

A Click Makes an Icon

By James W. Brown, for a presentation to the Indianapolis Literary Club, November 6, 2023

Preface

New developments in history typically build on old ones. Scientific papers cite literature reviews highlighting what has gone on before and present work extends knowledge. Law cases cite precedents. There were many stages in the development of photography before the social documentary emphasis could emerge. The invention of the first practical photographic process in 1839 began through the partnership of Nicéphore Niépce and Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and was completed by Daguerre resulting in the Daguerreotype process. The images were so realistic that some considered the process blasphemous. Man should not create images; only God should create images. Regardless, the process rapidly diffused in Europe as the French government gave Daguerre a life pension and made the process public. Diffusion to the United States was facilitated by the writings of Samuel F. B. Morse, the painter and inventor of the telegraph. The only serious documentary effort in the 1800s in the U.S. was Mathew Brady's work in the Civil War. Brady learned photography as a student of Morse.

The 1800s saw an explosion of developments in photographic technology resulting in businesses such as the once dominant Eastman Kodak company.

Before the photograph could become an equal partner to words in mass communication, it had to go beyond the crude translations of photographs to woodcuts for publication. How did that happen?

The visual narrative form had to emerge after technical developments laid the framework for its development. What forces merged to create photographs that carried stories within them?

The early experimenters were men. So, when did women explore photography?

These topics will be explored in this essay before we focus on the life and style of one photographer who influenced social documentary and who produced iconic work that will resonate through time.

Technology of Photographic Reproduction



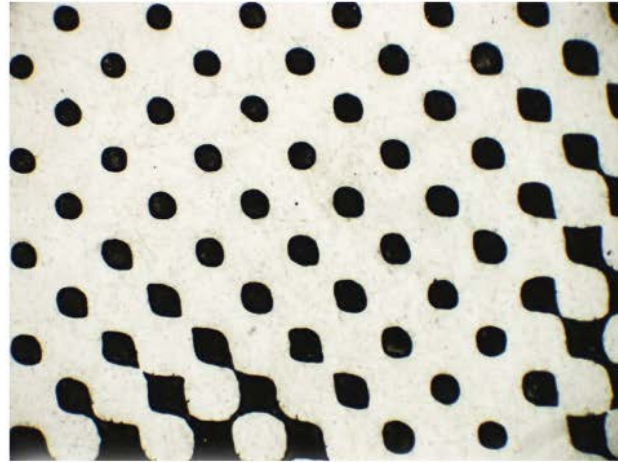
1 Woodcut made using metal engraving tools from photography on the block.

Photographic processes were extant in the early 1830s. But paintings, drawings, and photographs could not be directly printed into magazines and books without some intervening process. For example, technicians could convert a photograph into a woodcut. The information codes were vastly different. Woodcuts could carry limited information until someone thought of printing a photograph directly on the end grain of hardwood. The woodcut technician could use the photograph as a guide and cut right through the image with steel engraver tools, which allowed much finer detail. (Jussim 1974)

Making woodcuts was laborious; other solutions were sought resulting in the photomechanical or halftone process. A high contrast copy of a photograph was made through a lined screen resulting in a press process that would deposit dots of ink of various size on the printed page. Some dots were large and close together and others were small with some distance between them. When the page was viewed at a normal viewing distance, the dots were not perceived. Instead, the reader would “see” a continuous range of tones as in the original photograph.



Halftone print created using a standard Ives/Levy halftone screen at 55 lpi. Detail below at 40x magnification.



The tones were still black dots on white paper and not continuous, so they were called “halftones.”

There were numerous contributors to the evolution of the process but perhaps the most well-known was Frederic Ives, a pioneer in color photography. (Stulik and Kaplan 2013)

The half-tone process allowed photographs to be placed on a page with equal ease as text. However, photographs were illustrating text and were not yet seen in their own power as a communication medium.

Before the halftone process, if a photo appeared directly in a book, it was printed and tipped in (glued) the book.

Women in Photography

There were few women in photography until the 1900s. Julia Margaret Cameron was given a camera by her daughter and son-in-law in 1863.(Higgins 2015) She became a Victorian photographer of some note

making portraits with soft focus. She was criticized for her soft-focus technique as it did not fit with the norm of the period. It was said she spit on her lens to achieve the soft-focus effect. I have not tried this with any of my own lenses. Perhaps the reader may try it and let me know how it works.

In the 1970s, I was exploring a rare book collection in a secure research lab at 3M to see if it would be a useful resource for my graduate students. The head of public relations showed me the collection and asked me to put on white cotton gloves. He placed in my gloved hands a note written with a quill pen by Alfred Lord Tennyson. It was a sonnet written in thanks to Julia Margaret Cameron. She had made photographic illustrations that were inserted into an edition of his *Idylls of the King*. Since some of the lines were close to the edge of the paper, my assumption is that it was composed as he was writing. Otherwise, the sonnet would have been more properly centered on the page if copied. As my mind was attempting to grasp that I was reading the original Alfred Lord Tenneson sonnet, my host said, "How about that shit!" I have never forgotten the direct comparison of eloquence and lack thereof.

I was in Denver at a journalism conference and my wife was killing time at the Tattered Cover Book Store. She spun the greeting card rack around and was stunned to find a greeting card featuring three women with floor-length hair.

The same picture hung in our dining room.



² "Three Women" is a photograph of James Brown's grandmother and her two sisters by Belle Johnson who operated a studio in Monroe City, Missouri.

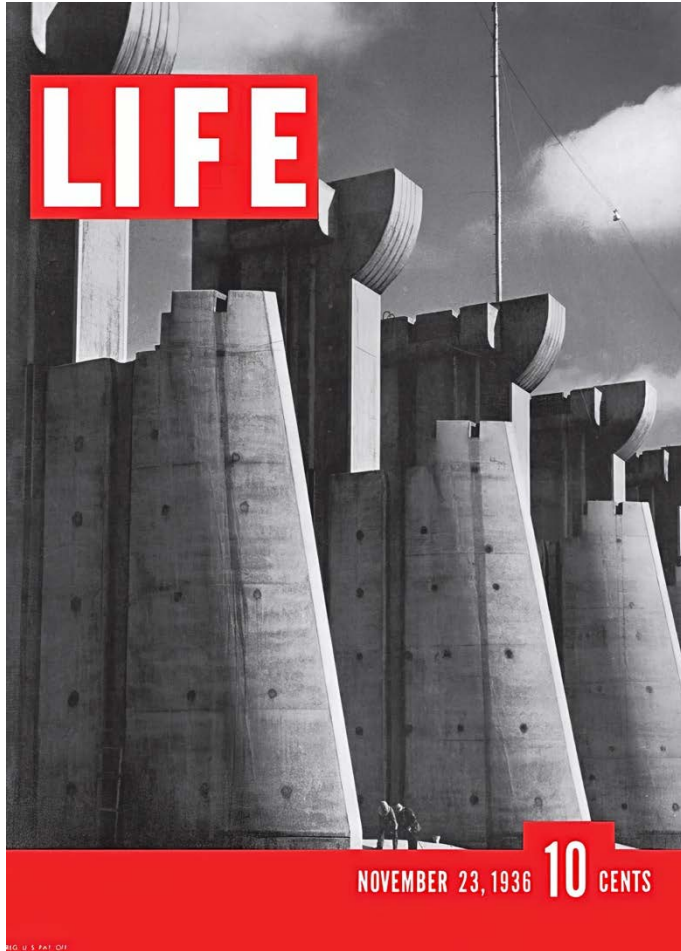
The women were known, at least to me. They were my grandmother and her two sisters. The card had been published by the Massillon Museum of Ohio.¹ The museum had a major collection of Belle Johnson's photographs, and the three women were considered the significant image of the collection. (Staff)

