For all our deceased loved ones,
and those others dearest to us at present and in future.

Sponsors: Rose C. Muskat Marcou; Matthew and Jessica Amarneke Marcou; Tom and Joy Marcou; Bernard McGarty; Charles and Christine Freiberg; David W. Johns; and Ignacio and Argentina Peterson.

"The contemplation of things as they are without substitution or imposture without error or confusion is in itself a nobler thing than a whole harvest of invention."
- Francis Bacon (From a Sign in the Dorothea Lange Darkroom).

David J. Marcou is author of 112 books so far. His ancestors were explorers, teachers, farmers, shop-owners. David J. graduated schools in La Crosse, plus the Universities of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Missouri. In 1981 he was a London Sunday Times intern. He photographed Mother Teresa in 1985 and received 18 letters from her. David's works have been nominated for Pulitzers and POY's. They're credited in leading newspapers, magazines, and archives in America, Britain, S. Korea, etc. In 2011-2012, two 2008 campaign photos he took were in a group-show at the Smithsonian curated by David Haberstick. "Gift of the Artist". David J. Marcou's son, Matthew, is an Army Special Ops Combat Medic veteran and top university Engineering student married to Jessica Amarneke Marcou, a dedicated artist and university teacher.


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Spirit of America, Vol. 28: Things As They Are - Eight 20th Century Documentary Photo Masters

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Note on this opening essay’s subject:

Henri Cartier-Bresson, the great star of 20th century photojournalism, wandered the world with his camera, becoming immersed in its human environments. He covered many of the world’s biggest events of that period.

EARLY YEARS

Widely considered one of the leading artistic forces of the 20th century, Henri Cartier-Bresson was born on August 22, 1908 in Chanteloup, France. The oldest of five children, his family was wealthy — his father was a key textile manufacturer — but the photographer Cartier-Bresson later joked that due to his parents’ frugal ways, it often seemed as though his family was poor. (In fact as a young man traveling in Africa, he once fell so ill he believed he’d die, and sent a message home asking his family to bury him properly. His grandfather sent a message back saying it was preferable he come home first!)

Educated in Paris, Henri developed an early love for literature and the arts. Creativity was a key part of his DNA. His great-grandfather and an uncle had been noted artists. Even his father dabbled in drawing. As a teen, Cartier-Bresson rebelled against his parents' formality. Early in his adult life he drifted toward communism. But it was art that remained at the center of all for him. In 1927 he began a two-year stint studying painting under noted early Cubist, André Lhote, then moved to Cambridge University to immerse himself in art and literature courses.

Sparked by the avant-garde and surrealist scenes of Paris and fresh from his release from the Army, which had stationed him just outside Paris, Cartier-Bresson traveled to Africa in 1931 to hunt antelope and boar. Not interested in actually eating what he'd tracked down, Cartier-Bresson eventually grew tired of the sport and quit it. But Africa did fuel another interest: photography. He experimented with a simple Brownie he'd received as a gift, taking pictures of the exotic people and world around him.

For Cartier-Bresson there were direct parallels between his old passion and his new one. "I adore shooting photographs," he'd later note. "It's like being a hunter. But some hunters are vegetarians—which is my relationship to photography." He also stated that all good photographers should demonstrate a "velvet hand" and a "hawk's eye". But unlike W. Eugene Smith and select other photojournalists and photo-documentarians, he wasn’t overly interested in the printing of his photos. In fact, as his frustrated editors would discover, Cartier-Bresson preferred taking shots rather than making prints and showing his work.

Upon returning to France later that year, Cartier-Bresson purchased his first 35mm Leica, a camera whose simple style and stunning results would help define the photographer's work. For the rest of his life, Cartier-Bresson's approach to photography would remain much the same. He made clear his disdain for the augmented image, one that had been enhanced by artificial light, dark room effects, even cropping. The naturalist in Cartier-Bresson believed all edits should be
done when the image was captured through the camera-lens. His equipment load was generally light: a 50mm lens and, if needed, a 90mm lens too.

COMMERCIAL SUCCESS

Cartier-Bresson's rise as a photographer was rapid. By the mid-1930s, he'd shown his work in major exhibits in Mexico, New York, and Madrid. His images revealed the early possibilities of faster-speed street photography and photojournalism in general.

During an exhibit of his prints in New York in 1935, Henri befriended another photographer, Paul Strand, who was experimenting with movie film. Inspired by Strand’s work, Cartier-Bresson abandoned photography and returned to France, where he was taken on as an assistant to French filmmaker Jean Renoir. Over the next three years, Cartier-Bresson worked on a handful of Renoir films, including the most critically acclaimed, “La Règle Du Jeu” (“The Rules of the Game”, 1939). But the documentarian in Cartier-Bresson had no use or particular talent for directing feature films. Instead, he was drawn to showing real stories about real life.

His own life took a dramatic turn in 1940, following the German invasion of France. Cartier-Bresson joined the army, but was soon captured by German forces and forced into prison-of-war camps the next three years. In 1943, after two failed attempts, Cartier-Bresson escaped for good and immediately returned to his still photography and movie work. He created a photo department for the resistance and following the end of the war, was commissioned by the United States to direct a documentary movie about the return of French prisoners.

MAN OF THE WORLD

Not long after the war, in 1947, Cartier-Bresson traveled to the United States, photographing prison life, William Faulkner in Mississippi, and a feisty elderly lady draped in an American flag in New England, among US subjects. Then, he went to the Mideast, spending considerable time in India, where he met and photographed Mahatma Gandhi shortly before his assassination in 1948. Cartier-Bresson's subsequent work to document Gandhi's death and its immediate impact on the country became one of Life magazine's most prized photo-essays.

His work to solidify photojournalism as both legitimate news and an art form went beyond what he did behind the camera. In 1947 he teamed up with Robert Capa, George Rodger, David 'Chim' Seymour, and William Vandivert, and founded Magnum Photos, one of the world's premier photo agencies. A wanderer at heart, Henri's interest in the world led him on a three-year odyssey through Asia. When he returned to France in 1952, he published his first book, “The Decisive Moment”, or when translated more accurately from its French original, “Images on the Run,” a rich collection of his work spanning two decades.

In that defining publication, Henri stated: “To me photography is the simultaneous recognition in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression.” That photographer star was careful to state that what any good photographer is trying to capture is the essence of an event. To comprehend what is occurring, one must recognize “both the fact itself and the rigorous organization of
visually perceived forms that give it meaning. It is putting one’s head, one’s eyes and one’s heart on the same axis.”

Cartier-Bresson further pointed out that to the gifted, focused photographer, composition should be a constant preoccupation. The risk in this human geometry is that style or form may override content in importance, when they should be in fair balance. One photo of Cartier-Bresson’s is considered his trademark image, though he took many hundreds of truly stellar photos along the way.

Henri’s all-time trademark image is his view of a man in jacket and hat leaping over a large puddle at a Paris train station. He ascends apparently from a flat ladder in the water and doesn’t appear he’ll make land without getting wet. His leap is mirrored in the puddle and in a dance poster on the wall in back. There is also a rail fence in back, and a man by that fence who is also mirrored in the puddle. Timing, lighting, main subject, circumstances/context, a click of the shutter, and good luck are all involved in that very memorable “still” image.

To be sure, the book cemented Cartier-Bresson’s reputation as a photographer with a great heart, mind, and eye. It also helped that some of his photos were included in Edward Steichen’s large-scale “Family of Man” group-show in 1955. Over the course of his long career, Henri took his Leica round the world to visually document triumph and tragedy in varied forms. He was there for the Spanish Civil War and the demise of traditional China due to the Chinese communist revolution. He documented George VI's coronation and told the story of Khrushchev's Russia. His subjects ranged from Che Guevara to Marilyn Monroe, while his magazine clients ranged from Life and Paris Match to Harper’s Bazaar, Vogue, and many others.

By comparison, take many of Cartier-Bresson’s iconic photos vis-a-vis one by Edouard Boubat from 1958 Portugal. There’s no motion or whimsy in Boubat’s very staid, but decent street portrait of a woman selling flowers from an umbrella-canopied stand in front of an apartment building. The lady is dressed in black with her hands in muff and a simple picnic-style basket at other side of stand. She expresses very simply the tedium perhaps, yet the dignity of a beautiful woman who must work on the street for a living, but an honest living at least. There’s none of Henri’s mass of boys playing wildly on the other side of a hole in an old wall, the front-cover photo to Cartier-Bresson’s Aperture Masters of Photography monograph; Edouard’s photo shows no joie de vivre ala Henri, but not every life-moment is thoroughly joyful, as even Henri knew.

LATER YEARS

In 1966, Cartier-Bresson quit Magnum and turned his focus a bit more on where it had once been: drawing and painting. He disdained doing interviews and refused to talk much about his previous career as a photographer, seemingly content to bury himself in his notebooks, sketching landscapes and figurines. Still, ca. 2000, Henri was the subject of an in-depth interview by PBS-TV’s Charlie Rose, resulting in my writing to Mr. Cartier-Bresson twice, and in two of his photo-postcards being sent to me and inscribed/signed by him, and being published in group-books I directed-edited.
Then, in 2003, Henri, plus wife Martine Franck and his daughter, took an important step in securing his legacy as an artist with the creation of the Foundation Henri Cartier-Bresson in Paris to preserve his work. His later years would also see him receive numerous awards and honorary doctorates. Just a few weeks shy of his 96th birthday, Henri Cartier-Bresson passed away at his home in Provence on August 3, 2004.
“Robert Frank (1924-Present): Immigrant Becomes an Iconic American Photographer” – FROM TRAGEDIES TO GREATNESS

Robert Frank's “The Americans” came into this world, ca. 1958. It has since taken on such iconic status among photojournalists and others, it is almost impossible to criticize successfully. To be sure, Mr. Frank's photos can be both beautiful and dispiriting at once, which is how some people would define the American culture from which those photos came, though only semi-accurately at that.

Many of us can sympathize with Mr. Frank's personal background, because he lost both his children, apparently before they gave him grandchildren. His daughter, Andrea, died in a plane crash in 1974; his son, Pablo, died partly due to the effects of schizophrenia in 1994. It's hard not to admire key Frank photos -- especially some of his work in Britain, and in America his tuba piece de resistance, his trolley car with open windows, and his woman and girl in separate tenement windows near an American flag -- because Mr. Frank knows how to take a superb picture, when he truly wants to.

At his best, Mr. Frank, as still photographer, is reminiscent of a slightly more existential Walker Evans, his chief mentor and champion. Both men's candid American shots and photos of buildings and signs, helped inspire many photojournalists and documentarians to do candid street photography.

THE EARLY YEARS

Robert Frank was born in Switzerland. He states in the 2005 documentary "Leaving Home, Coming Home" by Director Gerald Fox, that his mother, Rosa (others state her name as Regina), had a Swiss passport, while his father, Hermann, originating from Frankfurt, Germany, had become stateless after losing German citizenship as a Jew. They had to apply for the Swiss citizenship of Robert and his older brother, Manfred. Though Robert and his family remained safe in Switzerland during World War II, the threat of Nazism nonetheless affected his understanding of freedom too often being limited by oppression.

Mr. Frank turned to photography, in part as a means to escape the confines of his business-oriented family and home, and trained under a few photographers and graphic designers before creating his first hand-made book of photographs, “40 Fotos”, in 1946. Robert emigrated to the United States in 1947, and secured a job in New York City as a fashion photographer for Harper’s Bazaar. He soon left to travel in South America and Europe. He created another hand-made book of photos he shot in Peru, and returned to the U.S. in 1950. That year was momentous for Frank, who, after meeting Edward Steichen, participated in the group show “51 American Photographers” at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA); he also married fellow artist Mary Frank née Mary Lockspeiser, with whom he had children Andrea and Pablo.
Though he was at first optimistic about US society and culture, Robert Frank's perspective abruptly changed as he confronted the rapid pace of American life and what he saw as too strong an emphasis on money. He came to see America as an often bleak and lonely place, a perspective that became evident in his later work. Frank's own dissatisfaction with the control editors exercised over his work also affected his experience. He continued to travel, moving his family briefly to Paris. In 1953, he returned to New York and continued to work as a freelance photojournalist for magazines including McCall’s, Vogue, and Fortune. Associating with other contemporary photographers such as Saul Leiter and Diane Arbus, he helped form what Jane Livingston has termed The New York School of Photographers (not to be confused with the New York School of Art) during the 1940s and 1950s.

THE AMERICANS

With the aid of his major artistic influence, the photographer Walker Evans, Robert Frank secured a Guggenheim Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in 1955 to travel across the United States and photograph all strata of its society. Cities he visited included Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan; Savannah, Georgia; Miami Beach and St. Petersburg, Florida; New Orleans, Louisiana; Houston, Texas; Los Angeles, California; Reno, Nevada; Salt Lake City, Utah; Butte, Montana; and Chicago, Illinois. He took his family along with him for part of his series of road trips over the next two years, during which time he took 28,000 photos; 83 of these were selected by him for publication in “The Americans”.

Robert Frank's journey was not without incident; he may be seen as responding to the era of McCarthyism that influenced the nation then, and his cross-country ventures. He later recalled the anti-Semitism he was subject to in a small Arkansas town. As he said, his photos “came naturally to show what I felt, seeing those faces, those people, the kind of hidden violence. The country at that time – the McCarthy period – I felt it very strongly.”

“I remember the guy [policeman] took me into the police station, and he sat there and put his feet on the table. It came out that I was Jewish because I had a letter from the Guggenheim Foundation. They really were primitive.” He was told by the sheriff, “Well, we have to get somebody who speaks Yiddish. They wanted to make a thing out of it. It was the only time it happened on the trip. They put me in jail. It was scary. Nobody knew where I was.” Elsewhere in the South, he was told by a sheriff he had "an hour to leave town."

Shortly after returning to New York in 1957, Frank met Beat writer Jack Kerouac on the sidewalk outside a party and showed him the photos from his travels. Kerouac immediately told Frank, "Sure I can write something about these pictures," and he contributed the introduction to the first U.S. edition of The Americans. Frank also became lifelong friends with the poet Allen Ginsberg, and was one of the main visual artists to document the Beat subculture, which felt an affinity with Frank’s interest in documenting the tensions between the optimism of the 1950s and
the realities of class and racial differences in America. The irony Frank found in the gloss of nationalist culture and wealth over this tension gave his photos a clear contrast to those of most of that period’s American photojournalists, as did his use of unusual focus, low lighting and cropping that deviated from accepted photo techniques.

This divergence from period photographic standards gave Robert Frank difficulty at first in securing a US publisher. He said, “They wouldn’t publish it. They thought it was terrible – anti-American, un-American, dirty, overexposed, crooked.” “Les Américains” was first published in 1958 by Robert Delpire in Paris, as part of its “Encyclopedie Essentielle” series, with texts by Simone de Beauvoir, Erskine Caldwell, William Faulkner, Henry Miller, and John Steinbeck that Delpire positioned opposite Mr. Frank’s photos. It was published in 1959 in the United States without those texts by Grove Press, where it initially received much criticism. Popular Photography, for one, derided his images as "meaningless blur, grain, muddy exposures, drunken horizons and general sloppiness." Though sales were poor at first, that the introduction was by the popular Kerouac, helped it reach a larger audience.

Over time, though, and through its inspiration of later artists, “The Americans” became a seminal work in American photography and art history, and is the work with which Frank is clearly most identified. Critic Sean O’Hagan writing in The Guardian in 2014, said "it is impossible to imagine photography’s recent past and overwhelmingly confusing present without his lingeringly pervasive presence", adding “[The Americans] changed the nature of photography, what it could say and how it could say it. . . . It remains perhaps the most influential photography book of the 20th century.”

It’s important to note Mr. Frank’s style was condensed and dense, unlike Cartier-Bresson’s, which was capacious, light, and often whimsical. “Parade—Hoboken, New Jersey” is the first reproduction in Frank’s seminal book. A woman’s figure is seen in each of two windows. The shade of the left window throws one face into shadow. An American flag attached to that window frame blows across the right window, blocking the second woman’s face. No parade is shown, only two isolated figures in a plain brick façade, making the photo’s title heavily ironic.

Frank’s book is sequential but not “strip-sequential” (meaning not chronological and single-event-oriented). And it’s not a photo-essay in the accepted sense. It is filled, though, with hard-hitting images, suggesting America was a more diverse and dangerous place than generally accepted, and not often a happy place in the 1950s.

In 1955, a few Robert Frank photos were included in Edward Steichen’s monumental group-show, “The Family of Man”. In 1961, Mr. Frank received his first individual show, entitled “Robert Frank: Photographer”, at the Art Institute of Chicago. He also showed at MoMA in New York in 1962. To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the first publication of “The Americans”, a new edition was released worldwide on May 30, 2008. For this new edition from Steidl, most photos
were un-cropped compared with the cropped versions in previous editions, and two photos were replaced with those of the same subject but from an alternate perspective.

A celebratory exhibit of “The Americans”, titled “Looking In: Robert Frank’s The Americans,” was displayed in 2009 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The second section of the four-section, 2009 SFMOMA exhibition displays Frank’s original application to the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (which funded the primary work on the seminal book’s origins), along with vintage contact sheets, letters to mentor Walker Evans and writer Jack Kerouac, and two early manuscript versions of Kerouac’s book-introduction. Also exhibited were three collages (made from more than 115 original rough work prints) that were assembled under Frank’s supervision in 2007 and 2008, revealing his intended themes as well as his first rounds of image selection. An accompanying book, also titled “Looking In: Robert Frank’s The Americans,” was published.

