

Module 05: 1968 — A Generation in Revolt?

Evidence 31: Critical Visual Literacy: Photo Study of Chicago in 1968



Introduction

As a primary source, photographs are notoriously difficult for historians to use effectively. Many people accept photographs as visual facts, or as the capturing of a moment in time on film. People often believe that photographs speak for themselves. Yet if we think critically about how photography records history, many questions come to the fore, such as:

- Do photographs capture a neutral moment in time?
- What is the role of the photographer in framing the photograph?
- Why has the photographer chosen to shoot that particular scene?
- What has the photographer left out of the frame?
- Has the picture been cropped?
- Who exactly took the picture and to what purpose?

Even if photographs capture a historical moment, the image often exists bereft of context, without which, whether visual or textual, divining meaning becomes very difficult. Take, for example, the following photographs from Chicago in 1968. Click on the image or the link below it to watch an exploratory animation.



[\(click to play\)](#)