In the early 1900s, photography materials were readily available, and women were beginning to practice photography. Belle

Johnson was unusual as she

owned her own studio in Monroe City, Missouri (about 30 miles west of Hannibal). Her photographs were internationally known. The picture of the three women was published in the *Smithsonian* magazine in 1997 and in *A History of Woman Photographers* by Naomi Rosenblum.

¹ Some years later, I was driving by Massillon, Ohio on my way to judge the Ohio News Photographers contest. I called the director of the museum and asked if she wanted to know who the women were. She was giddy with excitement as she had tried for years to find their identities.

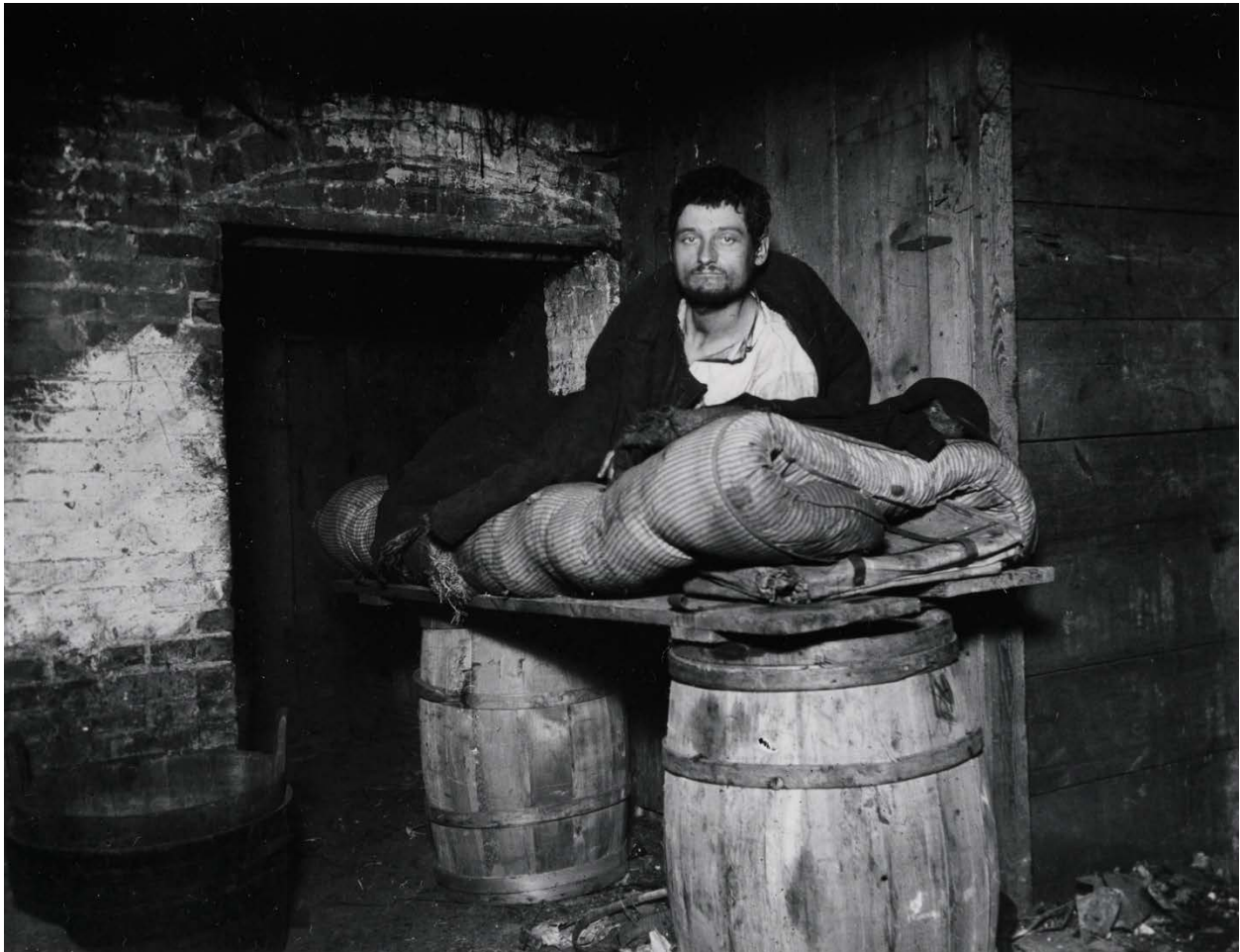


Margaret Bourke-White made history with the first cover of *Life* magazine in 1936.

3 First cover of *Life* magazine by Margaret Bourke-White.

Photography as Social Reform

In the early 1900s, photographs were seen as truth and representations of reality. They were seen as a method to document situations needing social reform. Beginning in 1890, the first American to use photography for social reform was Jacob Riis who documented poverty, crime and unsafe housing in the Lower East Side New York City. (Cookman 2009)



4 Photography by Jacob Riis - One of four Peddlers Who Slept in the Cellar of 11 Ludlow Street Rear.

His photographs caused city officials to make improvements in the lives of the people living there. Riis' book, *How the Other Half Lives*, was the first book in America to use photomechanical reproduction

(halftones). Ministers quoted it in their sermons according to Claude Cookman, author of *American Photojournalism: Motivations and Meanings*.



5 Lewis Wickes Hine's 1909 photograph of a young spinner in a Georgia cotton mill The Photography Collections, University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Lewis Hine photographed children working in dangerous jobs including coal mines and food processing plants. Child labor was a normal part of manufacturing. The 1900 census showed that child labor was 2.6 percent of the population. Eighteen percent of children between ages 10 to 15 were working. Hine's documentary photographs accelerated child labor laws.(Cookman 2009)

The work of Riis and Hine demonstrated that photographs had the power to effect change, perhaps more power than words had been.

The Visual Narrative Form

There were several developments in the 1930s both in the United States and Europe that created a nexus of change in how photographs were used in communication. These trends affected both how images were created in terms of focus and style and how they were used. Photographs were becoming equal partners with words in publications or even becoming dominant in emphasis.

