information on the laws governing photography in Australia and a sample model release, visit www.artslaw.com.au.





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Taking Life Seriously

For those passionate about ensuring change, this genre can be an extremely powerful tool as they set about portraying everyday life in its rawest form.

For many years this style of photography has been used as material evidence of injustices on the path to reform. It is essentially an informative and truthful account, with artistic consideration given to execution and composition. Serious photographers who undertake this style of work have an interest in people and are not afraid to face the reality and, sometimes, not-so-pleasant side of life. They do so in order to bring these realities to the attention of the wider community, which can then place pressure on authorities so issues can finally be addressed and overcome.

Photographers who set out to record images for documentary purposes often do so using black and white medium arguing that colour complicates an image and distracts from the emotional and expressive message that they are trying to convey. If you have Photoshop or some form of digital manipulation software you can shoot in colour and at a later time play around with black and white and see which medium best suits your purpose. It is important that you never digitally alter the context of an image for any reason as you risk portraying events differently to how they actually occurred. Documentary images should remain untouched for the sake of integrity.



Put Your Best Image Forward

Email us the best example of a Social Documentary image that you've taken. Files should be approx 1 MB and received before deadline of 5pm Thursday. Photos can be emailed to photo@dailyexaminer.com.au.

The best images will appear in the next installment of *Beginners' Guide to Digital Photography*, published on Monday 9th May.

Prize for the best image each week will be a 7" Digital Photo Frame.

All photographs appearing in the paper will win the photographer 50 free 6x4 prints in store at Harvey Norman Grafton.

At the end of the course, the best image will win the photographer a Panasonic Digital SLR twin lens camera Kit (DMC-G10KTWIN) VALUED AT \$900.00. **ALL PRIZES COURTESY OF HARVEY NORMAN.**



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