

Reading Historical Photographs

Today we will be looking at the online materials available at the *La Guardia and Wagner Archives* using the guide in the Course Pack from pp. 54-60. (This guide includes sample photographs from Queens history, including several images from the World's Fair from 1939-40.) There are also images of people working which will give you some historical 'context' for our upcoming course readings on changes over time in factory and manual labor, which will be a question on the Midterm / Essay #2.

******This exercise is designed to let you understand historical photographs and to start thinking about these resources for your research.

- In groups of 3:

I. Sample Photographs from the La Guardia and Wagner Archives – Queens Collection

- First, spend 5 – 7 minutes looking over the pictures on pp. 51-60 in the Course Pack.

[LINK: bit.ly/3Eei1Fx](https://bit.ly/3Eei1Fx)

As a group, **choose 2 photographs to think about**. One photograph should have at least one person in it. One photograph should have a landscape or depict a building or other form of architecture.

******Write down your group's 2 choices here:

A) Photo of Person(s): __Photo ID #: _____ Page: ____

B) Photo of Building / Outdoor Scene: __Photo ID #: _____ Page: ____

II. Photo A – Person(s)

1) Now based on our discussion of the "How To Read a Photograph" handout, describe your first photo of a person (or people). Remember to look at the whole photograph first. Then look for details that aren't obvious. Try to do some 'close reading' of the photo.

******Make some notes for your photo, which you will report to the class:

2) Now answer question #2 from the handout. Try to imagine what life was like for the person (or people) in your photograph. **Try to be specific and use the 'evidence' in the photo to back up what you say.** Aim for 2 or 3 short sentences.

(~15 min.)

● **Reporting Out** – One person from each group should be ready to report your group's responses to the first two questions that describe your photo of a person (or people) for the class.

III. Photo B – A Place

3) Again, based on the "How To Read a Photograph" handout, describe your **photo of a place** using some 'close reading.' Try to read the photo carefully and give us a sense of the time and place of that the image was taken. (Hint: look at the caption for the year and description of what place is depicted in the photo.) Look for something that isn't immediately obvious.

***Make some notes on this second photo. Be ready to share these with the class.

4) Now answer question #4 from the handout (if applicable). If not, answer question #5 (on the tone of your photo). If this image is of a real place, try to explain what is different today as compared to the 'historical' image. **Is this place still recognizable to you or not?** If you have chosen a World's Fair image, you can also answer this question by looking at how the designers of the fair used 'models' to represent the 'present day' (of the 1930s) or even the future. (Some of the pictures actually are attempts to predict what cities would look like. If you chose one of these images, you might judge whether the scene looks like a real city today or not. We will be looking at how the makers of the World's Fairs were interested in describing the future of America. As we will see the fair's depiction of the future of cities and cars seems to have been correct.)

*Again, try to write down a few sentences that 'analyzes' this second image carefully. **Try to explain for the class what is interesting about this photograph** and why your group chose it.

(~12 min.)

● **More Reporting Out** – We will collect the class responses to questions #3 and #4, so another reporter from each team should be read to 'report out' this set of answers.