Henry Luce founded *Life* magazine in 1936 with an eloquent manifesto.

“To see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things—machines, armies, multitudes, shadows in the jungle and on the moon; to see man’s work—his paintings, towers and discoveries; to see things thousands of miles away, things hidden behind walls and within rooms, things dangerous to come to; the women that men love and many children; to see and take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed;

“Thus to see, and to be shown, is now the will and now expectancy of half mankind.

“To see, and to show, is the mission now undertaken by a new kind of publication, THE SHOW-BOOK OF THE WORLD, hereinafter described.”(Luce 1936)

In the same confidential memo, Luce writes, “Nevertheless, people are missing relatively more of what the camera can tell than of what the reporter writes. With more or less success they “follow” the news—i.e., the written news. They scarcely realize how fascinating it can be to “follow” pictures—to be for the first time pictorially well-informed.

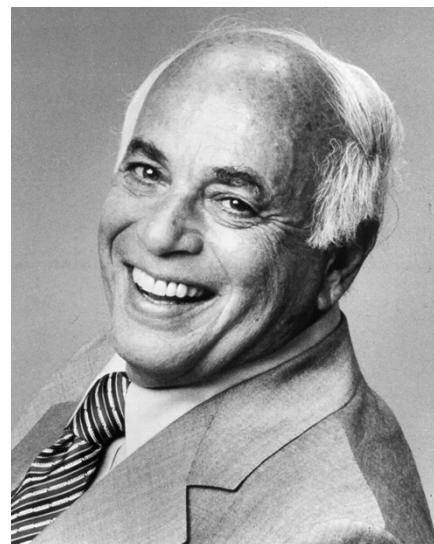
Thus, *Life* magazine was born as a picture magazine and its photographers helped define the picture essay. A change was happening in American journalism.

Three months after *Life*, a direct competitor, *Look* magazine, was born. Eventually *Look* became known for its extensive use of “white space” in story layouts. Minimizing text created space on the pages that had the effect of enhancing the impact of the photographs. Under the art direction of Will Hopkins, story layouts with white space were finalized before copy editing was complete. Once layouts were complete, writers and editors had to edit the copy to fit the copy blocks left in the layout. Thus, in *Look*, photographs were king.(Hopkins 1970s)

Both magazines folded in the early 1970s. They were the favorites of advertisers because they were the largest display space short of a billboard (*Look* was 11 by 14 inches). Both magazines had low subscription prices, much lower than production costs. The difference in production costs plus profit came from advertising dollars. Advertising in those magazines had excellent reach due to their large circulations. However, advertisers precipitously discovered television. Television seemed to be a better buy and the dollars flew from print to TV and both magazines died a quick death.

In addition to the picture magazines in the U.S., visual magazines were already well established in Germany.

Most people hearing the phrase “Candid Camera” probably remember the popular television show hosted by Allen Funt beginning in 1960. Unsuspecting people were placed in confusing and ridiculous positions while their reactions were captured with a hidden camera. The show was hilarious. The term “candid camera” was coined earlier in the 1930s to describe the photography of Dr. Eric Salomon (1886-1944). He is often thought of as the father of photojournalism. Salomon used a small Ermanox camera with an Ernostar



6 Allen Funt

85mm f/1.8 lens, which even by today's standards is very light sensitive.(Unknown 2023) The fast lens made unobtrusive photographs possible without the use of flash.



7 Ermanox Camera like the one used by Erich Salomon for candid photography.

Salomon made available light, candid pictures of European dignitaries at meetings where he found ingenious ways to make entry. (Salas) He was fluent in about seven languages and as a lawyer had the tuxedo with sash and medals to allow him to blend in with the dignitaries at a party. He would arrive late to the event. As party guests began to go to the veranda for a cigar, the doorman whose duty it was to check invitations would lose track of who had already been admitted and those who were new arrivals. If questioned, Salomon would reply in some other language. The doorman, rather than admitting he didn't understand the answer, would admit him. His photographs began to appear in

German picture magazines such as *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* that were exploring new forms of layout and design and moving photographs into more prominence.



8 Salomon was noted for his candid photographs but here he was discovered.

After Hitler came to power, Salomon, being Jewish, went to the Netherlands but was captured after Germany invaded. He and his wife met their end at Auschwitz on July 7, 1944.

Unfortunately, Salomon had declined an invitation to join the staff of *Life*. Other Jewish photographers did escape Nazi Germany. Some went to Great Britain but dared not use their credit line in their photographs since Germans were unpopular.

Alfred Eisenstaedt did escape the Nazis and joined the staff of *Life*.

During his career he had over 2,500 photo essays and 92 covers for

Life. (Staff) One of his most well-known photographs was of a sailor

kissing a dental assistant on V-J Day.^{2 3}



9 Photography by Alfred Eisenstaedt.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, visited the Ohrdruf internment camp on April 12, 1945. (Staff) He cabled General Marshall with these words:

“ . . .the most interesting—although horrible—sight that I encountered during the trip was a visit to a German internment camp near Gotha. The things I saw beggar description. While I was touring the camp I encountered three men who had been inmates and by one ruse or another had made their escape. I interviewed them through an interpreter. The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick. In one room, where they were piled up twenty or thirty naked men, killed by starvation,

² “I was walking through the crowds on V-J Day, looking for pictures. I noticed a sailor coming my way. He was grabbing every female he could find and kissing them all — young girls and old ladies alike. Then I noticed the nurse, standing in that enormous crowd. I focused on her, and just as I'd hoped, the sailor came along, grabbed the nurse, and bent down to kiss her. Now if this girl hadn't been a nurse, if she'd been dressed in dark clothes, I wouldn't have had a picture. The contrast between her white dress and the sailor's dark uniform gives the photograph its extra impact.” From: Eisenstaedt, A. (1969). Eye of Eisenstaedt. New York, Viking Press.

³ As a young professor, I met Alfred Eisenstaedt. He said to me, “Photographers today have it so easy.” “How so,” I replied. “You have Tri-X,” he said. Tri-X had a nominal ASA of 400 but was commonly “pushed” to 1,200 or even 2,400 for available light news photography. When Eisenstaedt was young, film speeds were much slower making available light photography more difficult.

George Patton would not even enter. He said that he would get sick if he did so. I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to 'propaganda.'"(Eisenhower 1945)

Shortly thereafter he asked Congress to send a delegation, including journalists, to witness the atrocities for history. He knew the importance of both words and pictures for history.

As an undergraduate employee of the media department of my university, I was asked to make 35mm slides for a psychology professor's research project. The images of Nazi atrocities were published in *Life* magazine. I could not finish the assignment in one session. I went home sick and had to gather my thoughts before I continued making 35mm slide copies. The visual record impressed both Eisenhower and me, as a young photojournalism major. It is one of the experiences that cemented my desire to have a career in photojournalism education.