FILMS

By the time of the US publication of “The Americans”, Robert Frank had moved away from photography and on to filmmaking. Among his films was the 1959 “Pull My Daisy”, written and narrated by Kerouac and starring Ginsberg, Greg Corso, and others from the Beat group he’d photographed. The Beats emphasized spontaneity and the film seemed to have been thrown together or even improvised. The film was accordingly praised for years as an improvisational masterpiece, until Frank's co-director, Alfred Leslie, revealed in a November 28, 1968 article in the Village Voice that the film was actually carefully planned, rehearsed, and directed by him and Frank, who shot it with professional lighting.

In 1960, Frank was staying in Pop artist George Segal’s basement while filming “Sin of Jesus” with a grant from Walter K. Gutman. Isaac Babel’s story was transformed to focus on a woman working on a chicken farm in New Jersey. It was originally supposed to be filmed in six weeks in and around New Brunswick, but Frank ended up shooting for six months.

His 1972 documentary about the Rolling Stones, “Cocksucker Blues”, is arguably his best known film. The work shows the Stones on their 1972 tour, engaging in heavy drug use and group sex. Perhaps more disturbing to the Stones when they saw the actual film, however, was the degree to which Frank faithfully captured the loneliness and despair of life on the road. Mick Jagger apparently told Frank, "It's a fucking good film, Robert, but if it shows in America we'll never be allowed in the country again." The Stones sued to prevent the film's release, and it was disputed whether Frank as filmic artist or the Stones as those who hired the artist, held the copyright. A court order resolved this by restricting the film to being shown no more than five times per year and only in the presence of Robert Frank. Frank's photos also appeared on the
cover of the Rolling Stones' album “Exile on Main St.” Other films by Frank include “Me and My Brother”, “Keep Busy”, and “Candy Mountain”, which he co-directed with Rudy Wurlitzer.

Though Frank continued to be interested in film and video, he returned to still images in the 1970s, publishing his photo book “The Lines of My Hand” in 1972. This work has been described as a "visual autobiography", and consists largely of personal photos. However, he largely gave up "straight" photography to instead create narratives out of constructed images and collages, incorporating words and multiple frames of images that were directly scratched and distorted on the negatives. None of this later work has achieved anything near as much impact as “The Americans”. As some critics have pointed out, this may be because Mr. Frank began playing with constructed images more than a decade after Robert Rauschenberg introduced his silkscreen composites — in contrast to “The Americans”, Frank's later images were not new developments beyond accepted technique and practice by then.

Robert Frank and first wife Mary separated in 1969. He remarried, to sculptor June Leaf, and in 1971, moved to Mabou, Nova Scotia, in Cape Breton Island, Canada. In 1974, tragedy struck when his daughter, Andrea, was killed in a plane crash in Guatemala. Also around this time, his son, Pablo, was first hospitalized and diagnosed with schizophrenia. Much of Frank's subsequent work has dealt with the impact of the loss of both his daughter and subsequently his son, who died in an Allentown, Pennsylvania hospital in 1994. In 1995, he founded the Andrea Frank Foundation, which provides grants to artists.

Since his move to Nova Scotia, Frank has divided his time between his former fisherman's shack along the coast, and his Bleecker Street loft in New York City. He has acquired a reputation for being a recluse (particularly since Andrea’s death), declining most interviews and public appearances. He has continued to accept eclectic assignments, though, such as photographing the 1984 Democratic National Convention, and directing music videos for artists such as New Order ("Run"), and Patti Smith ("Summer Cannibals"). Frank continues to produce both films and still images, has helped organize retrospectives of his art, and his work has been represented by Pace/MacGill Gallery in New York since 1984. In 1994, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, presented the most comprehensive retrospective of Robert Frank's work to date, entitled “Moving Out”.

Finally, Robert Frank’s most influential work, “The Americans”, has been compared to Alexis de Tocqueville’s superb critique of the 19th century United States, “Democracy in America”, with subtle but insightful interplays of criticism and acceptance. And Mr. Frank’s pivotal photo book also has helped inspire generations of photojournalists and documentarians, including a series of books I’ve authored, “Spirit of America,” which so far comprises 28 volumes with this one, among more than 110 books I've authored and published so far.
“Bert Hardy (1913-1995)” -- or Chapter 1 of “The Cockney Eye”, Also Authored by David Joseph Marcou.

Stefan Lorant, who was generally a very shrewd judge of photographic talent, and who was the first truly great editor/idea-man for pictorial magazines at the outset of their golden age, once told me Bert Hardy – lead-photographer for Britain’s Picture Post magazine (1938-57) – was not one of the greatest cameramen working in those days. Lorant said Mr. Hardy – who died in 1995 at age 82 – was in the “second rank” of photographers from that period.

Now, I doubt Mr. Lorant was being totally fair to Mr. Hardy, and the same can be said of the one-time head of the photojournalism sequence for the Missouri School of Journalism, Angus McDougall, who told me in late 1981, that Bert Hardy was not an A-class photographer. When I wrote the first draft of my book on Mr. Hardy, “The Cockney Eye”, in 1997 (first published in early 2013), few experts outside of Britain were singing the praises of Bert Hardy. In more recent years, though, many experts worldwide have been doing that, some even giving his populist approach to picture-taking credit for being the cornerstone of “The Picture Post Aesthetic”.

PICTURE POST AND BERT HARDY

Stefan Lorant was the founding genius of Picture Post, and when he first discussed his credentials and ideas with soon-to-be-PP-owner Edward Hulton (later knighted), there must have been a gleam in the eye of the capitalists they both at least partially were (albeit Lorant also believed in a key degree of socialism). Lorant had worked on leading picture magazines in Hungary, Germany, and then in Britain (where he began Lilliput and Weekly Illustrated), before founding Picture Post. And the pioneering picture editor did as much for the conceptualization and layout of that British publication as any man or woman ever did. For his part, Hulton must have seen a great opportunity in front of him, for he pounced on his chance and didn’t let go of it – until 1957, that is, when he gave up the battle with television, etc., for popular support.

However, it was Bert Hardy’s inimitable personality and pictures that would help bring Picture Post out of the pre-World War II years, through the war itself, and then well into the post-war era. Lorant, an irreverent Hungarian with a touch of Jewish ancestry had been a prisoner of Hitler’s for six months in 1933, and had, soon after, written the million-selling book “I Was Hitler’s Prisoner”. He decided to flee to America in 1940, where he made his home until his death in 1997, rather than risk being captured again by the Nazis. Before then at Picture Post, he was the Nazis’ worst editorial enemy.

Although Bert Hardy – the oldest of seven children who been raised in the rough-and-tumble world of London’s Elephant and Castle District and who had left school at age 14 to work in the photo-processing and -delivery business -- had been published in Picture Post from its fourth issue until its last, Lorant and Hardy apparently didn’t know each other well if at all while Lorant was in charge. Hardy’s work first came into the magazine from a picture agency he was working for, and he wasn’t credited for his work in the magazine until Feb. 1, 1941 with his “Fire-
Fighters!” photo-essay, soon after Tom Hopkinson (later knighted) became editor of Picture Post. And yet Lorant, who executed the layouts of virtually every single issue of Picture Post during the 20+ months he led it, must have worked with Hardy’s pictures sufficiently to have asked once or twice, who took the pictures in Hardy’s case. Lorant had been training his successor as editor, Hopkinson, and Hardy would gain immeasurably from working with the bright British editor rather than the Continentally-raised genius Lorant, who was partial to his German photographers.

Mr. Hopkinson was thrilled to have Bert Hardy sign on as a full-time freelancer for the magazine, soon after Lorant left. The new editor wrote in his autobiography, “Of This Our Time”: “In addition [besides Honor Balfour, Macdonald Hastings, Maurice Edelman, AL Lloyd, and Anne Scott-James, the writers the new editor added to his staff when he took over], to my great excitement, we found a remarkable new photographer. Bert Hardy was a young Cockney, the eldest of seven children, who had left school at fourteen. He left on a Friday afternoon and started work on Saturday morning in a printing and developing works at ten shillings a week with sixpence an hour overtime…. When Bert Hardy came in to see me he was in his twenties and already an experienced cameraman.”

HARDY MAKES HIS FIRST MARK

Hardy soon established a positive reputation on Picture Post. His first commission from Hopkinson was to photograph an air-raid shelter in 1940. Hardy was pressed for light, and ended up developing his film nearly four hours, after which the images that appeared “were Rembrandts”, he said, showing mothers with their anxious children underground.

Next, sent out to cover fire-fighters during the Nazi Blitz over London in January 1941, Hardy risked his life several times one night and returned with his first great picture-story – including the first photographer-credit in Picture Post history. That picture-story begins with a photo of roof fire-spotters, pointing into the distance. After a build-up in which the declaration “The Fights Is On” figures prominently, the final two-page spread evokes especially great admiration and empathy from readers. Two full-page photos stand side-by-side as dramatic images of the fire-fighters in perilous situations. The caption for the picture at left reads: “THE HEIGHT OF THE BLAZE: Eighty Feet up in the Air a Fireman Strikes at the Heart of the Fire – Stark and grim is the climax of the fire fight. Blazing walls are crumbling. The fire is bursting through. Overhead, guided by the flames, the German bombers are circling. One after another they release their load of death. Unmoved, unflinching, the firemen run out their ladder. One man mounts, higher and higher, till he is alone above the flames. There, eighty feet up, he strikes at the very source of the fire.”

Just as the overall image photographed from down below is gripping, so too is the close-up as it appears on the right-hand page, a lone fire-fighter, up-high. In that still, a figure looms, looking the mad clown. His hand dangles over the edge of a burning building, while in the background,
en-flamed rafters appear to slant like falling skyscrapers. Is he alive or dead? No one seems to know. But the caption beneath that photo summarizes and highlights the mission of all the fire-fighters (plus the photographer) seen in this photo-essay: “THE MAN ON THE LADDER”: In Clouds of Smoke and Steam He Faces the Fire Alone – All night long they have fought the fire. They have fought it in the streets streaming with water. They have fought it within buildings blazing like a furnace. On to the flames they have poured a hundred thousand gallons of water, concentrated at colossal pressure. And still the fight goes on. From our rule of anonymity we except these pictures. They were taken by A. [Albert] Hardy, one of our own cameramen.”

To Stefan Lorant’s credit, just before Tom Hopkinson’s tenure began, the founding editor had been adamant about not using photographer-names in the magazine, mainly because two of the cameramen he had brought with him from the Continent – Felix Man(n) and Kurt Hutton (formerly Hans Bauman and Kurt Hubschmann) – were German nationals, and they needed protection for themselves and the relatives they left behind, protection engineered by their sympathetic friend and boss, Mr. Lorant. Despite Hopkinson’s also being aware of their needs during his own tenure, he decided to occasionally give name credits with stories and photos during the way to some creators, especially while Man and Hutton were interned on the Isle of Man as “protected aliens”. After the war, there was much more freedom to use contributor-names with the works in Picture Post, and Man and Hutton eventually enjoyed a bit of their own celebrity status in its pages then, too.

Bert Hardy went on to cover many other aspects of World War II, as well as any Allied photographer did. He was there for the crossing at Normandy; the liberation of Paris; the crossing of the Rhine; a notable fire-rescue in Osnabruck, Germany; the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, also in Germany; war-crimes trials in the Far East while he was Lord Mountbatten’s personal photographer; and the end of World War II. He served as a sergeant in the British Army’s Film Unit during those years (1942-46); and he performed so well that Picture Post continued to use his work whenever the Army made it available to that magazine.

BEYOND WORLD WAR II

After Hardy’s return to England in 1946, Hopkinson offered him full-time employment once again for the magazine, and the ambitious, 33-year-old photographer returned to work there. Soon he was off to India to cover the formation of the first constituent assembly, after that nation declared its independence from Britain. That coverage went well, and Hardy continued to travel for Picture Post. He went to Egypt and other parts of Africa, to cover coups and civil wars. And he went to Yugoslavia to take the first postwar pictures of Marshal Tito and Mrs. Tito by a Westerner, once Tito had officially assumed power. Also, Hardy was in Spain and France often, as well as in other foreign lands.

Back at home too, Hardy worked extensively. Touching base whenever he could, the photographer made sure his family (sons Michael and Terry) were being properly tended to by
his first wife, Dora. He took many superb pictures while in Britain. He photographed a
memorable shop-girl in Birmingham; the slum-dwellers of Glasgow (which yielded his favorite
photo – of two young street urchins off on a lark); the neighborhoods of his own childhood, the
old Elephant & Castle District in London; the unemployment situation in Northern Ireland;
showgirls in Blackpool (which resulted in one of his most famous-ever photos); poor blacks and
whites in Cardiff and Liverpool; and countless “ordinary” Brits, at work and at play. Hardy was
so skilled, in this regard, that his New York Times obituary said, “his work was notable for an
empathy and delicacy that never became sentimental.”

Tom Hopkinson even suggested that, in the area of character-revelation, Hardy was a genius. In
“Contemporary Photographers”, he called Hardy – “one of the great recorders of social
conditions in the tradition of John Thomson, Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine. “He belongs,” one critic
wrote, “to a British tradition which favours anecdote and human incident. He pictures people as
characters, and his work is a rich source for any study of the folk-life of Britain, a modern
continuation of the graphic tradition of Hogarth and Rowlandson.”

However, as much as Hardy’s reputation rests with everyday folk, the “Cockney Cassius Clay”,
as he was called once, also garnered a reputation for his pictures of celebrities. His favorite
distance for taking pictures was about six feet, and he captured many great personages on film
from that distance. Queen Elizabeth II (including, though not so close-up, his stunning active
montage of the Queen entering the Paris Opera in 1957); Prince Philip; Sir Winston Churchill;
Marlene Dietrich; Frank Sinatra; Ava Gardner; Ingrid Bergman; Audrey Hepburn; Johnny Ray;
Jimmy Durante; Sugar Ray Robinson; George Formby; JB Priestley; Danny Kaye; Diana Dors;
the aforementioned Titos; Gens. Eisenhower, Montgomery; Zhukov; and Pandit Nehru, just to
name a few. And the religious were not slighted either, as he photographed top Catholic and
Anglican hierarchy, plus Jewish, Buddhist, and Muslim clergy, as well.

MEMORIES OF HIS PERSONAL HEROISM

The work of Bert Hardy is one thing, monumental in the various life-facets it touched and
revealed; the man was another – warm and friendly, but also always cognizant of where his next
pictures had to come from, where his bread (spiritually, physically, and economically) was to be
buttered.

To show the depth of the man, three other events need mentioning here. The first occurred in
Osnabruck, Germany, when Sgt. Hardy and his jeep driver came upon a smoke-filled basement.
The sergeant sent his driver back for more help, while he himself put down his camera and risked
his life to save more than a dozen Russian slave women. (German police had set the fire, and left
the women there to burn alive.) Hardy pulled several women out, and when his driver returned
with more help, Bert began taking pictures. He recorded the scenes for posterity. Bert Hardy was
a genuine hero, even if he didn’t plan on being one then.
Another place Mr. Hardy showed his courage was in 1950 Korea. James Cameron, the distinguished British writer, and he were sent to cover US President Truman’s “police action”, after another Picture Post journalist (Stefan Schimanski) had been killed in an explosion, flying between Korea and Japan.

In Pusan, Korea in early September of that year, Hardy and Cameron reported on 700 (by Cameron’s count) South Korean political prisoners being herded onto trucks by UN troops, possibly to be taken out and shot. Publisher Edward Hulton ordered the presses stopped on that picture-story, because he claimed that, printed, it would give “aid and comfort to the enemy”. Editor Tom Hopkinson wanted the picture-story published and was fired for his zeal. A bit more journalism history was then made when that now-famous bit of self-censorship resulted in Cameron’s text being pirated away by the Daily Worker and published on Nov. 1, 1950, along with the report of Hopkinson’s demise.

But before the presses were stopped in late October, Hardy and Cameron’s coverage of the Battle of Inchon was published in Picture Post. Hopkinson had called Hardy’s Inchon photos the best he’d ever worked with and laid them out himself. That coverage has been written about extensively, including in American books and articles. And Hardy’s “Inchon” picture-sequence won him the Encyclopaedia Britannica/Missouri Photo Award in spring 1951.

It’s noteworthy, though, that according to Mr. Cameron in my face-to-face interview with him in November 1981, the pair once entered unannounced into Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s office. The stunned UN Commanding General barked, “Goddamit, NOW what are you two doing here?”

The reason for all the attention their Korean War coverages have drawn in more recent years is due to the tremendous physical courage and journalistic instincts Hardy and Cameron displayed with both photo-essays. Noted war photographer David Douglas Duncan wrote to me in July 1990 that “Bert Hardy and others at Picture Post earned everybody’s respect, and not just for [their] Inchon shots.”

Hardy held onto his job with Picture Post despite the atrocities coverage, but Cameron was gone in a year’s time, after he got fed up with Hulton’s political views. Also, during the Battle of Inchon, the most pivotal battle of the Korean War in terms of preserving South Korea’s independence, both men acquitted themselves well physically in various respects – with the press boat preceding the US 1st Marine Division, which has properly been credited in history for its courageous attack on that port just west of Seoul. William Manchester compared those Marines favorably with Leonidas and his 300 Spartans and the English bowmen at Agincourt.

