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## The Value of Photography

Published on April 5, 2009 by [David J. Marcou](#) in [Photography](#)



**Why still photography has great value today to all people, or should have great value to us all.**

The word means 'writing with light' – that is, Photography.

Writing is a form of setting down our thoughts, feelings, and facts, as a record of life, and to write with light is to fashion a vocabulary of visual symbols that can have great meaning to human beings and the world.

Many people think today that motion pictures or videos have the most legitimacy in the world of documentation. To me, though, to freeze a key instant in time visually, as it occurs, is a higher calling, even without sound. It is a higher calling, however, only when done well.

Some think all you have to do is take motion pictures, and edit down to stills. That isn't what great still photography is about; it's about the instant the photographer sees/captures the moment that not only is writing/documenting with light, but that is the telling moment – that differentiates that moment from many others.

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When Daguerre and Fox Talbot invented

Photography as we know it today, in 1839,

they may have foreseen that motion

pictures could be valuable. More likely they saw the value in the instant, the document of one

moment – the true moment of recognition – of the sort that modern humanity was not quite capable of until then, though decent recognition was possible with the greatest paintings and sculptures.

What photography does is to yield to the everyday photographer a similar power – of the recognition that we are all in this together, humanity as a great team, en route toward the goals of peace and prosperity for all, happiness for all, really, and for as long as possible.

The first photographers who suggested the sort of recognitions of others I needed, so I could recognize life via my camera/s, too, were Dorothea Lange and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Who can forget Ms. Lange's 'Migrant Mother'? – California's pea-picker and her young children, in desperate straits during the Great Depression. And who can forget Cartier-Bresson's best photos, once you see them; they're incredibly beautiful, though mainly based on everyday, active life.

Today in a world shocked by economic crises, and crises involving violence and murder, it's still relevant to take up a camera, and document our world visually, not only in motion pictures, but in still photos, too.

Once you see still photos decently laid out (as the great editing pioneer Stefan Lorant used to do in Picture Post, or in the first photo-biography of Lincoln) on paper, or in a wondrous slide-show with music, you'll never look back on your still camera and say, 'This is worthless; what am I taking still pictures for?' Instead you'll say, 'Where is that next great picture in my camera?' Or 'When am I, the photographer, going to take that next great photo-document, the one that, yes, writes with light, but also sings to humanity. The one that helps make humanity and the world whole again. The one I was born to take, and make humanity and me happy with?'

This all plus more is the Value of Photography, and I hope, if you think you might be a great photographer about to happen, that you act on that thought, look at other great photos, and find a place for you to 'stray' with your camera – for in that straying is life's message: 'My

views are worthy of consideration, because my subjects are great, no matter how everyday or historic, and my vision is clear.'

David J. Marcou is a father, photographer, writer, editor, and clerk in La Crosse.



Tags: 'Migrant Mother, Daguerre, David J. Marcou., Dorothea Lange, Fox Talbot, Great Depression, Henry Cartier-Bresson, Lincoln, Photography, Picture Post, Stefan Lorant

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
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
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