The Farm Security Administration



10 Rexford Tugwell.

Roy Stryker saw poverty and discrimination as he walked in New York city. Stryker, as a student of Rexford Tugwell, studied economics at Columbia University. Tugwell hired him to compile a “Pictorial Sourcebook of American Agricultural History.” Stryker began to collect old pictures for the project, which never was completed. However, it grew into a larger project with impact. (Gordon 2009)

The Farm Security Administration grew out of disagreements within the Department of Agriculture. The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 intended to help agricultural workers was helping growers instead. Leading the disgruntled progressives was Tugwell who was undersecretary of Agriculture, and Stryker’s former teacher. Tugwell threatened to resign unless the Department of Agriculture ensured that tenants



11 Roy Stryker.

and sharecroppers were receiving their entitled benefits.

(Gordon 2009) Tugwell and other liberals were eliminated from the department, but he did get a new organization that was independent from the Department of Agriculture—the Resettlement Administration.

The Resettlement Administration did not have an initial budget but grew from twelve employees to sixteen thousand in less than a year. The organization was moved back into the Department of Agriculture and was renamed the Farm Security

Administration (FSA).

The Department of Agriculture had racist policies, which FSA had to work with. For example, press releases about aid to black farmers were distributed only to black press. According to Linda Gordon, “Such racism saturated New Deal agencies. Almost no government photography showed whites and blacks together. Throughout the public arts project, administrators told artists to observe southern racial codes.” (Gordon 2009)

Photography became the FSA’s most important activity. Tugwell had hired Stryker to head up the enterprise. Stryker asked for photos of FSA programs, land use, farm implements, etc. When he saw Dorothea Lange’s photographs, he realized that agriculture was more than machines. There was a human element to be explored.

When Stryker hired Lange, he underpaid her compared to younger and less experienced males. His reasoning, common at the time, was she had a husband to support her. Yet her work changed the direction of images made for the FSA to look at the effect of government policies on people’s lives.

It was Dorothea Lange who set that change in motion.

Dorothea Lange

So, who was Dorothea Lange? This quote was tacked to her darkroom door from 1923 to her death in 1965.

The contemplation of things as they are

Without error or confusion

Without substitution of imposture

Is in itself a nobler thing

Than a whole harvest of invention.

Francis Bacon

This quote was the guidepost for her life's work in photography and is a perfect description of her contribution to documentary photography.

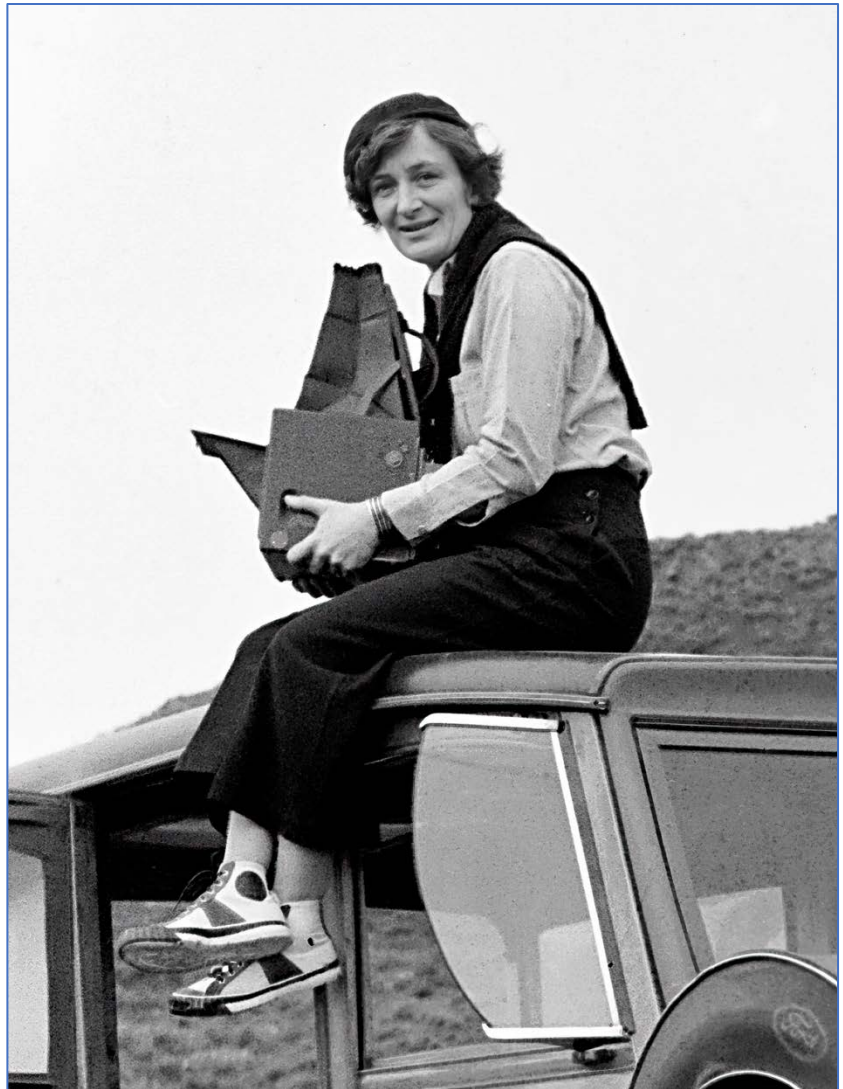
Dorothea Lange was born in 1895 in Hoboken, New Jersey and did not have a happy childhood. She contracted polio when she was seven years old, which left her with a deformed foot and weakened right leg. While the deformity was not debilitating it was a defining part of her life. Her father abandoned the family when she was 12 years of age.

Lange's family had never owned a camera and she had never made a photograph, yet remarkably when she graduated high school she decided she would be a

photographer. This may have been

an early indication of her determined and adventurous spirit. She apprenticed with Arnold Genthe, a successful New York photographer. She also took a class at Columbia with Clarence H. White, a well-known Pictorialist.

In 1918, Lange set out to see the world with a high school classmate, Florence Ahlstrom. They reached San Francisco when disaster struck in the form of a pickpocket who took all their money. She took a job in a general goods store that sold photo supplies. On her application, she used her mother's maiden name, Lange, as a rejection of her father who had abandoned her.(Meister 2018)



12 Dorothea Lange.



13 Maynard Dixon.

The San Francisco Camera Club gave her the creative home she needed and within a year of arriving in San Francisco she opened her own portrait studio. The bohemian crowd often gathered in her studio, and it was there she met the dashing western painter Maynard Dixon, whose work hangs in our local Eiteljorg Museum. She married Dixon in 1920. The first of their children arrived in 1925 and the second in 1928. Also in their home was Dixon's daughter from his first marriage. This was a difficult time in trying to be wife, mother and professional

photographer. The demand for Dixon's paintings was falling and the Great Depression was coming on.