Cameron, who was brave enough too at Inchon, later wrote that he had the luxury of being able to contemplate his story and type it up at his leisure, while his partner had to get his pictures then and there. In fact, Bert Hardy was the only Allied photographer to retrieve dramatic pictures from that initial landing on Sept. 15, because he used his trusty “35-er”, not the large-format cameras his peers had with them. Also, while the bombs burst frenetically overhead, Hardy went
over the famed sea-wall first, before the rest of the press corps and before the Marines, because he had to get pictures with what little light was left by fast-approaching night. In addition, mysteriously the press boat had landed ahead of the Marines, making good targets of everyone in that first boat.

PERSONAL CONTACTS AND THE PICTURE POST AESTHETIC

Your author owns two key Bert Hardy Korean War prints – one of the Marines landing on the seawall at Inchon; and another, of squatting political prisoners at Pusan. I’ve published both prints previously. I also own 33 other Hardy prints, including about 16 Bert Hardy Christmas picture postcard images sent to my son and me annually. In addition, my best photo-portrait of Bert with his dogs Lizzie and Kim at his farmhouse in Surrey is in the Photographs Collection of the British National Portrait Gallery.

Bert Hardy took as many notable photos as any other photojournalist based in an Allied nation during the middle portion of the 20th century. In one book about candid photography, only two photographers were singled out as the greatest in that category – Henri Cartier-Bresson and Bert Hardy. Despite a difficult ending to his first marriage, Bert found true love in one woman he stayed with until he died, Sheila Marshall Hardy, a heroic and beautiful woman, who had worked as a picture-researcher at Picture Post.

One writer has cited an interview with Mr. Hardy in which that photographer is said to have referred to his subjects as “guinea-pigs”. Look at a large share of Mr. Hardy’s photos, though, and you’ll see that Bert Hardy saw something other than guinea-pigs through his lenses. He saw the complexity of human life. Everywhere, he looked for that. Perhaps that’s why he convinced Edward Steichen to include three of his photos in the famed “Family of Man” group-show that went round the world in the mid-1950s. Bert Hardy only had ten minutes to talk with the great Steichen, then director of the photography department of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, but in those ten minutes Mr. Steichen must have perceived many of the qualities that impressed me in 1981 when I visited the Hardys at their home in the Surrey countryside. Mr. Hardy was a man with his true eye on the world, and a great Cockney wit as well.

Bert Hardy’s life and work should be studied more thoroughly everywhere for two good reasons. First, he displayed more courage than most other war photographers, with the exception of photographers like Robert Capa, killed in wars by landmines, snipers’ bullets, bombs, bayonets, and other weapons of destruction and terror. Hardy put his head “in there”, though, so many times when it could have been shot, lopped, bombed, or beaten off, and yet he triumphed. He came out smelling like a rose, or at least a close facsimile. (Take a look at his famous photo of Pandit Nehru smelling a rose, or his photo of Nehru with his daughter and grandson – one Indian Prime Minister at that time, and two others in future, by a lily pond.)

Second, Hardy expressed the quality of mercy as few photographers in war or peace have done. His pictures of everyday people are masterful, and his empathy with them crucial. Stuart Hall has
written tellingly about the “Picture Post Aesthetic”. He states Stefan Lorant’s vision for that magazine was new, because he took British people seriously-enough. Hall points out: “Lorant, like many a foreigner, seemed to find it easier than most native journalists to break through [the] crust of ignorance and prejudice. He was convinced the British public could and would read a serious, popular presentation of news…”

Bert Hardy felt similarly, from the start, and a personal aesthetic was born, as well as a populist one. As a result, his career would turn out to be reminiscent of the Neo-Dickensian world he’d been raised in – a world as fraught with photojournalistic -- as with social documentary -- details, dangers, joys, and meanings.
“Lewis W. Hine (1874-1940): A Reformer with a Camera.”

Jacob Riis’s groundbreaking 1890 book “How the Other Half Lives” gave Mr. Riis a reputation as “The Emancipator of the Slums” with its social documentary photos and text, but he only dabbled in photography while earning his living as a newspaper reporter. Nevertheless, he played a key role in the start of muckraking journalism in America. By 1902, muckraking had been firmly established by McClure’s and other magazines, though Alfred Stieglitz was almost to press with the first issue of Camera Work magazine that year, the brilliantly reproduced journal that would carefully avoid any connections with the art of muckraking journalism.

Yet in the same year (1902), Wisconsin-born and -raised Lewis Wickes Hine, a modest-enough man, was beginning a career that would fully prove the camera could be aesthetic, expressive, and reformist, which is why he was nicknamed “A Reformer with a Camera”.

EARLY YEARS IN WISCONSIN

Born in 1874 in Oshkosh, a town that at the time kept more than a dozen local lumber mills busy and would help supply the lumber to resurrect Chicago after its great fire of 1871, young Hine worked many odd jobs he later said he was neither physically nor temperamentally suited for, and likely also helped around his parents’ restaurant/coffeeshop. His dad, Douglas, had been in a music regiment during the Civil War, and his mother, Sarah Hayes Hine, a teacher, also helped with the family business.

In 1892, Lewis’s father died. He’d been sick with bronchial problems six years, and was chatting in a shop with an acquaintance when the gun he was cleaning “accidentally fired”. Some surmised he had committed suicide, but that couldn’t be proven.

Young Lewis was exposed to child labor through his own work as a youngster, but would take it to another level later with his social documentary photos. Also, there was a famous labor strike in Oshkosh in 1898, while Lewis was apparently working as a janitor or teller in a local bank. The National Guard was called in, and noted attorney Clarence Darrow represented the strikers versus the Paine Lumber Company, which had brought a suit against them. One striker-complaint was that lumber company owners had been bringing in child laborers to replace strikers and other adult workers.

Around that time, Lewis studied (including art) at the city’s Normal School, under Frank Manny, the principal there and his new mentor. Manny soon encouraged Lewis to attend the University of Chicago, where he studied sociology under famous liberal educators John Dewey and Ella Flagg Young. Noted sociologist Thorstein Veblen also taught at UC then.

LEWIS HINE MOVES TO NEW YORK CITY

When Manny moved to New York City to direct the Ethical Culture School, Hine joined him and became the school’s new photographer. One project designed by Hine was about new
immigrants. In 1904, he even made the first notable photos of immigrants entering at Ellis Island. That same year, he traveled back to Oshkosh to marry his former classmate and lifelong partner Sarah Ann Rich. And in 1905, in a series titled “Joy in Work”, he made a very good portrait of an elderly man called “The Old Printer”. He was being published fairly often by then, including in Charities and Commons magazine, boosting his social documentary career.

In 1907, Paul Kellogg, managing editor of Charities and Commons – later Survey – invited Hine to join an in-depth survey of Pittsburgh, a mushrooming industrial enclave of industry to be sure, but also rife with congestion, poverty, and urban alienation. The idea of surveying big cities was a key item in the reformist movement. If a survey could offer a rational picture of social facts, it was believed, positive social action would logically follow. For the Pittsburgh survey, Hine supplied most of the photos, while painter Joseph Stella made sketches of steelworkers and miners. Being published in Survey inspired Hine to devote his life to persuasive photos in the service of social reform.

LEAD-PHOTOGRAPHER FOR NCLC, AND WORLD WAR I

In 1903, McClure’s magazine had published Francis H. Nichols’s “Children of the Coal Shadow”, illustrated by Frank Schoonover. But the latter’s decorative paintings could not convey what Hine’s photos of young boy-miners’ sunken cheeks, stooped shoulders, and mental fatigue would in a few years. But although printing of photos had been improved by 1910, many magazines continued to use painted illustrations, because cheap paper still made the latter look good, and ads were crowding out much news content.

By 1908, Lewis Hine was designated lead-photographer for the National Child Labor Committee. He and his wife traveled up and down the Eastern coast, taking pictures of youngsters who worked long hours at dangerous jobs, including the Breaker Boys of Pennsylvania’s coal mines, perhaps his most famous early group of photos. He said he always enjoyed photographing workers, especially young miners, his favorite subjects. Perhaps that love sprang from his Wisconsin roots where lead-miners were called “Badgers” after the state’s feisty, beloved animal mascot, both of whom burrowed into the ground to live and work.

Along the way, Lewis and Sarah also raised their son, Corydon, born in 1912, a year after his brother, Richard, had died.

Lewis Hine may have been raised with a religious background, because when he’d present his photo-slideshows, they were often shown in churches with a simple title like “Child Labor”. After photographing child laborers several years, Lewis went to Europe to photograph the effects of World War I for the Red Cross; refuges and vulnerable children were his main subjects there. After returning to America, he continued doing photo-stories for magazines and organizations like the American Clothing Workers, the Boys and Girls Scouts, the Tenement House Association, and the Interchurch World Movement.
EMPIRE STATE BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

By 1930, Hine was at work as the photographer in charge of documenting the construction of the Empire State Building. He was 56 years old by then, and the construction documentation was the riskiest work he’d ever undertaken, though even his child labor photos had been risky, because he had to pose as a salesman to gain access for that incriminating picture-taking.

Assisted by his son, Corydon, Lewis climbed with construction workers on the inner skeleton of the rising building, balancing his bulky cameras on girders, snapping pictures at dizzying heights as the structure ascended into the sky. Hine later recalled: “It was a new problem for me, this Empire State Building, full of surprises and thrills, of hard exhausting climbs up long vertical ladders with a heavy camera on my back, of perching way up on the tops of columns and even on the very tip of the mooring mast for special shots. And finally swinging out on the high derrick a quarter of a mile above the street. After it all, I came to realize that even a skyscraper is what it is because behind all of it is the human spirit that made it.”

Perhaps Lewis Hines’s most amazing photo from that six-month assignment was “Icarus Atop the Empire State Building”, showing a virile, hatless, sleeveless male worker in coveralls clinging to a thick, taut wire; beneath him far below is more of Manhattan and a waterway. It is a masterful photo, for at least two masterful workmen, the construction-worker and Lewis Hine.

1930s WORK AND THEN “DEMISE”

In the mid-1930s, Hine tried obtaining work several times through Roy Stryker, head of the Farm Security Administration photo-team, but he was thought too old by then. Also, he worked with bulkier cameras than the FSA staff generally did, and he wanted to keep the copyrights to his work as well, something Stryker and the federal government wouldn’t allow. In addition, he never took candid stills, which the FSA photographers sometimes did; his photos were, as his friend Walter Rosenblum at New York’s Photo-League, said, conversations.

And yet, Lewis Hine photographed for some federal agencies, including the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Rural Electrification Administration, and the Works Progress Administration. During this period, Edward Steichen, who had grown up in Milwaukee while Hine was growing up in Oshkosh, was busy with his most productive and lucrative personal work, doing portraits for Vogue and Vanity Fair magazines.

In 1939, a major exhibition of Lewis Hine’s photos opened at the Riverside Museum in New York. The show lifted Hine’s spirits, but the recognition came a bit late. His banker soon foreclosed on the Hines’ house. Soon after that, Lewis’s beloved wife, Sarah, died after a lingering illness. Lewis survived his wife by almost a year. He passed as a result of an intestinal operation on Nov. 4, 1940, at Dobbs Ferry, NY, aged 66.
Berenice Abbott, discoverer of famous, turn-of-the-century Parisian street photographer Eugene Atget, and Elizabeth McCausland, an up-and-coming art critic, had visited with Lewis Hine shortly before his death and had organized his retrospective show at the Riverside Museum. The show helped his reputation in the long run, but as indicated, he soon passed.

In Russell Freedman’s gripping Hine study “Kids at Work” (1994), he notes that Lewis died in poverty, neglected by all but a few. But his reputation continued to grow. As Freedman writes, “Through his camera, a young spinner in a Carolina cotton mill gazes at us across a distance of eighty years. In her eyes we can still see the pain and cruelty of child labor, but Hine also captured her humanity, dignity, and strength.”

A friend once asked Lewis Hine why his kids seemed so beautiful, and he said, “I only photograph beautiful children.” With a smile and a few kinds word, he let children know he was their friend and ally. He saw the beauty residing in every child, and kids responded by trusting him and his camera.

Lewis Hines’ images of working children stirred America’s conscience and helped change the nation’s laws. His most lasting legacy was his work for the National Child Labor Committee, which still works today on behalf of working children.
“Photographic Equality: Dorothea Lange, Her Migrant Mother, and the Nisei Internees (1895-1965)”

Big things often emerge from small packages, and so it was with Dorothea Margaretta Nutzhorn’s life. Dorothea was born into a Lutheran family in the Jewish neighborhood of Hoboken, New Jersey, on May 25, 1895. Her father, Henry, an attorney, walked out on her mother, Joan, when Dorothea was 12. To survive, Joan worked in a New York City library, and later for the probation courts.

The child attended primary school, but would have skipped out endlessly, if she could, to walk the neighborhoods of life, and spend time in museums and galleries, viewing the art she so loved. Dorothea preferred visualizing life rather than writing it down, though her best field-notes in the 1930s were to be insight-driven and literate.

Dorothea’s ancestry was German, on both sides. Three brothers to her mother had been trained as lithographers in Germany, before they came to America. After Henry Nutzhorn absconded, Joan, Dorothea, and Dorothea’s younger brother, Henry Martin, would move in with Joan’s mother, Sophie Vottler. When Joan took the job with the probation courts, it required she visit the homes of those involved. Dorothea sometimes accompanied her mother. The experience would prove invaluable. Joan kept notes on her home visits, and Dorothea, it seems, read some of these. Walking with a limp wasn’t slowing Dorothea down enough to prevent her from wanting to see the world.

The limp derived from her bout with polio at age seven, which left her right leg partially paralyzed and wizened, principally from the knee down. She couldn’t flex the front of her foot for the rest of her life. Dorothea apparently never used trusses or braces, but did wear a right shoe a half size smaller than her left. Later, she spoke of her disability: “No one who hasn’t lived the life of a semi-cripple knows how much that means. I think it was perhaps the most important thing that happened to me. [It] formed me, guided me, instructed me, helped me, and humiliated me. All those things at once. I’ve never gotten over it and I am aware of the force and power of it.”

It is significant too, that Dorothea Lange would began to come to prominence during the time when Franklin Delano Roosevelt, an even more severely disabled person, rose to power. Neither would let their disability stand in the way of doing important work. Still, as a young girl, Dorothea was called “Limpy” by other children, while her mother always said, “Now walk as well as you can!” The daughter grew bitter against her mother as a result, but learned to bide her time sufficiently and began making her way in New York City. She always wore long dresses or slacks, though, to conceal her disfigurement.

Dorothea’s camera would also become part of the things that were second-nature to her. She said: “You put your camera around your neck in the morning, along with putting on your shoes, and there it is, an appendage of the body that shares your life with you.”
For high school, Dorothea’s mother arranged to send her to Wadleigh, for girls, in Manhattan by stating their residence was in New York City, not New Jersey, where it actually was. At Wadleigh, Dorothea’s progress was helped by a teacher who upgraded her student’s paper crucially once, when Dorothea had done abysmally, so she could finish school there. When Dorothea graduated, Joan asked her what she wanted to be. “I want to be a photographer,” she said.

EXPANDING CONTACTS

After graduation, Dorothea studied at a Teachers’ College, because her mother said she needed something to fall back on, if becoming a photographer didn’t work. However, she longed to take pictures and soon found teaching wasn’t for her. She next studied photography, with Clarence White, a notable pictorialist, portraitist, and chiaroscuro specialist at Columbia College, known for his deft, delicate people photos; and she apprenticed under several photographers, including Arnold Genthe, who had famously photographed the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, and had later come to New York, where he established his studio. Among Genthe’s sitters were Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, as well as John D. Rockefeller and Greta Garbo.

In 1918, Dorothea felt ready to travel, photographing as she went. She and friend Florence Ahlstrom set out on a world-tour, but when they reached San Francisco, their money was stolen and they had to find work immediately. Dorothea got a job at Marsh & Company, whose business included inexpensive photo-finishing. Then, in 1919, the divorce between Dorothea’s parents went through, and Joan retook her maiden name; Dorothea converted her last name to “Lange”, too, utilizing it the rest of her life.

One of the first people Dorothea Lange met at Marsh’s was artist Roi Partridge, who was married to photographer Imogen Cunningham. With expanding contacts, Dorothea soon set up her own portrait studio, and her clients included some of the best-connected families in the area. Cunningham, a close friend of Lange’s, would later become part of the famed f/64 group of photographers, which would begin in 1932, and which got its name from the smallest aperture on a camera, yielding the fullest depth of field. Other members included Ansel Adams and Edward Weston. Dorothea never joined f/64. However, she was a friend of many in the group, including Adams, whom she periodically relied on for his superb print-making from her negatives.

In 1920, Lange married Maynard Dixon, a talented western artist. They had two sons, Daniel and John. However, Dorothea was not a stay-at-home mom, and in a pattern that would repeat itself often over the years, friends and family were enlisted as “foster-parents” for the children. Maynard and Dorothea pursued their art primarily, with Dorothea sometimes accompanying Dixon on his trips into other western states. Her tight close-up of the face of a Hopi Indian is a notable Lange photo from this period.
The Wall Street crash occurred in October 1929, and by 1932, Lange’s studio began faltering badly, due to the depressed economy. Dorothea began venturing onto San Francisco’s streets more regularly with her camera. She needed to expand her range of subjects to help her family and herself.

