For God & my family & friends, always.

**“I want to be a photographer.”**—A young Dorothea Lange.

**“Lange was by choice a social observer, and by instinct an artist. In the best of her photographs the demands of these two commitments are reconciled and resolved; the image and its comment are inseparable.”**—John Szarkowski.

**“Champions come in all sizes.”**—From a BTN documentary.

**“We can send greetings to generations [yet] unborn; the main way we can do that is Art.”**—From a film documentary.


Bio:SA57 is David Joseph Marcou’s 142nd book so far; he’s Wisconsin’s most prolific living author.

By David Joseph Marcou. (Sources are same as for DvJMs "Photographic Equality", re: Ms. Lange, pp. 17-27, in his book "The Photographic Spirit"; PE 1st published by Quazen online, Oct. 8, 2009.)
“The cars of the migrant people crawled out of the side roads onto the great cross-country highway, and they took the migrant way to the West. In the daylight they scuttled like bugs to the westward; and as the dark caught them, they clustered like bugs near to shelter and to water. And because they were lonely and perplexed, because they had all come from a place of sadness and worry and defeat, and because they were all going to a mysterious place, they huddled together; they talked together, they shared their lives, their food and the things they hoped for in the new country.” John Steinbeck, “The Grapes of Wrath”, 1939.

Big things often emerge from small packages, and so it was with Dorothea Margareta 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 came to prominence during the time when Franklin Delano Roosevelt, an even more severe polio victim, rose to power. Neither would let their disability stand in the way of doing important work. Still, 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 she'd 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 for her. However, she longed to take pictures and soon found teaching wasn’t her cup of tea.

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.

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, taking along her brother for protection. As it turned out, even unemployed people took to her sufficiently, so she could 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 with 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
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 photograph 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 an entire nation.

**LANGE AT AUCTION**

It’s a shame more money involved in art-colllecting 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 Oct. 11, 2005 indicates. There, 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 photo at auction. That October day in 2005, the Sotheby’s sale of photographs totaled $5.5 million, $10.3 million over two days.

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 then.

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, 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 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 maybe she kept a copy of her top images from the start.

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 an otherwise non-issue, making it a hot issue instead.

THE PEA-PICKER'S CAMP
In February 1936, Stryker wired approval to Lange for a one-month field trip

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 perhaps all others, though she did travel tens of thousands of miles. Not because she took more stunning news photos than all others, because news work wasn't her style. And assuredly not because she made more money or captured more celebrities 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 help tell.

Today, most of Dorothea 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 was America's eye of conscience for the Nisei internments.

TRANSCENDING THE MEDIUM
The epitaph on one 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.
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’d 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 where he was Steichen’s successor, 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
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 hits 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 later added, “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 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 story, 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.”
However, that scheme was replaced by an internment plan. 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. (By contrast, the “Trail of Tears” march the Cherokee Indian nation was forced to make starting in 1835, affected about 17,000 Cherokees.)

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 a mystery, but some staffer may have wanted to point up a government scandal, since at least a few 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 of 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.

Assembly centers were set up in whatever spaces were temporarily available. Paul Taylor -- who acknowledged a somewhat rational basis for public fears of Japanese-American disloyalty given they weren’t yet fully assimilated and many retained a strong affinity for their forebears’ land -- reminded Americans, though, that 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 Other Migrant Mother”, in Michael Stones’ term – Lange’s view of Florence breast-feeding her baby, Norma. Stones retouched it recently, 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 good documentary photograph is generally 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 own 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 broken-down.)

Regarding re-touching classic photos, one needs to be aware that critics might seek one’s hide for it, because classics are classics for good reason. 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”, 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 wanting either, apparently. Unable to get funding to renew her contract, Stryker let Lange go. Though she’d been temperamental and hard on 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 was 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 wrath” 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.