The view from the second story window of her studio would change the focus of her work toward social reform. She saw people who needed help. She took her camera from her studio where she made portraits of well-off clients to the streets of San Francisco to photograph the lives of ordinary people. One of the images she made of the White Angel Bread Line became one of her most well-known. A single man faces toward the camera among other men all waiting



14 White Angel Bread Line.

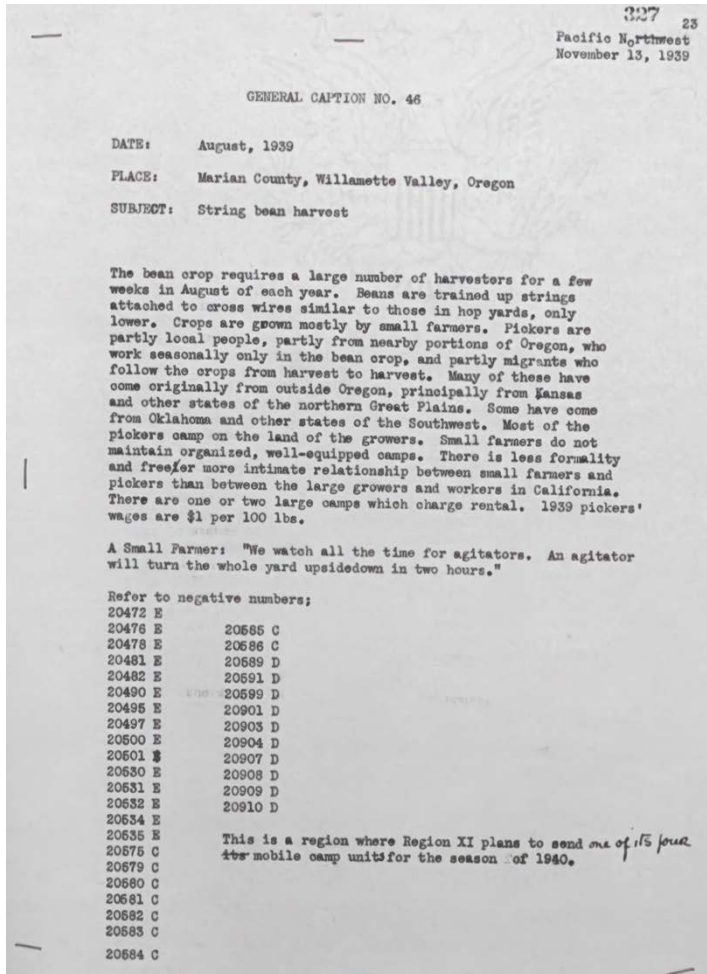
for a food handout. You can tell she worked the scene because another photograph of the same setting was not so powerful in its emotion.



15 Paul S. Taylor appears before Senate Unemployment Committee, Washington, D.C., contending that the problem of providing for the poverty-stricken workers transcends state lines.

Willard Van Dyke noticed Lange's work and exhibited her pictures in his studio. Paul S. Taylor, an economics professor at the University of California saw them and he bought one to use in one of his reports. He eventually hired her to work with him on preparing a report on migrant labor in California. This was the first team of an academic and photographer. Their work had impact as it resulted in the

building of camps for the migrant workers. Further, their work influenced the Farm Security Administration to include a photographic unit to enhance their mission.(Elliot 1966)



16 Example of a well-documented general caption.

Their work together had direct impact on their own lives as well. They both divorced their spouses and married. Roy Stryker, seeing her work, brought her into the photographic documentary work of the FSA. Lange, no doubt influenced by the academic experience of Taylor, made another innovative contribution to the work of the FSA-the general caption. Lange thought that the larger story could not be told in a single photograph or in a series without words and documentation. She developed the "general caption," which according to

Anne Spirn defined, "a topic, place, or people, to cross-list individual photographs and captions by negative number, and sometimes to include documentary evidence from newspaper clippings, articles, and office reports."(Spirn 2008) Spirn comments on the general caption, "Lange's words and images, seen together, are more than documentary records; they are an art form. . . .Her strongest captions direct the eye and the imagination beyond the obvious or picturesque or grotesque. At times they focus on the merely factual, at other times they are rhetorical, complex or ironic; sometimes they point to

what is *not* in the photograph.” Thus, Lange’s general captions provided extensive context, and often statistical information, to elaborate the human environment in which her photographic subjects were found.

The Assignment Lange Never Forgot, Which Really Was Not an Assignment

“Migrant Mother” became the photograph that defined Lange’s career and was the most famous picture to come out of the FSA documentary effort. Yet, it almost didn’t happen.

Lange had been in the field alone for a month photographing migrant workers in California. Her work was done and she was heading home in the rain as she describes.

“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, the box containing all those rolls and packs of exposed film ready to mail back to Washington. It was a time of relief. 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 felt free, for I could lift my mind off my job and think of home.

“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, but out of the corner of my eye I *did see* it.

“I didn’t want to stop, and didn’t. I didn’t want to remember that I had seen it, so I drove on and ignored the summons. Then, accompanied by the rhythmic hum of the windshield wipers, arose an inner argument:

Dorothea, how about the camp back there?

What is the situation back there?

Are you going back?

Nobody could ask this of you, now could they?

To turn back certainly is not necessary. Haven't you plenty of negatives already on this subject? Isn't this just one more of the same? Besides, if you take a camera out in the rain, you're just asking for trouble. Now be reasonable, etc., etc., etc.