THE START OF SOMETHING BIG

In 1932, during the depth of the Depression, when 14 million work-eligible Americans were without work, Dorothea became aware of the discrepancy between her formal portraits and what was going on in the streets. She knew her strength in photography was taking pictures of people and so it was that she began shooting San Francisco street life.

A rich woman called the “White Angel” had set up a bread line nearby, and Dorothea had finally decided to photograph it in 1933, taking along her brother for protection. As it turned out, even unemployed people took to her sufficiently, so she could generally photograph without objection. It was the streets, nevertheless, and there would still be shocks and intrusions occasionally.

On that first day, when she’d made her decision and gone to the White Angel Bread Line, she took one of her best-known photos. It could have been lost forever, though, but for some good fortune. Dorothea had made 12 exposures on her 3-1/4” X 4-1/4” Graflex, three of them of the bread line. When she got home, she removed her sheet-film from the camera’s film holder, handing the holder to her assistant, Roger Sturtevant, for reloading later.

The next day, Sturtevant took the holder into the darkroom and, with the light out luckily, reached in and found a film not yet pulled out. He put it in the box and developed it. It was the picture Lange would call “White Angel Bread Line,” showing an older man in hat holding his cup, leaning against a fence facing the photographer, his back to the other men waiting for food.

“I can only say I knew I was looking at something,” Lange said of taking the Bread Line photo. “You know there are moments such as these when time stands still and all you do is hold your breath and hope it will wait for you. Sometimes you have an inner sense that you have encompassed the thing generally. You know then that you are not taking anything away from anyone: their privacy, their dignity, their wholeness.”

When her portrait customers saw the photo, they asked her what she’d been doing photographing “that”. But Dorothea knew taking the photo was the right thing to do. She had not only made a great street portrait, but she’d also provided “the context of the lives of the people in it,” according to writer George P. Elliott. In other words, Dorothea Lange had photographed people of interest, composing and using the lighting to tell a human story, in the subject’s natural environment. It was the start of something big.

The next year, 1934, Lange met Paul Taylor, an agricultural economist from Iowa, who was educated at UW-Madison and taught at the University of California. She did some work for him,
and they soon fell in love. In 1935, she was amicably divorced from Maynard Dixon, as was Taylor from his wife, and the new couple married. Taylor had three children from his former marriage, and Lange two, so their new family became a total of seven.

ROY STRYKER AND THE FSA PHOTOGRAPHERS

One of Paul Taylor’s jobs was as part-time consultant to the State Emergency Relief Administration of California. Since photographers were not widely employed in his work, his office manager, Lawrence Hewes, Jr., broke the rules, hiring Lange at $1,560 a year as a “clerk-stenographer”, to use her photos.

Then in mid-1935, Dorothea was hired by Roy Emerson Stryker, who had himself been hired for the vague Historical Section Chief job in the US Resettlement Administration (RA), created by FDR’s Executive Order of April 30th, 1935. That executive order subsumed a number of programs, including one that moved sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and other poor farmers to subsistence farms held in-common. The Resettlement Administration was subsumed by the Farm Security Administration, in the Department of Agriculture. The Farm Security Administration, or FSA, was to become one of the most important agencies in the employment of photographers during that era.

Although he himself had hired her, Roy Stryker wasn’t immediately impressed by Lange’s photos. Because she was part of the same organization that included talented photographers Walker Evans, John Vachon, Ben Shahn, Russell Lee, Arthur Rothstein, the Rosskhams (Edwin and Louise), Jack Delano, Carl Mydans, Esther Bubley, Marion Post Walcott, and, eventually, Gordon Parks, it took time before the hard-driving Stryker admitted Dorothea “had the most sensitivity and the most rapport with people” of all his photographers. The photographers assigned to the RA, and later to the FSA, photographed all over the United States, documenting chronic rural problems especially, including land-erosion and poverty. Their photos were sent to publishers, free-of-charge, to suggest how to uplift the poor, including people thrown out of their homes by bank foreclosures, work layoffs, etc., and forced to migrate cross-country, before there was anything like a sophisticated Interstate Highway System. Roads were often unpaved, and towns few and far between.

Lange was assigned mainly to California, though she’d travel tens of thousands of miles, including visits to Washington, D.C. The issue of who should retain her negatives struck closely to Lange, who wanted to utilize prints in California, and save time and the risk of losing images, by having her own printers do the work, and then send prints to Stryker, too. She also feared the deterioration of her films due to bad weather. Stryker balked; a tentative truce allowed negatives and prints to be sent back and forth, as needed at both ends.

One thing Lange and others feared was Stryker’s ill-treatment of negatives. Often he’d punch two holes in negatives he rejected, and as any self-respecting film-photographer knows, you generally don’t destroy negatives. Dorothea hinted to Stryker they should meet to discuss issues.
Stryker said he couldn’t travel to California, but would try to answer her letters more promptly. Whether Stryker agreed fully or not, Lange would generally develop her films in Berkeley. She would then make three prints of each photo and forward them and relevant negatives to him. He would then return one print of each photo to her, so she could keep control of her lab. At least Lange would know immediately what her negatives contained. And likely she quietly kept a copy of her top images from the start too.

Another issue was criticism from conservatives that the Roosevelt administration was too left wing, and that, they said, was especially true of FSA photographers, whom they called propagandists. That label didn’t bother Lange; she said that when it’s done with feeling and has a social purpose, everything is propaganda. The conservatives suggested liberals were attacking rich land-owners and banks with propaganda, thus adversely affecting American livelihoods.

During the same trip as Arthur Rothstein photographed a Cimarron County farmer and his two sons in Oklahoma, which made the Oklahoma Panhandle the symbol of the Dustbowl, the “Fargo Forum” broke a story that said a photo taken by Rothstein, of a steer’s skull in the South Dakota Badlands, had been moved by the photographer onto a dry riverbed, and thus, faked, to prove drought and erosion were destroying American farms. Rothstein suggested he moved the skull only a few feet, and simply to take better pictures, aesthetically, but critics, already outraged by FDR’s deficit spending and social welfare programs, quickly latched onto what might have been a non-issue, making it a hot issue instead.

THE PEA-PICKERS CAMP

In February 1936, Stryker wired approval to Lange for a one-month field trip to Southern California. The field trip completed, Dorothea was driving home, the weather cold and miserable. “It was raining, the camera bags were packed, and I had on the seat beside me in the car the results of my long trip,” said Lange. “Sixty-five miles an hour for seven hours would get me home to my family that night, and my eyes were glued to the wet and gleaming highway that stretched out ahead.

“I was on my way and barely saw a crude sign with pointing arrow which flashed by at the side of the road, saying PEA-PICKERS CAMP ... I didn’t want to stop, and didn’t.” Then, accompanied by the rhythmic beat of the windshield wipers, arose an inner argument: “Dorothea, how about that camp back there? What is the situation back there?”

“Are you going back?”

“Nobody could ask this of you, now, could they?...”

“Having convinced myself for 20 miles that I could continue on, I did the opposite. Almost without realizing what I was doing, I made a U-turn on the empty highway. I went back those 20 miles and turned off the highway at that sign, PEA-PICKERS CAMP.”
The rest is history. Though the family in the now-famous Migrant Mother sequence looks very much down on their luck, there’s also strength in the mother’s face, of a much-put-upon, but still resilient sort. After Lange had made six exposures of the mother and her children, her iconic photo would be published worldwide and still is the standard for early photographic portrayals of impoverished mothers with children.

Almost immediately, the photograph would prompt relief assistance, which didn’t directly help the Thompson family – Florence Owens Thompson was the iconic mother, and she and her family departed the area promptly after Lange was there. Lange was later unsure about what she’d said to the mother to assuage any fear she might have had about the family's being photographed. However, Dorothea did state: “There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.”

“The pea crop at Nipomo had frozen and there was no work for anybody. But I did not approach the tents and shelters of other stranded pea-pickers. It was not necessary; I knew I had recorded the essence of my assignment.”

Roy Stryker recalled what that photo meant to the FSA program and to the country, nearly 35 years later in an interview with his biographer, Nancy Wood: “When Dorothea took that picture, that was the ultimate. She never surpassed it,” said Stryker. “To me, it was the picture of Farm Security. The others were marvelous but that was special.” “People would say to me, that migrant woman looks posed and I’d say she does not look posed. That picture is as uninvolved with the camera as any picture I’ve ever seen,” Stryker added.

The first time the “Migrant Mother” photo was published was in Survey Graphic’s September 1936 issue. Other photographs from the Nipomo sequence were published in the San Francisco News as early as March 10th and 11th, 1936, and resulted in aid being sent to the pea-pickers camp at Nipomo.

The first time “Migrant Mother” was shown in a gallery was at the first exhibit of the Museum of Modern Art’s new Department of Photography, in 1941. Countless publications and exhibits followed. George P. Elliott’s commentary hit the mark: “Most of Lange’s pictures are of people, and usually the center of interest is a face expressing troubled emotion. Her temptation is to sentimentalize these subjects about whom her feelings are so warm.” “But in her frequent successes, she redeems these pictures from sentimentality by the honesty and clarity of her seeing. Her vision leads to our warm understanding … ‘Migrant Mother’ centres on a manifestly decent woman whose face is ravaged by immediate worry … She is poor, and we assume that her poverty and the uncertainty of her future cause her worry. But the viewer is less concerned with her poverty as such, and far, far less with feeling guilty about the social conditions that imposed poverty upon her, than … with understanding the profounder, the humanly universal, results of that poverty.” “For the picture is a sort of anti-Madonna and Child,” wrote Elliott. “One sees on her lap part of a sleeping, dirty baby; but the mother, who, we feel without reservation,
wants to love and cherish her children, is severed from them by her anxiety even as they lean on her.”

Elliott added later, “Not all the wire-pulling and slipper-licking in Babylon will, finally, do a fraction as much to get a picture known and seen as its own power.” “Migrant Mother” has that power.

NOBLER THAN INVENTION

Of the five additional exposures Lange made of Florence Thompson at the Pea-Pickers camp in February 1936, one other is worth comment – “The Other Migrant Mother”, in Michael Stones’ term – Lange’s view of Florence breast-feeding her baby, Norma. Stones retouched it in more recent years, due, he claims, to the tight crop at the top of the original photo, and lack of cropping of the background at right. A big scratch on the original negative also needed retouching, Stones tells us. In the original classic “Migrant Mother” view, Lange retouched the image herself to hide the mother’s left thumb, which held onto the tent-pole at right. Scratches and minor blemishes apart, one can’t help feeling that any great documentary photograph is superior without retouching; and that such alteration is a distraction from the truth of the moment.

Michael Stones argues for a different kind of “truth”. “Because [the] mandate was to show the human side of the Depression,” Stones says, “should not the truths portrayed in the picture include those about Florence herself?” However the answer, according to Geoffrey Dunn, quoting from statements by Florence Thompson’s daughter Norma, and son Troy, is maybe not.

“Norma, the baby in the pictures, said of her mother that she ‘was a woman who loved to enjoy life, who loved her children. She loved music and she loved to dance. When I look at that photo of mother, it saddens me.’"

“They were tough, tough times, but they were the best times we ever had,’ said Troy.”

Norma agreed: “We also had fun.” And that is what is so notably missing from every face in Lange’s Nipomo series – a single smile that signifies fun. (But then, it was a rainy, cold day, and the family was staying in an open lean-to, with their car’s tire flat.)

Regarding re-touching classic photos, one need be aware that critics might seek one’s hide for it, because classics are classics for good reasons. And “The Other Migrant Mother” photo is at least a minor classic, as Lange originally saw and photographed it. The argument over the alteration of any of the “Migrant Mother” photographs should, perhaps, be laid to rest with the quotation that Dorothea stuck to her darkroom door in the 1930s, and which remained there throughout her working life. Derived from a passage in Francis Bacon’s “Novum Organum”, first published in 1620, the quotation is, for good reason, repeated often by photographers, and by those who write about photography. “The contemplation of things as they are, without substitution or imposture,
without error or confusion”, wrote the statesman-philosopher, “is in itself a nobler thing than a whole harvest of invention.”

MORE FSA WORK, A BOOK, AND A FELLOWSHIP

Not long before her death in 1965, Dorothea Lange was interviewed for the Smithsonian Oral History Project. Her interviewer, Richard Doud, asked which of her scenes most encapsulated Farm Security. Once in the 1930s, Lange replied, she had stopped at a gas station where she spotted a forlorn family of American whites from Oklahoma. “We’ve been blown out,” they told her.

“There were the people who got up that day quick and left,” said Lange of the family who had driven west when the dust storms arrived. “They saw they had no crop back there,” she told her interviewer. “That was the beginning of the first day of the landslide that cut this continent and it’s still going on.”

On photographing people in distress, Dorothea told Doud that it is often just about sticking around and being there. “Not swooping in and swooping out in a cloud of dust.” You sit down, she said, “letting the children look at your camera with their dirty, grimy little hands, and putting their fingers on the lens.” “If you behave in a generous manner, you’re very apt to receive it, said Lange adding, “I have told everything about myself long before I asked any question.”

Photographing for the FSA until 1939, Lange acquired standing with some people in government, though she also made enemies. To be sure, her stellar views of former slaves and black sharecroppers in the Southeast; Mexican immigrants in the Southwest; Filipino lettuce workers in California; Okies and Arkies all along the route Westward; eroded fields on the Great Plains; churches, farms, schools, roads, and businesses in many locales; a distinguished pioneering woman named Queen in a bonnet; and officials, too, drove her stock up, generally.

But some had suggested she would be hired immediately, following her FSA work; she wasn’t. She wasn’t a straightforward spot-news photographer, and her photos weren’t, generally, what “Life” and “Look” magazines were looking for either apparently. Unable to get funding to renew her contract, Stryker let Lange go. Though she’d been temperamental and difficult for Washington staff, Stryker still supported Dorothea’s book-project with husband Paul. The book was based on the physical and cultural erosion of America – it’s called “An American Exodus”.

However, the decision was made not to make photos the book’s main focus, but rather one of its many elements. To Paul Strand, it seemed clear: “In such a book as this, the photographs must be the foundation materials, provide the basic structure, just as in a documentary film, and that the function of the text must be to heighten and extend their individual and total meaning.” Strand felt the photos did little more than illustrate the text. Or vice-versa. And there was “a tendency towards negation rather than active interaction between image and word.” There was also
dialogue from people in the photos, which complicated artistic unity. The formula hadn’t been tried much previously, and it fell flat for Strand.

Then in March 1941, Lange was granted a Guggenheim Fellowship. Soon after the announcement of her grant, the conservative Associated Farmers organization attacked the foundation for selecting the wife of “liberal Dr. Paul Taylor”, with whom she had collaborated on “a grapes of wrathy” book. Lange was the first woman to receive a photo grant from the Guggenheim, and there would not be another for 18 years when Helen Levitt won. Several others followed after Levitt.

To begin the grant-coverage, Dorothea went on a two-month field trip, and photographed the Hutterites of South Dakota and the Amana Colony in Iowa. She’d also intended to photograph the Mormons of Utah, but asked for a two-month leave of absence, because she felt exhausted and not doing her best work. On top of that, her brother, Henry Martin, was arrested for defrauding a California state-unemployment-insurance fund. Henry spent six months in jail and seven years on probation. They were different types of people, but Dorothea always felt she was her “brother’s keeper”, and was fond of him. In any case, before the completion of the grant-coverage, on December 7th, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Dorothea’s plans were at least temporarily changed.

WORK FOR THE WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

On February 19th, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, allowing military commanders to establish military zones in the United States wherever they thought necessary, and to remove anyone they wanted from those areas, regardless of race, nationality, or age. General Dwight Eisenhower’s brother Milton was the civilian put in charge, and on March 1st, Lt. General John L. DeWitt, head of the Western Defense Command, announced that all persons of Japanese ancestry would have to leave the Pacific Coast military area.

Originally, the plan was to move them, via a resurrected Homestead Act, to subsistence farms in the interior that they would own. However, that scheme was replaced by an internment plan instead. Two-thirds of the 120,000 men, women, and children affected, were full US citizens. The United States was also at war with Germany and Italy, but only a handful of Americans of German and Italian ancestry were being penned up in concentration camps. This largest single-group, forced-migration in American history seemed based solely on race.

On War Relocation Authority’s staff was an information officer who’d shifted over from the Social Security Board Dorothea’s husband Paul Taylor had worked for. When WRA decided it wanted to document its work photographically, the information man had Dorothea added to his staff. Why the WRA hired someone to photograph the evacuation and internment is something of a mystery, but some staffer may have wanted to point up a government scandal brewing, since at least a few other Americans were already criticizing the internments.
Although the executive order stunned West Coast Japanese-Americans, they went about their evacuation dutifully, locking their stores and houses, and dressing in their Sunday best, as they boarded buses that would take them to the camps. Some Americans thought the Japanese-Americans were national security threats, but they also hadn’t liked the economic competition from the Nisei (first-generation Japanese-Americans). The Nisei were hard-workers and efficient-savers. When they’d got the news of the order, many were desperate to prove their loyalty; they bought war bonds, donated blood, made bandages, and tried to join the armed forces (nearly all were turned away); but when the Army said the West Coast might be bombed or invaded by Japan, hysteria struck non-Nisei residents there.