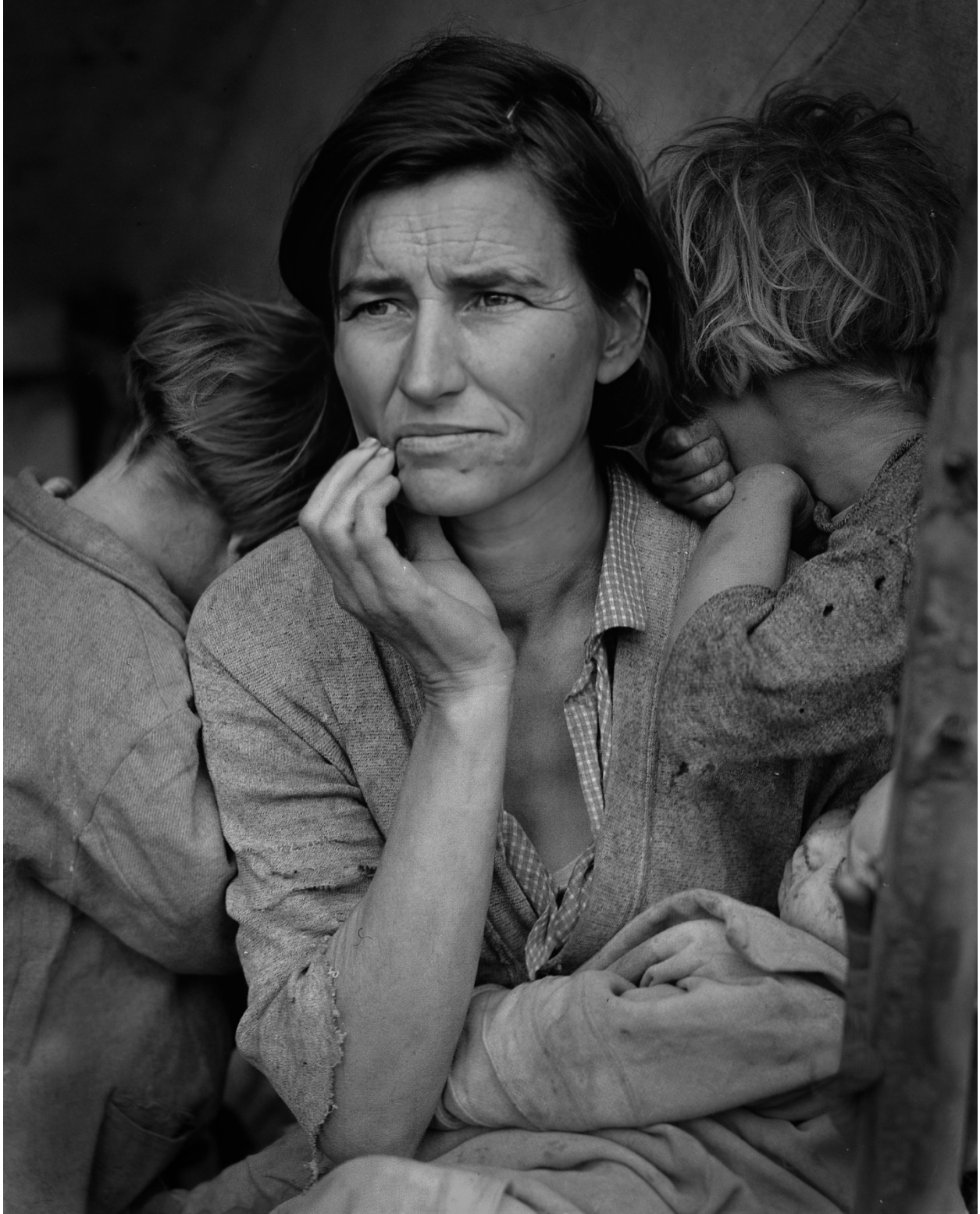
"Having well convinced myself for 20 miles that I could continue on, I did the opposite. Almost without realizing what I was doing. I made a U-turn on the empty highway. I went back those 20 miles and turned off the highway at that sign, PEA-PICKERS CAMP.

"I was following instinct, not reason; I drove into that wet and soggy camp and parked my car like a homing pigeon.

"I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was 32. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in the lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it."(Lange 1960)

One of those exposures would capture the attention of the world and become known as “Migrant Mother.”





17 Florence Thompson, became the iconic "Migrant Mother."

Tired and miserable in rainy weather and anxious to get home, some inner drive to leave no opportunity unexplored caused Lange to turn around and see what was happening at that camp. Her pictures immediately caused the Surplus Commodities Division of SRA (State Relief Administration) to send food to some 2,500 people at the camp, the majority of whom were children. They were starving.

Who Was “Migrant Mother?”

It wasn't until 1978 that the mother in the photograph was known by her name Florence Owens Thompson. The Associated Press had reports that Thompson felt exploited and felt that others were making money from her image and she was uncompensated. The *San Jose Mercury News* in 1983 published a plea from her children for money to cover Thompson's medical expenses. Strangers who had been touched by the image contributed \$30,000 to help defray expenses.(Meister 2018)

Since the time the photograph was made, the mother was assumed to white and to represent the plight of the white “Okies,” migrants from Oklahoma. The country, and federal agencies too, were very racist in treatment of Native Americans, and migrant workers of color. Once Thompson was identified her heritage was known as well. She was Cherokee. Lange had never asked her name or anything else about her. Would the photograph have become an icon if she had not been assumed to have been white?

Doubtful.

Location of the Iconic “Migrant Mother” Photograph

In about 2012, Paul Lester⁴ and his wife were driving in Southern California and passed near Nipomo, California. Lester, a professor of photojournalism, thought there should be a marker on the highway

⁴ Paul Lester earned his M.A. under me at the University of Minnesota, and I was his Ph.D. dissertation chair at Indiana University. Beyond our academic relationship, we became lifelong friends. We ran three marathons together. I learned as much or more from Paul as he did from me over the long years of our friendship.

marking the location of Dorothea Lange's iconic photograph. Thus, began a multiyear effort to accomplish this. Lester worked with local history buffs Brian Dunn, an engineer, and Doug Jenzen to pinpoint the exact location where Lange made her picture. (Linn 2016)



18 Location of Migrant Mother photograph.

For the geographic calculations, in part based on the probable height of fence posts in some of her pictures, the focal length of the lens used was needed. Lester asked me to research that, and I found a reference to the standard lens shipped with the camera Lange used. A historic marker could not be placed at the actual location as it is a working farm field. The city of Nipomo has a park about a mile from the location and it was determined to put the marker there. I established a fund-raising account at the National Press Photographers Foundation, where I served on the board.

Sadly, with all this effort, the city of Nipomo never was able to accomplish the completion of the marker.

Icon?

What brings an image to iconic status?

Certainly, wide public recognition, multiple publications in mass media, books and other media, and conversion to postage stamps are all factors. Persistent recognition through time is also a factor.

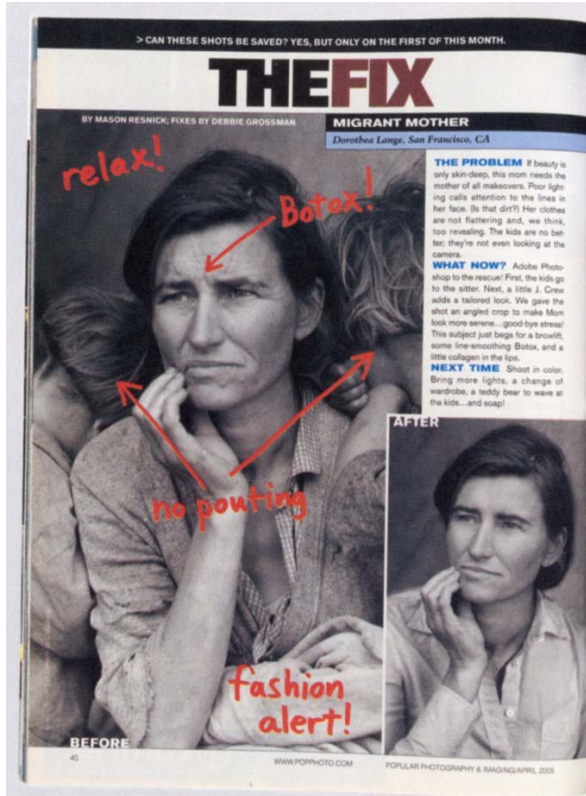
When the Marines raised our flag on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, Joe Rosenthal was there with his 4x5 Graphic to capture an image for the ages and a Pulitzer Prize too.(The Pulitzer Prizes) The photograph was the basis for the Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, Va. and was made into a 3-cent stamp issued on July 11, 1945.(Trotter)

Two photographs of the Vietnam era that bring mental images to mind in almost everyone are Eddie Adams' photograph of the pistol execution in a Saigon street and Nick Ut's picture of a naked girl, burned by napalm, running in a road. All I must do is describe them and you will know the image.