Assembly centers were set up in whatever spaces were temporarily available. Paul Taylor – although he acknowledged a somewhat rational basis for public fears of Japanese-American disloyalty given they weren’t yet assimilated and many retained a strong affinity for their forebears’ land -- tried to remind many Americans the evacuees “were not convicted, were not found guilty of anything, that they were entitled to every consideration under American principle and fair play.”

However, early in April 1942, Dorothea Lange began her WRA work. Her assignment was Northern California, where she photographed at the Manzanar Relocation Camp (as would Ansel Adams in 1943); other photographers covered Southern California. Lange photographed “the procedure, the process of processing,” and stayed with “the baffled, bewildered people” as they ran from place to place beforehand, trying to find information and help.

Lange said, “Everything they could possibly do for themselves, they did, asking the minimum, making practically no demands.” They even relied on their own doctors for required inoculations rather than Army doctors. Dorothea’s military supervisor, a Major Beasley, complained regularly about the “negative light” Lange was shining on these events. One complaint was that one of Lange’s photos showed plant-nursery-men in a relocation camp, working in the latticed sheds used to break the force of the sunlight. Beasley didn’t like the picture because the streaks of light and shadow made it look as if the evacuees were behind bars, or dressed in stripes.

The Japanese-Americans didn’t resent Lange. View her photos of Nisei schoolchildren standing alongside their Caucasian peers, saying the Pledge of Allegiance; or the big banner a Japanese-American grocer put on the front of his store, saying, “I Am An American.” Lange's Rolleiflex was as unimposing to the Nisei as any camera she'd ever carry was to her subjects. They treated Lange as a friend, and upon their release, many went to visit her. As with migrants a decade earlier, Dorothea Lange was precisely the right photographer to photograph them.

The critic AD Coleman wrote, “She functioned in effect as our national eye of conscience in the internment camps. Her constant concerns – the survival of human dignity under impossible conditions, the confrontation of the system by the individual, and the helpless innocence of
children – were perfectly suited to the subject.” Some of her “most poignant and angry images” were made for the WRA, Coleman added.

Dorothea remembered her WRA work as one of her most intense experiences as a photographer: “On the surface, it looked like a narrow job. There was a sharp beginning to it, a sharp end; everything about it was highly concentrated.” Actually, though, the WRA work wasn’t narrow at all. “The deeper I got into it, the bigger it became,” said Lange, pointing out that the internment was often cited “as an example of what happens to us if we lose our heads.”

“I think it’s rather encouraging, as a sign of our mental health, that we admit a mistake,” said Lange. “What was of course horrifying was to do this thing completely on the basis of what blood may be coursing through a person’s veins, nothing else.”

Thirty years later, and after her death, Dorothea Lange’s WRA photos were made the core of an exhibition and book called Executive Order 9066, which reminded the country of the fragility of American justice. The show toured Washington, New York, San Francisco, and Tokyo. Of the 63 exhibited images made by a dozen photographers, the largest group was Lange’s, 27 photos.

**TO A CABIN**

While Dorothea Lange was photographing the evacuation of the Japanese-Americans, she suffered her first duodenal ulcer. She’d eventually also be hit by post-polio pain syndrome, then little understood. In 1951, Dorothea received her final grant-check from the Guggenheim Foundation, and was back to work by then, after being slowed by her ailments for several years. Soon, she was also consulting with Edward Steichen on the “The Family of Man”, for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which she contributed a number of photos to.

In her later years, she’d travel overseas, even with her ailments, because one doctor suggested she would die either way; it was up to her whether she wanted to die without experiencing a tour she so much wanted to make. So husband Paul and she traveled to the Far East (including Java and Korea), the Middle East (including Egypt and Palestine), and Europe (including Ireland), and she photographed these places wonderfully, though she said she couldn’t capture the richness of the Far East on black-and-white film. And yet, she did very well with black-and-white, nevertheless.

Many intended projects kept Dorothea’s mind active, even if they were not all physically happening. However, John Szarkowski, new Director of the Museum of Modern Art’s Photo Department, insisted she do her retrospective exhibition there for him. Szarkowski knew she would say no, if he asked her. So instead, he commanded her to do it, and she worked on it to the extent she could, until her death aged 70, in October 1965.

She’d been suffering from esophageal cancer, and the exhibition opened three months after she died. It would be, along with the book “To a Cabin”, a warm tribute to her family and to her
family’s place of emotional and physical calm in California, the crowning achievements at the end of her life. The Lange-Taylor Grants, awarded to photographers of conscience, carry on that legacy today.

A NATION’S EYE OF CONSCIENCE

Dorothea Lange was one of the greatest of photographers. What she overcame was formidable – crippled by polio from an early age, and saddled with a limp thereafter, she still chose to use medium and large-format cameras, rather than the lighter and faster Leica. Lange was among the greatest, though, not because she traveled farther physically than most others, though she did travel tens of thousands of miles. Not because she took more stunning news photos than all others, because spot-news work wasn’t her style. And assuredly not because she made more money or captured more celebrities on film than all others, because she made far less money than her work was worth and didn’t “do” celebrities generally. No, Lange was among the very greatest, because she discovered the “news” about people best by traveling deep into their hearts, and presenting in photos the real currency of documentary photography – how and why people live as they do. For Dorothea Lange, three elements were key: the natural environment of her subjects, their dignity, and the human story she hoped each photo would tell.

Today, most of Lange’s photos are housed in the Library of Congress’s FSA Collection and in the Oakland Museum of California, and are, through the internet, available to all. No doubt, two phases of her career will leave their marks longest: these two phases are symbolized by a comment in a letter, and by an epitaph on a gravestone in Lakewood Memorial Park, Hughson, California.

Milton Eisenhower wrote in a letter to his former boss, Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard, about the internment of Japanese-Americans: “When the war is over and we consider calmly this unprecedented migration of 120,000 people, we as Americans are going to regret the unavoidable injustices that we may have done.”

Dorothea Lange had been America’s eye of conscience for the Nisei internments.

TRANSCENDING THE MEDIUM

The epitaph on the gravestone in Lakewood Memorial Park is to Florence Thompson, the subject of Lange’s “Migrant Mother” photo. A woman of Cherokee descent and already a widow when the photo was taken, Thompson bore 10 children and outlived her first husband by 52 years, and her second by nine. Gaining almost nothing from the fame thrust upon her, she lived her final years in a trailer park, dying at aged 80 in 1983, as her daughters called out for medical aid for her cancer and heart problems.

Her children had bought her a home previously, but she’d said she always needed wheels under her, and moved back to a trailer park. Thompson’s daughter Katherine, who in the iconic
A photographer buries her face behind her mother’s right shoulder, was to say the image left the family feeling shame, and determined never to be poor again. On her poverty, Florence Thompson spoke of living under the bridge at Bakersfield, California. In “The Grapes of Wrath”, Steinbeck wrote of people living beneath that very span. “It was the same story”, said Thompson. “Didn’t even have a tent then, just a ratty old quilt.”

The epitaph on the gravestone begins, “Florence Leona Thompson.” It then recognizes, in its way, that a moment captured by a photographer on a cold, wet day in March 1936, at a Pea-Picker’s camp in Nipomo, California had achieved what few photos ever achieve.

“Migrant Mother”, the epitaph continues. “A Legend of the Strength of American Motherhood.”

“Migrant Mother”, Dorothea Lange’s greatest photograph, had, the epitaph suggests, transcended its medium to become part of the folklore of not only an entire nation, but of the world too.

LANGE AT AUCTION

It’s a shame more of the money involved in art-collecting Dorothea Lange’s greatest photos couldn’t have been shared with more of her subjects, but then she photographed tens of thousands of people, and she didn’t earn a queen’s ransom herself. However, collectors continue to cash in, as a Sotheby’s auction on October 11, 2005 indicates. At that auction, a stack of 32 vintage Lange “Oakie” prints, including “Migrant Mother”, made $296,000. Bill Hendrie, whose family came from Oklahoma, had salvaged the mounted prints from a San Jose Chamber of Commerce dumpster in the 1960s, and held onto them. After his death, his daughter Marian Tankersley sold them via Sotheby’s. The joint-highest grossing item in the sale (with Weston’s “The Breast” of 1921) was “White Angel Bread Line.” That earliest major Depression-era work by Lange, taken in 1933, sold for $822,400, then a record for a 20th century photograph at auction. That October day in 2005, the Sotheby’s sale of photographs totaled $5.5 million, $10.3 million over two days.
“Gordon Parks (1912-2006): The Jackie Robinson/Muhammad Ali of the Arts”

It was once said that, if a person was photographed in Washington, D.C. by a Scurlock, the famous family of African-American photo-portraitists whose works are now housed in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History Archives Center, then the photo-subject had been photographed by the VanDerZees and Parkses of Washington. James VanDerZee and Gordon Parks have long been thought of as residing near the top of the photographic ladder, with the Scurlocks added in, whether or not you consider the latter Great Black Photographers or, simply, Great Photographers.

Like Leonardo Da Vinci and Edward Steichen, Gordon Roger Alexander Buchanan Parks was one of the most versatile and resourceful artists in history. He not only took remarkable photos and wrote beautifully for “Life” magazine, but also wrote successful novels, memoirs, books of poetry, musical scores, librettos, films, and could play the piano well, too. He experienced a great deal of racism, though, making his way forward, and documented a fair amount of it in his memoirs, films, photos, etc.

Gordon Parks’s heart was passionate about many ventures, with rare heat and precision of purpose. Showing great ability and stamina was his fuel every time, no matter the venture. Though Gordon Parks was one man, his experiences were diverse, his talents varied and immense, his achievements superb. Mr. Parks’s main idea in taking photos applied to his whole life – “The subject matter is so much more important than the photographer [/artist].” Thus, his intense focus on the arts he created, via the people and world around him.

EARLY LIFE

Born in the small prairie town of Fort Scott, Kansas on Nov. 30, 1912, Gordon was the son of Sarah Ross Parks and Andrew Jackson Parks, a farmer who raised corn, beets, turnips, potatoes, collard greens, and tomatoes. The family also had a few ducks, chickens, and hogs. When Gordon was 11 years old, three white boys threw him into the Marmaton River, knowing he couldn't swim. He had the presence of mind to duck underwater so they wouldn't see him make it safely back to shore, crawling along river-bottom.

Gordon was the youngest of 15 children in his family, and attended “segregated school”, but Fort Scott could not afford a fully segregated high school (that town’s elementary schools were segregated fully into separate buildings then, Gordon’s elementary school being the Plaza School), so blacks attended high school in the same building as whites, but were not allowed to play school sports or attend school social activities. Also, they were discouraged from higher education. Gordon’s high school teacher told him college would be a waste of money. He dropped out of high school at 14 when his mother died. But the greatest lesson he’d ever learn came from his mother, Sarah, who preached to him and the rest of the family the value of dignity (or faith in God and self) and hard work in overcoming bigotry.

It’s said young Gordon spent the night sleeping beside his mother’s coffin before she was buried, to face down his fears of death, and to be close to the first woman he’d ever loved. His father soon sent him to live with one of Gordon's sisters and her husband in Minnesota’s Twin Cities.
His brother-in-law soon kicked him out in thirty below temperatures, and Gordon stayed afloat on the streets, traveling all night on city streetcars. Struggling to survive, young Mr. Parks soon worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps; in brothels as a piano player; as a big band singer; as a semi-pro basketball player; and as a train waiter. While working in a brothel, Mr. Parks had witnessed the stabbing of a man, causing Gordon to quit that job.

TURNING POINT

In 1937, Mr. Parks was working as a train waiter on a train (the North Coast Limited) between Chicago and Seattle. A key turning point came when he saw photos of migrant farm workers in a “Life” magazine a passenger had left behind. Photographers working for the government's Farm Security Administration had taken the photos to illustrate the Great Depression’s effects. "I saw that the camera could be a weapon against poverty, against racism, against all sorts of social wrongs," he told an interviewer in 1999. "I knew at that point I had to have a camera." Parks quickly bought one at a pawnshop in Seattle, then spent three years teaching himself photography. He later noted, “I’d become sort of involved in things that were happening to people. No matter what color they be, whether they be Indians, Negroes, the poor white person, or anyone who was I thought, more or less getting a bad shake.” He added: “I’ve had a great sense of curiosity and a great sense of just wanting to achieve. I just forgot I was black, and walked in and asked for a job, and tried to be prepared for what I was asking for.”

In 1940, Parks convinced the wife (Madeline) of the owner of a women’s clothing store in St. Paul (Frank Murphy) to hire him as a fashion photographer. He'd picked up a camera he didn't know how to operate, and though Mrs. Murphy talked her husband into giving him a chance, the first batch of photos came out double-exposed, except one: Gordon’s beautifully composed view of a woman seated, wearing a fashion-plate dress. His work impressed Marva Louis, wife of legendary boxer Joe Louis, who convinced Parks to move to Chicago. She helped him get work shooting fashion and society photos; Parks also photographed poverty on Chicago's South Side. Always looking to record/mirror beauty, he knew the socially-conscious side of life was crucial too.

By 1942, he was taking good-enough photos to win a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship to study documentary photography in Washington, DC, under Roy Stryker at the famed Historical Section of the Farm Security Administration, and soon after, its successor at the Works Progress Administration, the Office of War Information, where he became one of the staff photographers. Other notable photographers on-staff included Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Arthur Rothstein, Jack Delano, Carl Mydans, and Ben Shahn.

Although Mr. Parks found himself among superb professionals, he'd already trained his eye, ear, and heart to make his mark as a documentary photographer (and writer) before he’d joined FSA. In the late 1930s, he'd self-studied the works of the FSA photographers and filmmakers, and realized visual communication could work as a language in ways other expressive forms might not. Photography and film were, for him, personal, universal activities that posited a mirror of
experience. He soon saw how he could make life better for others via his camera’s mirror on the world.

Mr. Stryker had said the new man should photograph a documentary subject, and Mr. Parks focused on the WPA cleaning woman, Ella Watson. The first day he photographed her, he posed that African-American lady holding a mop and broom in front of an American flag, calling it his own “American Gothic”, reminiscent of Grant Wood’s famous 1931 painting of a white farm pair holding farm implements with the same title; the image objectified an artistic response Mr. Parks had in mind, of subjugated black workers in America. Ms. Watson’s subjective response did not enter in, except Mr. Parks asked her to show a stern look. The photographer was inspired by actual events. Ms. Watson’s father had apparently been killed by a mob; and the photographer himself had recently been refused service by a clothing store, a movie theater, and a restaurant.

Stryker stated it was a photo-portrait that could get his whole photo-crew thrown out of work, for showing a put-upon, minority-group cleaning lady, but he told Mr. Parks to do some photos of Ella in her home, with her offspring around, etc. Though the latter photos weren’t as dramatic, Stryker knew he’d found a great photographer when he first saw the types of pictures Mr. Parks turned into prints. Both versions of “American Gothic” are still considered classics today.

The racism in the nation’s capital then was daunting, and Mr. Parks had to bite his tongue more than he liked, because he was a man who wanted to speak his mind, and could speak it well when necessary. When the Historical Section became part of the Office of War Information, Mr. Parks was asked to work there. He photographed the training of the first black fighter pilot unit in US history, the 332nd Fighter Group, based near Detroit. He was not allowed, though, to accompany the unit to Europe and WWII, probably because he was African-American. He relocated to Harlem circa 1944, doing freelance photography, including for “Vogue” magazine the next few years.

GROUND-BREAKING HIRE BY LIFE MAGAZINE

At the close of World War II, Roy Stryker asked Mr. Parks to work with him on the Standard Oil of New Jersey documentary project (1945-48). Parks photographed small town life and industrial areas. Then, he was hired by Life magazine, and from 1948-1970 was the first African-American photo-journalist employed by that magazine. Previous to Life’s hiring of Parks, blacks were generally depicted in stereotypical ways in that magazine, not in the complicated human ways Parks would show them and other Americans.

In his more than 20 years photographing and writing for Life, Mr. Parks completed 300 assignments, ranging from stylized portraits of celebrity beauty to somber studies of racism and poverty. He spent 1949 through 1951 at the Paris bureau of Life, photographing everything from a state funeral to everyday scenes. A 1956 picture-story by him documented the humiliation of segregation in the Deep South. Southerners twice threatened to lynch him while he was photographing the civil rights movement and other events for the magazine.

The first picture-story Gordon Parks proposed to “Life” magazine that was accepted had been “The Harlem Gang Story” (1948). His sensitive portrait of gang leader Red Jackson smoking a
cigarette by a broken window, says a lot about unrealized dreams among some African-Americans of that era.

As telling as was his first picture-story for Life, though, another one by Mr. Parks about black people in the 1956 Montgomery, AL, area is more inspirational. Although Martin Luther King Jr. was nearby too, Parks focused on everyday African-Americans there. Years later, Gerhard Steidel, who produced a five-volume set of the collected works of Gordon Parks, released on what would have been his 100th birthday in 2012, said, “I believe Gordon Parks was, with his camera, a fighter – on the right side (of history) … the people he photographed trusted him, they had 100% faith in him.” His subjects understood that at least one person was going to make sure their story got told, even if they themselves were trapped in a narrative almost impossible to escape. “Segregation Story: Gordon Parks” was eventually exhibited in New York City and Chicago.

**DOCUMENTARY DIGNITY AND THE SOULS OF BLACK PEOPLE**

Mr. Parks’s documentary photo of a black postman in western-style safari hat reading the mail to an illiterate black couple on their porch, speaks volumes for the crucial human capacities of these photo-subjects and their photographer. The relevant New York Times Lens feature by Maurice Berger, “A Radically Prosaic Approach to Civil Rights Images”(7-16-12), suggests this family’s human story more expansively.

Gordon Parks’s portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Thornton Sr., an elderly black couple in their Mobile, Ala., home in 1956, is different than most civil rights photography. It is in color, unlike most photos of the movement. Its subject matter was neither news worthy nor historic, unlike more widely published journalistic images of racial murders, police brutality, demonstrations and boycotts that characterized the battle for racial justice and equality.

Yet, as effectively as any civil rights photo, the portrait was a forceful “weapon of choice,” as Mr. Parks said, in the struggle versus racism and segregation. He took the pictures on assignment for a Sept. 1956 Life magazine picture-story, ‘The Restraints: Open and Hidden’, which documented the everyday activities and rituals of one extended black family in the rural South during the Jim Crow era. While 20 photos were published in Life, the bulk of Mr. Parks’s work from that shoot was thought to have been lost -- until the Gordon Parks Foundation discovered more than 70 color transparencies at the bottom of an old storage box, wrapped in paper and masking tape and marked, Segregation Series. Not all of the Segregation photos are as prosaic as the Thornton couple with postman image. Some are ominous and intense, providing dramatic evidence of the evils of segregation and the ways it endangered democracy: the “colored only” signs marginalizing one community as assuredly as they enriched another; the backbreaking labor; the squalor and overcrowding; and the unequal, ramshackle accommodations.

But most of the images are optimistic and affirmative, like Mr. Parks’s more-formal portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Thornton. Generally, his images for that assignment focus on the family’s everyday life, and their resolve to get on with their life as normally as possible, in spite of an environment that restricts and intimidates: e.g, Mrs. Thornton cradling her newborn great-grandchild; her son, now a father himself, on a stroll with his children; a couple filling out tax returns; a Sunday
These quiet, compelling photos elicit a reaction Mr. Parks believed was critical to the undoing of racial prejudice: empathy. Throughout his career, he endeavored to help viewers, white and black, understand and share the feelings of others. It was with this goal in mind that he set out to document the lives of the Thornton family, creating images meant to alter the way Americans viewed one another and, ultimately, themselves.

To be sure, the Segregation Series challenged an abiding myth of racism: that the races are innately unequal, a delusion that allows one group to declare its superiority over another by capriciously ascribing to it negative traits, abnormalities or pathologies. It is the true fullness, even ordinariness, of the lives of the Thornton family that most effectively contests these notions of difference, which had flourished in a culture that offered no more than an incomplete or distorted view of African-American life. As the writer Thulani Davis observes, white Americans, in the civil rights era, had little awareness black people “lived in a complete universe.” In our private lives “we were whole. We enjoyed a richness that the mainstream almost never showed, but that we took for granted just as white people did.”

As the organic depiction of black life in the rural South in the Segregation Series demonstrates, the aspirations, responsibilities, vocations, and rituals of the Thornton family were not essentially different from those of white Americans. Yet, these religious, law-abiding people, and others like them, were persecuted. It is this incongruity, visible in Mr. Parks’s photos, which may have appealed to the empathy and fairness of some of Life’s white readers. It challenged them to reconsider both their attitudes about segregation and the stereotypes they assigned to people in fact little different from them. The complete and positive images also helped to bolster the morale of blacks vis-a-vis withering prejudice. This is one reason Mr. Parks’s quiet portrait of the Thorntons is an important civil rights image, demonstrating the historic role of photography in black culture.

Throughout a century of oppression, photography served as a ray of light for black Americans, illuminating the humanity, beauty and achievements long hidden in the culture at large. By allowing a people to record and celebrate the affirmative aspects of their lives, the camera helped to overcome the toxic effects of stereotypes on their self-esteem. One detail in Mr. Parks’s photo-portrait of the Thorntons underscores the medium’s restorative power: the ornately framed picture of the couple that hangs on the wall above them. The image dates to the time of their marriage in 1903, when Mr. Thornton was 29 and Mrs. Thornton 17. Careful examination reveals it was spliced together from two separate images. What first appears to be a wedding picture is, in fact, the restitution of a lost history. The image serves as both a commemoration of the couple’s union and poignant metaphor of the resilience and sincerity of their bond against historic decades of intolerance and adversity.

Another object, the coffee table in front with family snapshots proudly displayed under its glass top, highlights photography’s esteemed place in black life. These details remind us of the extent to which blacks were able to represent themselves in a positive light, requiring no immediate cooperation from white-dominated media. As the popularity of inexpensive, easily accessible
cameras swept across the nation in the 1900s, black Americans, like their white counterparts, relied on snapshots to document and memorialize their lives. Millions of blacks used their own cameras (and before that patronized a nationwide syndicate of black-owned photo studios) to accomplish what a century and a half of mainstream representation usually could not: the creation of positive, multifaceted images that could give courage to a people against the forces of intolerance.

FURTHER LIFE PHOTO-ESSAYS

Gordon Parks continued creating picture-stories and photo-essays for Life in the 1960s. Among his most successful there are: “The Black Muslims” (1963); “The Death of Malcolm X” (1965); “On the Death of Martin Luther King, Jr.” (1968); “The Black Panthers and the Police” (1970); and “Papa Rage: A Visit with Eldridge Cleaver” (1970). Matthew Clair writes for Diverse Arts Project that Mr. Parks covered blacks differently than many other American photographers had, as in his Life photo-essay depicting New York City blacks with real feelings and attitudes not simply as art-objects. The name of the in-focus family is Fontenelle.

On that magazine’s March 8, 1968 front-cover is Mr. Parks’s photo of the angled profile of a young black girl in shadows, with a tear in her eye. She is Ellen Fontenelle, and we don’t know why she is crying, but Life’s writers suggest what the results will be with the cover/story’s title: “The Negro and the Cities: The Cry That Will Be Heard”. Blacks’ self-awareness and their interest in improving their lives well-beyond the era of forced-segregation, i.e., as human beings equal to whites, emerges strongly. The matriarch of the Life coverage-family, Bessie Fontenelle, had asked Mr. Parks early on the reasons for his coverage of her family, and he had assured her his photos and words would help her family and other black families like hers, improve their lives.

Among the many other beautiful and sensitive photo-portraits Mr. Parks had made/would make were those depicting Malcolm X (Mr. Parks was godfather to Malcolm’s daughter Ms. Shabazz), Muhammad Ali (many times, including in 1966 London where Ali defeated Brian London), Angela Davis, Ingrid Bergman, Barbra Streisand, Aaron Copland, and Duke Ellington, as well as his famous portrait of the Muslim woman Ethel Shariff in Chicago, 1968, standing in front of a uniformed grouping of “Sisters” – and of photo-geniuses Edward Steichen and Roy Stryker. Mr. Parks often used smaller-format cameras than most studio photographers did, and worked more quickly, like other top photojournalists were doing then.

Gordon Parks also photographed a pivotal story for Life in 1961, about a poor, very sick boy living just outside Rio de Janeiro, in the Favela of Catacumba (meaning “Death”), “a desolate mountainside of misery”, as Mr. Parks called it. The 12-year-old boy was Flavio da Silva. He suffered from the most severe form of asthma, and had the bone structure, height, and weight of a much younger boy. Dean Rusk, US Secretary of State under President Kennedy, had just warned the US Government that if it didn't give aid immediately to Latin America's poor, the entire region would go Communist. Mr. Parks had just been shown the New York Times clipping with Rusk's statement. That same afternoon, Flavio's story was in a new layout and scheduled for publication on ten pages of Life. “Freedom's Fearful Foe: Poverty” was published in Life, on June 16, 1961.
The outpouring of money and good will for Flavio was enormous; $30,000 (a huge amount then) was raised and a new house for his family built, as Flavio was brought to Denver for treatment. He left two years later, and wanted to stay with Mr. Parks. However, it couldn't be arranged, and Flavio returned home, in better condition than he'd been in, earlier in Brazil. Gordon Parks visited Flavio in 1977, and made a photo-portrait of him then too, publishing a book about him in 1978. The once-put-upon boy had grown up, but his hopes in meeting Parks earlier had been deflated somewhat, as is apparent in his no-nonsense look into the 1977 camera.

Thirty-five years (1996) after his story ran in Life, Flavio's situation was reviewed again by Mr. Parks. Poverty, an ever-present foe, lingered: Flavio had lost his job of 13 years, and at age 47 by then, he'd collected only $400 in severance pay. His father was confined to a mental institution, and couldn't remember his children's names. The Life-built house was crumbling from neglect.

Mr. Parks's groundbreaking job with Life often put him in awkward situations. Some black militants criticized him for working for a white-dominated publication, and Parks once upset other black photographers by not joining their protest against Life for not employing them. On the other hand, Life editors began to question Parks's ability to be objective toward black subjects. Still, in the 1960s, Parks photographed black radical groups, including the Black Panthers and Black Muslims. Life had assigned white photographers to cover those groups, but they were not able to get access to them, so the editors turned to Parks. He wrote an essay about the 1965 assassination of Malcolm X that provoked a plot to murder him as well. Life sent his family abroad to protect them and put Mr. Parks under armed guard for a time.

NEW GROUND-BREAKING VENTURES

After his years with Life (he actually continued to contribute there until its first closing in 1972, while directing Essence), Mr. Parks, a co-founder of the black style magazine Essence, directed its editorial office from 1970-1973. His keen interest in honest human beauty, especially among racial minorities, continued coming to the fore there. It couldn’t have been easy for Mr. Parks to weather the racial prejudice that continued to assail him and others like him, but he managed to do stellar work, nevertheless. Mainly his photojournalism is less hard-news-oriented, and more the work of a sensitive, objective observer, who is often gentle-enough in his compassion.

In the coming years, Mr. Parks also became the first black artist to write, direct, and score a Hollywood film (“The Learning Tree”, 1969, which Carl Mydans had advised Mr. Parks to do originally), based on his 1964 autobiographical novel by that title. Newt Winger is a young African-American man growing up in Kansas in the 1920s and 1930s. As a witness to the crime, he gives testimony in a murder committed by the father of his hot-blooded friend Marcus Savage, Booker. Booker commits suicide and Marcus confronts Newt with a gun. A vicious fight occurs, which Newt wins, but then Marcus is killed by a racist sheriff.

Gordon Parks also directed the very successful, pioneering “blaxploitation” film “Shaft” (1971) starring Richard Roundtree. “Shaft” stands black stereotypes on their heads in an action-packed, shoot-em up thriller with unafraid humor included. Its trailer says “hotter than Bond, cooler than Bullitt”. Its print-ad says: “The [Italian] mob wanted Harlem back. They got Shaft… up to here.
Shaft’s his name. Shaft’s his game.” Mr. Parks told the Village Voice in 1976 that he didn’t make black exploitation films; what he helped invent, though, was a new, more honest genre of black films in America. “Shaft’s Big Score”(1972) followed, then “The Super Cops”(1974), and the bio-pic about the notable blues singer Huddie Ledbetter, or “Leadbelly”(1976). “The Learning Tree” and “Shaft” are included in the Library of Congress’s National Film Registry, the highest honor bestowed on US films.

"I still don't know exactly who I am," Mr. Parks wrote in his 1979 memoir, "To Smile in Autumn." "I've disappeared into myself so many different ways that I don't know who 'me' is." The great thing about all his keen abilities is they were generally self-taught; no one had really told him he couldn’t do those things, so he just did them. In the area of film, "Gordon Parks was like the Jackie Robinson of film," Donald Faulkner, the director of the New York State Writers Institute, once said. "He broke ground for a lot of people -- Spike Lee, John Singleton." Jackie Robinson was the first African American player allowed to play Major League Baseball in the modern era; he starred for the Brooklyn Dodgers from April 15, 1947 to Oct. 10, 1956. Gordon Parks was the Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali of the Arts generally -- the first to do many things, and arguably the best at doing them, too. And regarding Ali, Gordon Parks had key access to the boxing champion on various occasions; his intimate, close-up portraits of Muhammad Ali are superb. Of course, Ali was known as “The People’s Champion”.

Mr. Parks' diverse and early successes had taken him far from his rural Kansas roots. He lived in a Manhattan high-rise with a view of the East River. He spent much of the 1980s and 1990s helping to create retrospectives of his work. One, “Half Past Autumn: The Art of Gordon Parks”, toured American museums in the late 1990s. Gordon Parks also composed the music and libretto for the ballet “Martin”, about Martin Luther King, Jr., and wrote a poem about his own father called “The Funeral”. He authored and was the subject of many books, including several memoirs; he earlier had even done a how-to book, “Camera Portraits: The Techniques and Principles of Documentary Photography”(1948).

Gordon Parks married and divorced thrice (to Sally Alvis, Elizabeth Campbell, and his third ex-wife and final estate executor, Genevieve Young). When author Candace Bushnell first moved to Manhattan, she became a good friend of his. Also, Mr. Parks was a close friend of the beautiful heiress Gloria Vanderbilt, mother of CNN anchor Anderson Cooper. Some historians have even said they were longtime companions. Why an artist so attuned to the sufferings of poor minorities would become so close to a woman of such great wealth may be partly because Ms. Vanderbilt appreciated Mr. Parks’s work and believed she could aid him with it. It also might be that, like notable Fox News Anchor Bill O’Reilly often says regarding his own fame and fortune, Mr. Parks felt he’d worked for everything he’d gotten in life and deserved his new-found status.

As Mr. Parks wrote late in life: “I think that after nearly 85 years upon this planet that I have a right after working so hard at showing the desolation and the poverty, to show something beautiful for somebody as well.” In fact, he’d spent much of his life before then showing sorrowfully beautiful things and beautifully happy things too. He wrote that he got so much work done over the years, due to his early upbringing: “I think maybe the rural influence in my life helped me, in a sense, of knowing how to get close to people and talk to them and get my work done.” Also, as youngest of 15 children, he knew what a youngest child from a poor family had
to do to stay alive. Mr. Parks himself had four children; one preceded him in death, Gordon Jr., who had directed the notable film “Super Fly”, and who died in a plane crash on April 3, 1979, while making a film in Nairobi, Kenya. He was 44.

Many photo exhibitions (his first, apparently, was for Kodak; a Kodak staffer had told him early, if he kept up his good work, Kodak would exhibit his work; and one recent posthumous, 3-part show of his work at Wichita State University through early April 2016, in honor of the 10th anniversary since his passing, including a group of his photos from Camp Nathan Hale’s interracial youth program in New York State in 1943), and other notable celebrations of Gordon Sr.’s works and life marked his time on earth.

THE BATTLES FOR SOCIAL ESTEEM

Mr. Parks was thought very highly of, in later life, despite the harsh racial and social discrimination he’d faced early. He’d been spit on, beaten up, and called the “n-word” numerous times as a young man. As he wrote: “I suffered evils, but without allowing them to rob me of the freedom to expand.” He authored four autobiographical memoirs, and one at least, “Voices in the Mirror”, begins with nightmares in which Parks must do physical combat with Death to go on, with Death already having done serious damage to him (perhaps reminiscent of his sleeping beside his mother’s coffin the night before her burial, when he was 14).

The challenges Mr. Parks faced over time likely took a toll on him. As he once wrote: “…winter is entering. Half past autumn has arrived.” In a way, though, autumn was always half past for him with winter entering, because his wisdom was very much experiential and eternal. But he kept turning out stellar work, even though life must have been hard on his family too. Never graduating high school, Mr. Parks did earn more than 40 Honorary Doctorates and Degrees. And in 1988, President Ronald Reagan bestowed on him the National Medal of the Arts.

A man I know says to people, “You’re going to die. Nothing you can do about it.” But there IS A LOT you can do about it, by doing many decent things for other people while you live. As Jackie Robinson once said, a life is important only in the positive impact it has on other lives. Gordon Parks had come a long, roundabout way from Fort Scott, Kansas, to New York and beyond. And he'd visited many great, happy, and sad places in-between. Somehow it seems if God saves a special place in Heaven for those souls who have overcome nearly every sling and arrow thrown at them, God saved a special place for Gordon Parks.

Mr. Parks returned more than once to Fort Scott, to photograph the area of his birth. Once, he even traversed the nation tracking down his former Plaza School classmates to photograph, but Life didn’t publish that coverage. He was even robbed by the husband of one of his former classmates after taking their picture. One photo he took on a visit to Fort Scott, though, speaks volumes. The frame is mainly filled with greenery in the countryside, but in the lower right-central portion of it, like a cut-out, is a modest light-filled opening, with the silhouette of a young woman, wearing a 19th-century-style dress, a school marm’s perhaps, in the distance. She is at right of a lean, still young boy, and she has her arm over his shoulders. It’s as if the middle-aged Gordon Parks had found his greatest happiness where he was once afraid he might not re-find it,
but did – in his birthplace, where he still remembered the love of his parents, the value of an honest day's work, and the play with his siblings too. He'd worked hard and he'd always had faith in himself, just like his mother said he should, before she died when he was 14.