Certainly, Lange's picture, Migrant Mother, has achieved iconic status as well. Her picture is one of the most well-known of all the pictures made by numerous photographers from the Farm Security Administration's documentary efforts. The photograph was issued as a 32-cent stamp as part of the 1998-2000 Celebrate the Century Stamp Series.(Smithsonian National Postal Museum)



19 32 cent stamp.



As an April Fool's joke, Popular Photography "fixed" Migrant Mother to give her a J. Crew look. Forehead wrinkles were treated with Botox.(Grossman 2005)

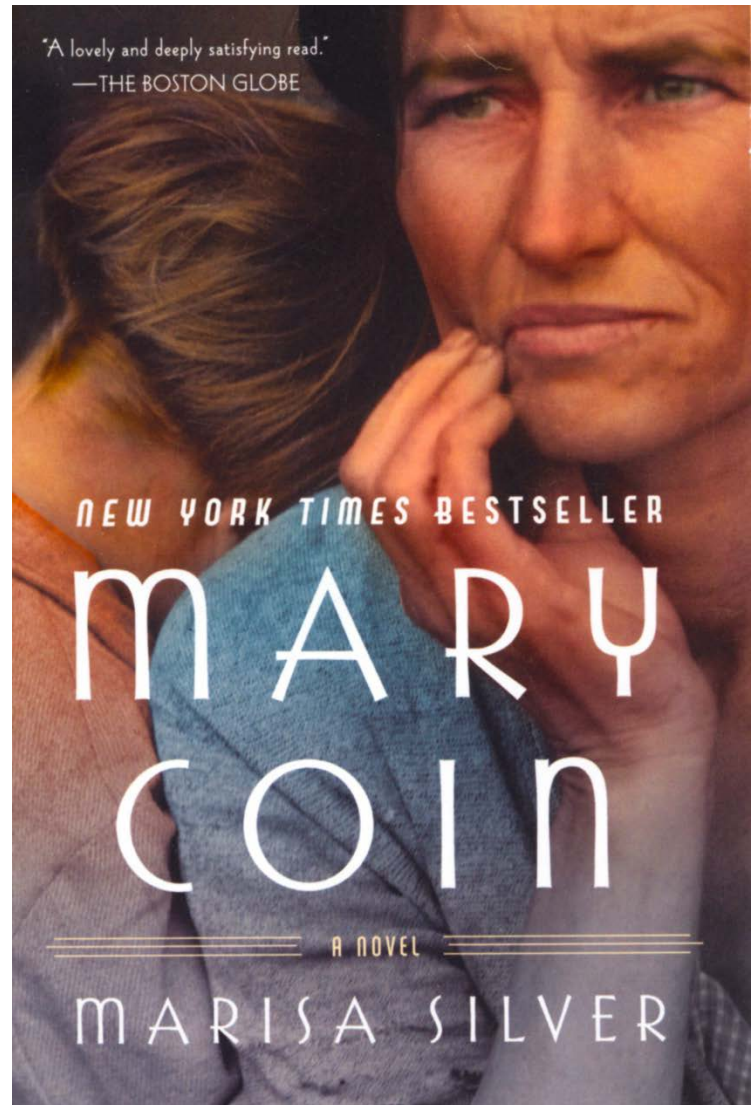
Among many other conversions, the image was converted to an illustration for *The Black Panther* and for the *Down and Out in Discount America* as the cover of *The Nation*.



Lange's *Migrant Mother* inspired the novel *Mary Coin* by Marisa Silver. Names were changed but the novel threads reasonable fiction following the framework of life experiences of Lange (Vera Dare) and Florence Thompson (Mary Coin), the subject of the photograph. (Silver 2014)

As editors took notice of the photograph and published it so readers would take notice, it took a life of its own. The translations and transformations expanded its use and recognition. Indeed, the transformations were possible because the picture was widely *known*. Lange's influence even found its way into the journal *Pediatric Radiology*, Vol. 50 through our own Richard Gunderman. (Gunderman 2020)

The photograph's iconic status was proven as I was at I.U. Hospital waiting for a medical procedure. I happened to be reading Linda Gordon's biography of Lange featuring a cover photograph of Lange with her large Graflex camera. Haley, the young tech ushering me to the procedure room, said, "Isn't she the woman with pictures at a local museum?" "It was the Eiteljorg," I replied.



20 Cover of the novel Mary Coin.

Another tech joined Haley, and she was explaining the photograph Lange was known for but couldn't quite remember the name. She struck a pose with her hand under her chin just as Florence Thompson did in the photograph. I said, "Migrant Mother."

"Yes, that's it," she said.

As I left the procedure room, I told her I was surprised that she knew of the picture.

"It's iconic!" she exclaimed. I rest my case.

Future of Photojournalism

In the summer of 1966, I was awarded one of the first college photography internships at *National Geographic*. It was a heady experience. It also paid a bit more than my internship offer at John Deere.

In those days, all the farm implement manufacturers published magazines with content oriented toward farmers. They also published stories of general interest. Angus McDougall, who later directed the photojournalism sequence at the University of Missouri, photographed a ground-breaking story of the drug Thalidomide and its creation of birth defects. The story was published in *International Harvester World* where McDougall was associate editor.⁵(Staff 2009)

In the 1960s, *National Geographic* had about 25 staff photographers on the masthead. There are none now. All photography is by contract now.

With few exceptions, the inability of newspapers to understand their own business model and inability to monetize their content on the Internet has led to the demise of newspapers. We have seen that in

⁵ McDougall created the Missouri Photo Workshop in which photographers would go to a small Missouri town and document life there, resulting in the publication of a book. I liked the idea so much that I copied it in my teaching the Documentary Photography class at the University of Minnesota School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Our Scottish Terrier's registered name was named Angus McDougall XIV. McDougall was tickled when he learned of this.

our own backyard, *The Indianapolis Star* is a shell of its former self. Corporations have bought up family-owned newspapers and now the central responsibility is to stockholders, not readers in the community served. Costs are cut in the form of copy editors, reporters and photojournalists in order to maximize profits. As content creators are eliminated, executive salaries are boosted. The result is a diminished ability to properly cover local news. Higher-salaried reporters, who have the institutional memory and experience to do investigative reporting, are offered buyouts since their salaries cut into profits.