To Gordon Parks, the camera was “a weapon against poverty, against racism, against all sorts of social wrongs.” His poetry was keen too, as in: “The Funeral.” “After many snows I was home again./Time had whittled down to mere hills the great mountains/of my childhood./Raging rivers I once swam trickled now like gentle streams/and the wide road curving on to China or Kansas City/or perhaps Calcutta/had withered to a crooked path of dust/ending abruptly at the county burial ground./Only the giant that was my father remained the same./A hundred strong men strained beneath his coffin/when they bore him to his grave.”

Pia Lindstrom said, after he’d passed, that her mother, Ingrid Bergman, asked for only one photographer (Mr. Parks) when she first worked with second husband-to-be Roberto Rosselini, who’d direct her first in the film “Stromboli”. Ms. Lindstrom added that near the end of his life, Mr. Parks, though weak from terminal cancer, wrote poetry every night before he went to sleep. His muses were daunting, but his talents towering.

LEGACIES

Gordon Parks died of prostate cancer and complications from high blood pressure in Manhattan, NY, at age 93 on March 7, 2006. His funeral was at Riverside Church there, whose interdenominational congregation comprises 40 ethnic groups, with a strong social justice history. Former New York Mayor David Dinkins, the only African-American mayor of that city so far, said when interviewed at Mr. Parks’s service, “His was a life well-lived, that really rings true.” Gordon Parks’s burial was in Fort Scott, KS, his hometown.

Many schools are named for Mr. Parks, and in 2000, Denzel Washington did the filmic story of his life, “Half Past Autumn”. His photos are still published, his films still viewed, his poetry still read, his music still performed. His living offspring still carry on his legacy as a Renaissance Man, the most versatile of titans. But before he belonged to the world, he was an American Champion.
“W. Eugene Smith’s Compassionate Eye (1918-1978)”

EARLY YEARS

The life and legend of William Eugene Smith began in Wichita, Kansas on Dec. 30, 1918 with his birth. He did not quite live to be 60, but packed a lot of incredibly ethical and beautiful photos into the interim. Among his many contributions was his championing of the rights of photojournalists to determine how their work was presented to the public, in order to preserve the essential truth of the subject and the photographer’s essence too in each use.

W.E. Smith was introduced to photography by his mother, an enthusiastic amateur. His childhood was “typical” until his father committed suicide during Smith’s senior year in high school. His camera became an obsession, perhaps to help Smith cope with his tragic loss. Although young, his photography talent was evident; he was hired by two local newspapers, the Eagle and the Beacon, to photograph sports, aviation and the devastation of the Dust Bowl. His talent led to a special scholarship designed for him to study photography at Notre Dame University, but he left after only one semester. His restlessness took him to New York City, where he was hired by Newsweek; he was expected to use medium-format cameras there, which he objected to. He soon worked for Life and freelanced for periodicals including Colliers, American, the New York Times, and Harper’s Bazaar. During this time, he married and fathered two children.

THE WAR YEARS, SEVERE WOUNDS, AND REBIRTH

While working for Life and for Ziff-Davis Publishing, Smith was assigned as a war correspondent and became famous for his emotionally charged and truthful images. It was important to Smith to photograph World War II with heart and precision. He photographed 26 carrier combat missions and 13 invasions in the Pacific and in Europe, on land, sea, and in the air. His photos were even published in Japanese periodicals.

His work was interrupted on May 22, 1945, during the invasion of Okinawa. His face and hands were severely injured in a mortar attack. After two painful years of numerous surgeries and recovery, Smith could hardly hold a camera. But he felt a strong need to make images that were signs of hope and happiness and that were socially conscious. “The day I again tried for the first time to make a photograph, I could barely load the roll of film into the camera. Yet I was determined that the first photograph would be a contrast to the war photographs and that it would speak an affirmation of life….”

His first photo after his injury was of his two young children emerging from a dark wooded area. It was titled “The Walk to Paradise Garden”. It became one of his most famous and beloved works, and was chosen by Edward Steichen as the final image in “The Family of Man” group-exhibition.

Returning to work for Life, Smith would produce a series of provocative photo-essays, including among the most famous: Spanish Village, Country Doctor, and Nurse Midwife. He spent weeks immersing himself in the lives of his subjects, an approach almost unheard of then. His
continued advocacy of the moral responsibility of the photojournalist led him to join the Photo-League in New York after the war, and to accept its presidency in 1949. At Life, despite ongoing battles over deadlines, picture size, layout, and captioning, more than 50 of his essays were published between 1946 and 1952. As with his keenly personal vision in the taking of his best photos, Smith said that 90% of his images’ power came from his personal vision in their printing, something he couldn’t easily control at Life. The darks were very dark in his prints, the lights light, but with sufficient details too in the gray areas generally.

It needs to be noted that the photo-essay shares some points with the photo-sequence, which preceded it in terms of origins and maturation. The best early photo-sequences were designed by Stefan Lorant in Germany and England. But in both forms, the order and size of the photos are important. Smaller photos, for instance, might depict incidents leading up to and explaining a significant event that would be reproduced larger.

However, in other respects a photo-sequence and a photo-essay differ. The photo-essay grew to prominence in America almost exclusively because of its use in Life magazine. W.E. Smith became the first great photographer associated with the more mature form. The structure and internal relationships of the photos in his essays, and in essays by more recent fellow masters of the form, do more than provide factual meaning to events and situations; they also imply certain values and interpretations of those circumstances. But at Life, unlike Picture Post, the photo-essay began with the writer. (At Picture Post, Editor Tom Hopkinson said his photographers were like thoroughbred racehorses; without the photographers, no matter how good the words were, they would fail the subjects. It was an idea Smith could appreciate.) W.E. Smith and other photographers found it ironic and frustrating that while working on the country’s most prestigious picture magazine, they were subordinate to the word men and were still being treated like second-class citizens. Smith always wanted to do photo-essays not picture-stories. Life Editor Wilson Hicks referred to word-photo combinations in his magazine as picture-stories.

Smith resigned permanently from Life magazine in 1954, when he recognized he couldn’t alter publication policies that denied the photographer a strong voice in the final appearance and meaning of published photo-essays. Though his methods were cutting-edge and brilliant, he had a difficult time with editors. Smith refused to allow any of his photos and their layouts to be anything but his own personal vision. After resigning from Life, he joined Magnum Picture Agency, which supported and fought for photojournalistic rights.

POST-LIFE YEARS

Mr. Smith continued to produce photo-essays, supported by three Guggenheim fellowship grants. One of the largest photo-essays he produced was about the city of Pittsburgh, a project directed by former Picture Post editor Stefan Lorant. Smith moved to that industrial hub, where he threw himself obsessively into the project. He took more than 11,000 photos, but was physically, mentally and financially broke afterward. His Pittsburgh images were never published in Life, but some were published elsewhere, including in Lorant’s book; his photo of a steel worker wearing goggles in the midst of intense toil is classic, as is his photo “Pittsburgh Boy”, which I call simply, “Pride Street”. His Pittsburgh photos, though, caused turmoil with Magnum and with his family. He left Magnum and his family and moved to New York City, where he produced a
series of wonderful images from his window. While there, he also worked from 1957-1965 on what he called his Jazz Loft Project, doing 4,000 hours of music tapes and nearly 40,000 photos from live performances of leading jazz artists Thelonius Monk, Roy Haines, et. al.

One poignantly successful photo-essay of Smith’s was “Minimata”. In 1971 he married Aileen Mioka Sprague and began his very intense photographing of Minimata, a small fishing village in Japan. The water in the village had been poisoned with mercury due to industrialization. A generation of residents was born with horrible defects due to that pollution. His most poetic and emotionally truthful photo from that photo-essay shows a severely deformed youngster, Tomoko, being bathed by her mother, in a searing moment reminiscent of Michelangelo’s Pieta. Smith once expressed his focus for many of his projects, saying, “I try to take what voice I have and give it to those who don’t have one at all.”

No less an expert than Edward Steichen, long the most powerful taste-maker in American photography, wrote in 1962 about Smith’s “The Thread Maker”, from Smith’s powerful early photo-essay “Spanish Village”: “This image of a woman weaving… has some of the splendor and grandeur of Spanish painting – of Velasquez, Goya and El Greco.” Yes, Smith was interested in showing people and things as they are, but at their most poetic too when poetry was called for.

W.E. Smith was the recipient of numerous awards and traveled extensively to teach and lecture. He moved to Tucson, Arizona in 1977 to teach at the University of Arizona and to organize his archive at the Center for Creative Photography. After an initial stroke in 1977, on October 15, 1978, Smith suffered a fatal stroke.

LEGACIES

W. Eugene Smith was inducted into the International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum in 1984 and his honorary panel was sponsored by Rangefinder Magazine. He was inducted for his revolutionary photojournalism and setting the standard for the mature photo-essay. Hal Gould said, “W. Eugene Smith was famous at twenty and a legend at forty. During the 1940s and 50s, when the leading edge of creative photography was found in photojournalism, Smith’s deeply humanistic style of photographic reportage continually restructured and expanded the expressive possibilities of the photo essay to a major credit level.”

The Center for Creative Photography in Arizona holds the largest collection of W. Eugene Smith’s works, including 3,000 master prints, thousands of negatives, contact sheets, proof and study prints, book dummies, magazine layouts, letters, cameras, darkroom equipment and records. The Smith family has founded the W. Eugene Smith Memorial Fund, a grant-giving organization recognizing photographers who demonstrate a commitment to humanitarian photography.

As William Eugene Smith once stated: “…I am always torn between the attitude of the journalist, who is a recorder of facts, and the artist, who is often necessarily at odds with the facts. My principle concern is for honesty, and above all honesty with myself….”
Ben Maddow has written that Mr. Smith’s vocation was “to do nothing less than record, by word and photograph, the human condition. No one could succeed at such a job, yet Smith almost did. During his relatively brief but often painful life, he created at least fifty images so powerful that they have changed the perception of our history.”

One project not fully completed by Mr. Smith was his Big Book, comprising 380 pages and 450 photos, laid out not in the way they would have been laid out in a publication like Life magazine, but by Smith’s own intensely personal vision.

In the end, the “W” in W.E. Smith came to mean “Wonderful”, according to John Loengard, a fellow Life photographer as well as superb picture editor like Mr. Smith, because Smith’s photos and layouts, at their best, were incredibly wonderful. We should all be as fortunate regarding the fate of our lives, our works, and our families. God is kind to all who believe; and God is no doubt kind to all who believe in, respect, and admire the life and works of W. Eugene Smith, too.
“From Luxembourg and America to the World: Edward Steichen’s Wisconsin Upbringing and His Very Influential Photographic Legacies (1879-1973)" --

NOTE: In December 2003, a truck marked “Wide Load” made its way quietly along Pilgrim Road from Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, near Milwaukee, to Old Falls Village, a distance of only four miles along County Line Road. James Auer, then art critic for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, did not report that activity until August 23, the next year, but when he did, he let Wisconsinites and whoever else wanted to know, that that truck was carrying something very special. He wrote: “Its precious but plain-looking cargo: the modest white farmhouse that had once been the home of the Luxembourg-born, Milwaukee-reared photographer, curator and chronicler of battles, Edward Jean Steichen.”

For many years, the Menomonee Falls Historical Society had worked to bring that farmhouse those four basic miles, so it could be outfitted as a museum memorializing Mr. Steichen and his family. This move was the “only local observance of the 125th anniversary of Mr. Steichen’s birth.” The only other one this writer knows of in the world was my own March 2004 cover-story for Britain’s RPS Journal. That Royal Photographic Society magazine is the oldest surviving periodical dedicated to photography, now more than 160 years old. That solo cover-story indicates how far into faded memory Mr. Steichen’s legacy may have passed, though his works still sell for considerable fortunes, as proved by the sale of his “The Pond—Moonlight” in February 2006 for the highest price ever paid for a photograph at auction until then, $2.9 Million. To be sure, his achievements for three-quarters of a century should be remembered for as long as artists live and create beautiful, useful works.

When “The Family of Man”’s very successful gala preview opened at New York’s Museum of Modern Art on January 25, 1955, many people had already heard of its director, Edward Steichen, whom the sculptor Rodin once called, "the greatest photographer of his time." But few knew Steichen had strong ties to Wisconsin. Despite there being many famous photographers once calling the Badger State home -- including Dickey Chapelle, H.H. Bennett, Eudora Welty (an excellent photographer, though she is better-known as a Southern writer, who attended college in Wisconsin), and pioneering social documentarian Lewis Hine -- the "Captain", as MOMA staff called Steichen from his WWII rank, was the most famous of them all.

The Spring 1958 issue of the Wisconsin Magazine of History included the abbreviated version of Mr. Steichen's remarks to the Wisconsin Historical Society's annual meeting in Green Lake of June 1957. Steichen began in universal terms, "Man's first knowledge of the world we live in and how it was... is based on images.." Images were always important to that Milwaukee-raised artist, and he found them, created them, and edited them continually. In the end, the images he chose to present to the world most quintessentially were not elitist, though he’d traveled among elites much of his adult life, but rather egalitarian, for “The Family of Man” was nothing if not egalitarian; and that egalitarianism got its real start in the socialist stronghold of Milwaukee, in the 1890s.

BIRTH AND IMMIGRATION FROM EUROPE TO AMERICA

Born March 27, 1879, in Bivange, Luxembourg, Eduard Jean (Edward John) Steichen, the oldest child in his family, was baptized Catholic. His father -- Jean-Pierre (John Peter), who was sent to America by wife Marie -- emigrated to Chicago, and the passionate, protective, Catholic-bred Marie (Mary) Kemp Steichen arrived there several months later with little Eduard, to rescue her husband from sickness and poverty. Moving for work to Hancock, Michigan, where Jean-Pierre's
health did not improve in the copper mines, and where daughter Lillian Pauline Steichen (also known as Pausl/Paula) was born in 1883, the Steichens made do, until Marie started a millinery business and Jean-Pierre spent more time tending his garden, which Eduard sold produce from, door-to-door.

Knowing her son and daughter needed more-educated surroundings to make something of themselves, Marie sent Eduard to the bustling German-American community of Milwaukee when he was nine, to attend Pio Nono College School. When her son turned 10, Marie had saved enough money to move the entire family to the city that would yield Steichen his first real jobs, and his first cameras.

Joanna Steichen, Edward's widow, who herself died in August 2010, told this writer in a 2003 phone interview that the Steichen family moved to Milwaukee for Eduard's sake, so he could get a better education. Marie "believed from the moment he was conceived that her son would be a genius," Edward's widow said, and Marie did a great deal to ensure his success, while his father was more of a "negative, pessimistic force". Hancock held less than 5,000 residents, while Milwaukee boasted a population of 104,468 inhabitants, by 1890 census figures. Newspapers were printed for every major language group in the bigger city. The Steichen parents read the German papers, and the English-language ones, too, though the latter were difficult at first. Still, Marie read up on political and cultural news.

According to Joanna Steichen, Edward later "talked about how the streetcar conductors spoke German and you couldn't get change or conduct business with them unless you spoke German." Milwaukee reputedly held the largest ratio of immigrants to overall inhabitants of any big city in America then. Many of Milwaukee's residents heard a lot about socialism, and tried to sort out its strengths and weaknesses. Victor Berger became head of the Social Democratic Party there, and even grew enamored of Edward's sister for a time, who, for her part, apparently grew enamored of socialism.

After settling into their first Wisconsin dwelling -- two floors of a building at the corner of North Third and West Walnut Streets -- the Steichens saw new things. As Penelope Niven states in her biography "Steichen": "There were modern streetcars; coal-burning hot-air furnaces instead of old wood-stoves; and a telephone exchange, although there were only 3,000 subscribers by 1896. The city was also fashion-conscious, and, therefore, an ideal place for a good milliner to ply her trade."

Young Eduard was also known as Gaesjack (pronounced Gay-shawk, meaning Little Jack, a nickname many sons of European men named John went by; his full name means; Edward = happy keeper; John = God's grace; Steichen = a variant from the German word Stauch, meaning wide sleeve or head-covering, or distinguished by peculiarity of dress. Niven states this Gaesjack was a charmer, who many people sensed would make a name for himself.

COMEUPPANCE AND NEW IDEAS, PERSONALLY AND ARTISTICALLY

Early during the family's time in Milwaukee, an incident occurred that would shape Edward's life. He recounts it in his "A Life in Photography":

"Once, when I was about ten years old, I came home from school, and as I was entering the door of [my mother's] millinery shop, I turned back and shouted into the street, 'You dirty little [derogatory term for Jew]'! / My mother... took me upstairs to our apartment. There, she talked to
me quietly and earnestly for a long, long time, explaining that all people were alike regardless of race, creed, or color. She talked about the evils of bigotry and intolerance. This was possibly the most important single moment in my growth towards manhood, and it was certainly on that day the seed was sown that, sixty-six years later, grew into an exhibition called ‘The Family of Man’.

(Many years later, Steichen's “Family of Man” would not only suggest why and how to unite the human family, but he himself would marry a woman of Jewish background from New York state -- an Episcopalian-convert most of her adult life, and a retired psychotherapist - his third/final wife, Joanna Taub Steichen. He was divorced from his first wife, Clara, the mother of his children, and his second wife, Dana, died after many years with him.)

At 12 or 13, Eduard was presented a bicycle by his mother. Realizing Western Union messengers walked their routes then, he took his bike down to their office and proposed he be hired as their first bike messenger. He was -- at the rate of fifteen dollars a month, five dollars more than the normal rate. Hearing of the youngster's success, Western Union's Milwaukee superintendent called the teen into his office. "I wanted a look," he said, "at a boy who has new ideas."

Eduard was often out-of-the-house, while Mary exploited her daughter by making Lillian dress up to model her hat creations. Pausl was a conscientious student. She loved books and music, and did not give up on school the way her brother would. Before long, Eduard apparently saw and/or experienced something at Pio Nono that turned him off to organized religion -- but he never documented anything specific about the supposed incident. Mary soon gave up on organized religion herself. Even on her deathbed, she would not have a priest in the room.

John and Mary often spoke Luxembourgish at home, and they transacted much of their business in Milwaukee in German; their children learned both German and French at an early age, along with English. Joanna Steichen said her own husband spoke French with a Midwestern accent.

In early Milwaukee, a group of painters of huge panoramas had a studio near Fifth and Wells, and Niven states their paintings were popular forms of entertainment when the Steichens arrived. The works represented subjects like the Crucifixion or momentous events in U.S. history and traveled as lavish entertainments shown to audiences in concert halls and auditoriums. One of the most famous panoramists was Richard Lorenz (also spelled Lorence), who would teach Eduard drawing and painting.

Niven points out: "The city was unique among new American cities in its marriage of the American dream of economic opportunity and the old European traditions of community and culture." European influences included the city's architecture, the sights and sounds of the streets, and the tastes of its restaurants, beer gardens, and free-lunch saloons, to which kegs of Milwaukee's beers were delivered in beer wagons drawn by rich-looking Belgian horses. Public buildings were designed after classical European buildings, and some wealthier citizens emulated the German Renaissance style in their mansions.

But Joel Smith has written in “Edward Steichen: The Early Years”: "The soul awakening in Steichen's [work] was that of Steichen's own generation of Americans, coming of age after the closing of the frontier and hungry for new horizons." At age nine, Eduard had traced a complex drawing in school, and presented it as his own sketch, which some of his teachers loved. He learned to experiment often -- to learn all the rules, then break them for art's sake.
MOTHER, WORK, AND EXPOSITION AS INSPIRATIONS

Mary Steichen was breadwinner and head of the family, but her millinery shop had to be listed under her husband's name, because women could not be officially recognized as heads of businesses then. She was also the children's mentor, protector, and disciplinarian. The great poet, journalist, and Lincoln biographer Carl Sandburg later called Mary, his mother-in-law, "Whitmanic", writing: "Nothing but the limit, nothing but the farthest and highest for her boy and girl. Nothing but the limit for herself, working in the scope of her chances. A rapt enthusiast, giving all, risking all, and no surety of returns." Her family, especially her children, was everything to her, and they felt the same way about "Oma".

At 13, Eduard read about the World's Columbian Exposition, set for Chicago in 1893. Because he was mechanically gifted and the exposition would feature many such wonders, he saved his money to travel there. By late summer 1893, he'd saved enough, and with his mother's blessing and a stock of chocolate, he headed for Chicago alone by train. Though future partner-photographer Alfred Stieglitz was inspired by the precision instrument there, the camera, young Steichen was interested in Electricity Hall. "Dynamoelectronics" was high technology then. (He also, though, may have half-noticed a photographer or two taking pictures at the Exposition.)

At 15, he left school, and entered a four-year apprenticeship, to learn to be a designer at the American Fine Art Company, a Milwaukee lithographic firm. He lived at home, and worked for nothing the first year as a litho-janitor. In 1895, his second year, he earned two dollars a week as printer's devil, learning how paper, ink, and metal plates produce lithographs. He was given raises the next two years, and his fourth year, helped design posters, show cards, and advertising. After-hours, he drew, and began to teach himself to paint, often going into the countryside with his sketchbook.

EARLIEST ART AND PHOTOGRAPHS

At 16, according to Niven, young Steichen wandered into a local camera shop, where he was amazed by the array of cameras. Though he himself had been photographed early on, he apparently did not hold a camera in his hands until, after many visits to and questions for the store-owner, the man offered him a "detective" box camera, at a very reasonable price. He bought it and rushed home to experiment, in his first "personal apprenticeship". It was the era of Kodak’s box camera, which used film not plates. Its motto was: "You Press the Button, We Do the Rest." His first camera had a fixed-focus lens and relatively fast shutter speeds, for more candid shots. Only one shot on his first roll turned out, though -- a view of Lillian playing piano.

At the litho firm, designers copied woodcuts from old German magazines and books as they created ads for Milwaukee brewers, flour millers, and pork packers. Steichen had observed that real Wisconsin pigs differed from those in the old woodcuts, and he asked his work supervisor to allow him to take photos that could be used in more realistic commercial drawings, the basis for litho designs. His boss said if he got a camera to do this work, he could present his photos for drawings. Eduard took his used Kodak to the camera store, and traded it in for a Primo Folding View Camera, four by five inches, which used plates not film.

After rigging up a darkroom in the family's cellar, he took a picture of a building. The camera shop owner told him it was overexposed and overdeveloped, but young Steichen persevered.
Then, the litho firm's owner saw him painting a picture of bluebirds and buttercups and moved his apprentice to the art department. Steichen honed his drawing skills and learned lettering art. Off-duty, he took pictures of friends and family, plus "phantasy pictures" of misty landscapes. He later wrote, "The haunting, elusive quality of twilight excited in me an emotion that I felt compelled to evoke in the images I was making." After-hours at 17, he sketched, photographed, and painted, sometimes riding the streetcar to the limit, where he'd hike into Nature. Once, it began to rain while he photographed trees on a wood lot, yielding a diffused view. Another time, he accidentally kicked his tripod, showing motion.

Steichen already was making so many photo-models for litho-designs that the old books of woodblock prints at the American Fine Art Company were being replaced by his photos. He roved the countryside, photographing wheat, and hops grown for the breweries. He also took clear pictures of pigs, which pleased his company's clients, too.

There were few if any photo classes in the city then, and no books to be found easily on phototechnique. Steichen did discover Alfred Stieglitz's groundbreaking photo-magazine in the city library, Camera Notes, and read it with interest. There, he saw photographs executed with great skill, and read about photo-aesthetics and technique. It was there he read Fred Holland Day's manifesto, "The camera, properly guided, is capable of art -- real art."

Lillian saw the possibilities of her brother's photos. She assisted in the darkroom. She also wrote. Later, in the April 1903 issue of Alfred Stieglitz's new journal Camera Work, her essay "Of Art in Relation to Life," revealed an egalitarian, William Morris-like premise that the foundation of art is reverence for "the life of man past and present and to come," and that art should not be "merely a handmaid to the luxury of rich and idle people." Morris was leader of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain. His Kelmscott Press turned out elegantly designed and thoughtfully written books of poetry and prose, which influenced socialist-leaning people. Morris also designed furniture, wallpaper, type, and he painted.

In 1897, Eduard won a prize for an envelope he designed for the National Education Association. He also designed an ad campaign for a new laxative, Cascarets Candy Cathartic, whose beautiful lady, drawn by Steichen, and motto, "Cascarets: they work while you sleep", would be seen on New York billboards when he visited that city en route to Europe in 1900.

EARLY MENTORS AND NEW INSPIRATIONS

By 18, Steichen, Carl Bjorncrantz, and other friends, some of whom were graphic arts tradesmen, formed the Milwaukee Art Students' League. Steichen was its first president, in a building owned by Milwaukee's Ethical Culture Society. Artists like Robert Schade and Richard Lorenz came to the group's studio and taught. Lorenz was Steichen's first real art teacher, who promoted the literal. Still, Eduard surmised that photographic art must transmute reality, to be truly art. (Niven states that Lorenz didn't think much of photography, though it was literal -- painting being the greater medium to him.)

Steichen read about The Philadelphia Photographic Salon's first annual show in the Nov. 5, 1898 Harper's Weekly. He determined to make the second year's event. One of his two pictures shown there was a self-portrait; the other came from a league event. The mother of a student had a beautiful estate, Gordon Place, on the Milwaukee River, and she turned over one of its houses to the league for the summer. Steichen wrote: “Early on the day of our housewarming, I had set up
my camera to photograph the sunlight coming in the doorway. Suddenly, one of the girl students appeared in the door, and I asked her to stay there while I made the picture... After trying it in and out of focus several times, I decided it gave a better feeling of light when it was out of focus... So I deliberately made the picture out of focus.”

Steichen's standards became more exacting. Getting a large raise as soon as he’d completed his four-year apprenticeship, plus earning money outside the firm with his camera, Steichen looked ahead. On Sundays and holidays, he wandered city parks, photographing laborers at their union picnics or members of singing societies. For twenty-five to fifty cents each, he sold and delivered snapshots to his subjects. With a friend, he even set up a photo-portrait studio.

Eduard also painted busts and heads of beautiful women and Native Americans, selling them in department stores. His posters even began appearing in his mother's hat shop. One of her son's early photos, made in 1899, shows 16-year-old Lillian posed in front of a tree trunk, wearing a straw hat covered with roses. When his sister graduated public school with highest honors, Eduard gave her a bouquet of lilies and a green velvet box. Inside he'd pasted a watercolor of trees and violets beside a pool with inscription. As his teenage years passed, Steichen read more about painting and photography at the public library. In a city paper, he read about the French sculptor Rodin, whom Steichen determined to meet.

NEW YORK, MEETING STIEGLITZ, EUROPE, AND BACK TO NEW YORK

At 21, he’d saved enough and made his move; en route to France, Eduard (who now changed his name to Edward) stopped in New York City, to introduce himself to legendary photographer Alfred Stieglitz. After they talked at the New York Camera Club, they decided they’d meet again, which would be a crucial alliance. Steichen wrote in his autobiography, "As I left, [Stieglitz] went with me to the elevator, and as the door closed, he said, 'Well, I suppose now that you're going to Paris, you'll forget about photography and devote yourself entirely to painting.' As the elevator went down, I shouted up to him, 'I will always stick to photography!'"

Steichen's best view of Rodin, which he took on that first artistic tour of Europe, with Rodin mimicking his famed "Thinker" sculpture, soon followed back in America, by Steichen's semi-scowling view of leading financier J.P. Morgan in 1903 – are his two most notable early photo-portraits. When Steichen returned to America, and moved into a New York City apartment, it became the famed “291” studio and gallery, at 291-293 Fifth Avenue, where Wisconsin-born artist Georgia O’Keeffe would hold her first solo exhibition. O’Keeffe later married Stieglitz.

SUBSEQUENT CAREER AND FAME

With few mentors then in Milwaukee, Steichen had needed to make a break from the Wisconsin upbringing he'd thrived on early. He'd soon become a man of the world -- helping introduce modern art to New York and America at 291 (on his first tour of Europe, he became a notable collector of modern European masters); helping photography find a greater role as art; leading U.S. military photographic units in two world wars; serving as chief photographer for Vogue and Vanity Fair (which may be why a PBS documentary about Annie Leibovitz called her “the modern Steichen”). Also, Edward photographed Wisconsin-tied celebrities for those magazines, including Lunt and Fontanne, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Orson Welles; and eventually directed the Photography Department of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where his truly eye-
opening, large-scale “Family of Man” group-show first appeared. And yet, he never completely forgot his roots. For many years after he'd left Wisconsin, he'd revisit the state. He'd spend time with his parents, after they moved from Milwaukee to their farm in Menomonee Falls, and then to their abodes in Illinois and Michigan. And Edward would send them money to buy their homes, just as his mother had sent him money early on, when he lived apart from his first family.

From Steichen's connections to poet Carl Sandburg -- his brother-in-law, good friend, and co-author, who lived in Wisconsin from 1907-12 and married Lillian Steichen in 1908 -- and Tom Maloney, another close friend, co-author, and job-recommender to the MOMA in 1947, who was a native Wisconsinite (and half-brother to La Crosse's Mary Funk, whom I interviewed) plus publisher of U.S. Camera Annual, where Steichen had influence, these connections also show Badger State sympathies. But trumpeting "local" elements in The “Family of Man” would have been alien to its egalitarian, universal mission -- which contained only three photos by Steichen.

Still, his successor in 1962 as director of the MOMA Photo Department was Ashland, WI-native and UW-Madison graduate, John Szarkowski, whom I interviewed via phone more than once. And the assistant curator of “The Family of Man”, Wayne Miller, who served under Steichen in World War II, also had ties to the Badger State; I also interviewed Mr. Miller via phone. From 1928-40, Miller's parents owned a summer resort in Hayward, WI. He recalled: "I was up there summer-times, and I helped take care of the guests, with guiding and things." Miller's father was a physician in Chicago, shown in “The Family of Man” delivering Wayne's son on Sept. 19, 1946 in Chicago, the photographer's 28th birthday. Asked if any "Family of Man" photos were taken in Wisconsin, Miller replied, "The photo of Mary Steichen holding a loaf of bread may have been taken in the Madison area, but I can't say for sure." The caption? "U.S.A. Edward Steichen 1921."

EDWARD STEICHEN'S LEGACIES

Today, the UW-Milwaukee has a courtyard named Steichen Court, a decent tribute to the man who helped make photography in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, America, and the World, more of an art form. Its dedication on May 8, 1988, also marked the close of a comprehensive exhibition of his work at UW-Milwaukee's Vogel Hall Galleries, "Steichen/109", named that since that show had opened on March 27, 1988, Steichen's 109th birth anniversary. That occasion may seem minor compared to his military honors and Presidential Medal of Freedom, which President Johnson bestowed upon Steichen in late 1963; but for a man who believed in the full circle, neither a permanent “Family of Man” exhibition in Luxembourg nor his honors in Wisconsin are insignificant, including his DFA Degree from UW-Madison in 1957.

And a year after the Menomonee Falls Historical Society moved the Steichen farmhouse to Old Falls Village, where I believe it still stands now as an Edward Steichen Museum, the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel’s photo-staff in a special project imitated the styles of four master photographers: Eddie Adams, Richard Avedon, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and native son Edward Jean Steichen.

Carl Sandburg wrote in the Prologue to “The Family of Man”: “There is only one man in the world/And his name is All Men./There is only one woman in the world/And her name is All Women./There is only one child in the world/And the child's name is All Children.”
Steichen's faith in America sprang from Wisconsin, staging grounds for an artistic egalitarian, where, as Joanna Steichen told me, "His love of Nature and Beauty in the things he photographed, [became] profoundly religious experiences to him." Not formally religious, Steichen learned Beauty, Equality, and Freedom in Wisconsin, and carried that learning forward. Two world wars couldn't destroy that learning. When he died on March 25, 1973, nearing his 94th birthday, the world marked the passing of the "Captain" with great respect and admiration. Alden Whitman wrote in the Page One *New York Times* obituary, Mr. Steichen was "the country's most celebrated and highest-paid photographer," a "craftsman of genius who transformed his medium into an art," a "humanist" who "gave his century a new vision."

Edward Jean Steichen was also a gardener, whose delphiniums were the first live floral art display at MOMA. His mother taught him many things, but he learned gardening from his dad, "Opa", who had called him that "long, lean, lazy lout of a poor, pitiful photographer". Edward fathered liberal, influential daughters Mary Steichen Calderone and Kate Steichen, and turned out to be not a bad offspring himself. Yes, Edward Steichen's roots and legacies ran deep, starting early in Europe, but Wisconsin, New York, and America were all key as well.

Captions for Interior Back BW Pic 4 Pages:
C-B: Mahatma Gandhi not long before his assassination, India, 1948, photo by Henri Cartier-Bresson for Magnum Photo Agency.
C-B: Man leaping over giant puddle, Paris train station, ca. 1950, by Henri Cartier-Bresson.
Frank: Mr. Frank’s Mary and son Pablo in car, USA, ca. 1955, by Robert Frank.
Hine: Teacher leading students in UK street, ca. 1940s, by Bert Hardy for Getty Images.
Hardy: Gorbals (Glasgow) street urchins, Mr. Hardy’s favorite photo, ca. Jan. 1949, by Bert Hardy for Getty Images.
Hine: Breaker boys in Pennsylvania coal mine, ca. 1913, by Lewis Wickes Hine.
Hine: Icarus of the Empire State Building, NYC, ca. 1931, by Lewis Wickes Hine.
Hine: Mill girl who just “happened in” to work, Newberry, SC, ca. 1913, by Lewis Wickes Hine.
Lange: Japanese-American kids reciting Pledge of Allegiance, Calif., 1942, by Dorothea Lange for War Relocation Authority and LOC.
Lange: Migrant Mother and children, Early 1936, by Dorothea Lange for FSA and LOC.
Parks: Muhammad Ali covered in perspiration, USA, ca. 1960s, by Gordon Parks for Life magazine.
Smith: Pride Street, or Pittsburgh Boy, 1955, by W. Eugene Smith.
Smith: Minamata Pieta (effects of mercury poisoning), or Tomoko in her bath, Japan, 1971, by W. Eugene Smith.
Steichen: Frank Lloyd Wright, ca. 1930s, by Edward Steichen.
Steichen: The poet Carl Sandburg with his wife, Lillian/Paul, Edward Steichen’s sister, by Edward Steichen, ca. 1940
American Eyes
Main photo Union Station, arched row, (DC), 2010; Inset photos (Left to right) Legends of the Human Spirit, Smithsonian, (DC), ca. 2006 (Matthew A. Marcou); Twin Harps, Lake Onalaska Gazebo, 2010, (Lorie Oldenburg)
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