In the 1970s, major metros, such as the Minneapolis Star/Tribune, published Sunday magazines. In the heyday of Sunday magazines, reporting teams were sent overseas and otherwise out of the local coverage area for stories of general importance. I remember a Star/Tribune major story about Mother Teresa photographed by Kent Kobersteen⁶ and another story on Amish life in Iowa, photographed by Mike Zerby as examples of out-of-market coverage. Sunday magazines were expensive operations and have disappeared as newspaper budgets have taken hits from competition for advertising dollars.

⁶ Kobersteen was director of the Minneapolis Star/Tribune Sunday Magazine from 1981-1983. He joined *National Geographic* in 1983 as Picture Editor and became Director of Photography from 1998-2005.

As the number of print publications decline, there will be fewer paid possibilities for those seeking to make a living in photojournalism. The U.S. Census Bureau's Service Annual Survey provides a unique look at the financial hit newspaper and magazines took between 2002 and 2020:

Decline of U.S. Physical Media by Estimated Revenue for Employer Firms: 2002-2020

(In millions of dollars)

NAICS industry ¹	2002	2010	2020
Newspaper Publishers	46,179	33,360	22,149
Periodical Publishing	40,181	31,876	23,919
Directory and Mailing List Publishing	16,920	11,987	4,409
Video Tape and Disc Rental	9,364	6,056	1,077

¹ North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Note: Data not adjusted for price changes. Differences in revenue estimates may be attributed to sampling or nonsampling error, rather than underlying economic conditions. Caution should be used in drawing conclusions from the estimates and comparisons shown. Additional information on survey methodology, including sampling and nonsampling error, sample design, and confidentiality protection can be found at <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sas/technical-documentation/methodology.html>. The Census Bureau has reviewed this data product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and has approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied (Approval ID: CBDRB-FY21-256).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Service Annual Survey and Service Annual Survey Historical Tables.

Table 1 Decline of U.S. Physical Media 2002-2020.

- Estimated Newspaper Publishers revenue dropped by 52.0%.
- Estimated revenue for Periodical Publishing, which includes magazines, fell by 40.5%.(Grundy 2022)

These precipitous drops follow big declines in the last decades of the 1900s. The so-called Fourth Estate is as weak as it has been in my lifetime. The National Institute for Advanced Reporting in the IU School of Journalism at IUPUI held the first national conference on computer-assisted journalism in 1990.

Journalists, many with Pulitzer Prizes, learned how to, as I liked to call it “interview data.” The stories that data analyses tell help formulate investigative stories. Max Jennings, then editor of the *Dayton Daily News*, after attending one the Institute’s six conferences, commented, “The watchdog has a great new set of teeth.”(Jennings 1990s)

In the present state of our Republic, investigative journalism seems not to matter much. The Republican Party seems to be on an alternate version of reality, subject to conspiracy theories and even reinforcing

them. Donald Trump faced two impeachments, while in office, and now is facing not one, not two, not three, but four criminal indictments. Regardless, Republicans seem on a track to nominate Donald Trump as their nominee for the 2024 election. In four separate cases, he has been charged with so many offenses that it is statistically unlikely that he can avoid becoming a convicted felon. News organizations have yet to decide how to ethically cover a candidate such as Trump. Social media has made proliferation of conspiracies and outright lies believable to those who no longer look to major media outlets with editorial processes for information. Attached to all campaign statements are photographs, which lend a sense of importance to nonsensical statements. There are no media gatekeepers as there once were. People turn to the sources that reinforce their beliefs rather than challenge them. Serious journalism and photojournalism are dying.

I am sorry to think that Max Jennings's watchdog may have lost all its teeth. The prolific spread of lies on social media cannot be thwarted by the necessary slow processes of investigative reporting. With the diminished number of experienced investigative reporters, there aren't enough teeth to bite through the lies.

Conclusion

Dorothea Lange's approach to her work is summed up in her own words.

"Documentary photography records the social scene of our time. It mirrors the present and documents for the future. Its focus is man in his relation to mankind. It records his customs at work, at war, at play, or his round of activities through twenty-four hours of the day, the cycle of seasons, or the span of a life. It portrays his institutions, family, church, government, political organizations, social clubs, labor unions. It shows not merely their facades, but seeks to reveal the manner in which they function, absorb the life, hold the loyalty, and influence the behavior of human beings."(Davis 1995)

Lange would be all the modern definitions of a “strong woman.” Perhaps that is why Roy Stricker hired and fired her three times. Men in the 1930s were not used to such women. She tried her best to be a homemaker because that was expected of women in her time. At the same time, she had an urge to create images that would lead to social reform.

Her two husbands, Maynard Dixon, the painter, and Paul Taylor, the academic agricultural economist, influenced her work in completely different ways. Her drive, however, was all her own.

She left her successful portrait studio to find her visual mission in the streets and fields where her photographs helped direct government policy. As her style of images emerged, she really defined documentary style of the period. Other successful FSA photographers modified their styles to mimic hers.

Her iconic “Migrant Mother” is so widely published it essentially represents the only period of government-sponsored documentary in the United States. It will be a lasting image through time.

Her friend Ansel Adams wrote of her work, “Her pictures are both records of actuality and exquisitely sensitive emotional documents. Her pictures tell you of many things; they tell you these things with conviction, directness, completeness. . . . If any documents of this turbulent age are justified to endure, the photographs of Dorothea Lange shall, most certainly.”(Meister 2018)

As past director of the National Press Photographers Foundation scholarship program, I can attest there are still college photojournalists who are seeking to use their talents to make a difference in the human condition just as Dorothea Lange did.

I remain skeptical as to whether there will be ongoing demand for their talents.

Illustrations

1 Woodcut made using metal engraving tools from photography on the block.	2
2 “Three Women” is a photograph of James Brown's grandmother and her two sisters by Belle Johnson who operated a studio in Monroe City, Missouri.	5
3 First cover of Life magazine by Margaret Bourke-White.	6
4 Photography by One of four Jacob Riis. Peddlers Who Slept in the Cellar of 11 Ludlow Street Rear.	7
5 Lewis Wickes Hine's 1909 photograph of a young spinner in a Georgia cotton mill The Photography Collections, University of Maryland, Baltimore County.	8
6 Allen Funt	10
7 Ermanox Camera like the one used by Erich Salomon for candid photography.	11
8 Salomon was noted for his candid photographs but here he was discovered.	12
9 Photography by Alfred Eisenstaedt.	13
10 Rexford Tugwell.	15
11 Roy Stryker.	16
12 Dorothea Lange.	18
13 Maynard Dixon.	19
14 White Angel Bread Line.	19
15 Paul S. Taylor appears before Senate Unemployment Committee, Washington, D.C., contending that the problem of providing for the poverty-stricken workers transcends state lines.	20
16 Example of a well-documented general caption.	21
17 Florence Thompson, became the iconic “Migrant Mother.”	25
18 Location of Migrant Mother photograph.	27
19 32 cent stamp.	28
20 Cover of the novel Mary Coin.	30

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