

WOMAN'S WORK:

205

An Analysis Of
Dorothea Lange's Photography Career
In Conflict With Family Life

by

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--Cheryl May

Chapter I.

Introduction

People often tell me I was the first one [documentary photographer]...that's nonsense. When you're in a thing you find there were people there a hundred years ago! But the impulse that I had didn't stem from anyone else.

--Lange

Lange was right--she wasn't the first documentary photographer--Mathew Brady and Lewis Hine preceded her. But she brought documentary photography to new heights. She used her photographic eye and her compassion for her subjects to draw America's attention to the poor and forgotten. This descriptive study will be an attempt to explore Dorothea Lange as one of America's foremost women photographers.

She brought about social change through her photographs. Dorothea Lange was a giant among photographers--her images had influence on political decisions as well as on individual feelings and perceptions. As a member of the FSA photography staff, she was in company with top photographic talent. Excellent photography abounded at the FSA, yet her photographs stood out from the others.

Her contributions to photojournalism and to documentary photography were enormous.

Because Lange's work had such a profound effect on American society, it behooves us to learn as much about this outstanding individual as possible.

Although much has been written about her, one area in particular has been left unexplored. We do not have a clear understanding of how Lange combined a spectacular career in photography with a personally satisfying family life.

It is hoped that this new and unexplored area of commentary by Lange and by persons close to her will contribute to insight and understanding of Lange and her unique talents and to the empathetic approach to people and photography that pervades her work. She set the standard for documentary photographers, both male and female, who have followed her through the years.

Lange would be important and worthy of study as an outstanding career woman, as a photographer, or as an individual for her societal accomplishments during the Depression and afterwards. Yet all these achievements were accomplished by one individual, making her even more important as a figure for study and examination.

This descriptive study is written as a helpful addition to the information available on Lange and as a contribution to the history of women's roles in alternative professions as well.

This thesis examines Dorothea Lange's career in photography. It differs from other studies of Lange in that

it focuses on how her photography was affected by her womanhood. Was the profession more difficult for her because of her sex? Did photography interfere with her home and family life? Conversely, did her family life interfere with her photography? Was she a more compassionate observer because she was a woman?

Although much has been written about Lange's history as a photographer, no studies have dealt exclusively with her position as a woman in this predominantly male field. This is an important area of Lange's history that has been touched on briefly, but not examined in depth in any of the many popular and scholarly works that deal with her life and work.

Significance of the Study--Lange as a Modern Role Model

A study of Dorothea Lange's photography career is particularly appropriate with the women's movement encouraging women to explore every available opportunity to enrich their lives.

Many women in our society want a career but do not want to forego the traditional role of wife and mother. Although women today may believe that combining career and family is a new challenge, examining Lange's life shows that it is not. This thesis will show how one woman, Dorothea Lange, met the challenge and combined an outstanding career with a family life that brought her satisfaction. In the 1930s, such a combination was considered avant garde.

Studying how a great photographer combined these diverse areas of her life may encourage other women who would make the most of their talents. By examining Lange's life and career, women can be encouraged by a role model who succeeded against difficult odds in maintaining the family that she desired and the career that she needed.

The Woman's Role

This study examines Lange's position as a woman artist-photographer, including the factors that made it especially difficult for her as a woman. She said that her position varied from that of a man in the same situation. "The woman's position is immeasurably more complicated. There are not very many first-class women producers." (1)

Yet Lange herself became one of those few first-class women producers. Her efforts were so successful that she carved a permanent place for herself in the history of photography. At the same time, she managed to sustain a family life for herself and the family she treasured.

Lange was a wife and mother who sometimes sacrificed career goals for her family. At other times her family life most certainly suffered because of her photography career.

Despite some similarities, Lange was aware of vast differences between herself and most other women of her era. She had a drive, a trade, and a developing social consciousness that compelled her to help right some of the

wrongs that she saw in her country. She had problems of her own, including a limp that affected her emotionally and physically but that may have helped to increase her rapport with her subjects. She understood people with problems. In a popular article published several years after her death, Van Deren Coke called her "the compassionate recorder:"

She made intimate contact with the victims [of the Depression] and therefore was able to catch the deadening effects of the disaster that depopulated part of mid-America, as well as the South and Southwest...Lange's pictures of the thirties have endured as important referential documents which help to define a dark period in our history but they are much more than a collection of facts of social import. They are symbols of the erosion of a peoples' spirit in a time when nature turned its back on those who tilled the soil.(2)

Just as Lange offered hope and inspiration to the victims of the Depression through her photos, today a study of Lange's life and work provides inspiration for modern women who would enter predominantly male professions. When Lange began her career as a photographer in the 1920s, most women in the labor force were servants, teachers, farm laborers, stenographers, and typists. She not only entered and succeeded in a predominantly male profession, but she used her unique vision to point out social injustices in this country. She evolved into a photographer with a strong sense of purpose. She was a major force in the birth and growth of photojournalism. When she left her studio for street

photography in the 1930s there was no word for what she wanted to accomplish. She herself never labeled what she did, but others called it "documentary photography."

Lange's Contributions to Documentary Photography

Edward Steichen called her "without doubt our greatest documentary photographer." (3) She had a major impact on the history of photography. She was a prominent force in photo history. She is mentioned in nearly every book on the history of photography. Her work with the Farm Security Administration (FSA) earned her a place among the top names in photography, either male or female. The excellence of her talents and abilities transcended facts of gender. She was not just a great woman photographer, but rather a great photographer. No qualifiers were required. Her photographs beckoned to viewers, then demanded that they look around and see what was happening in the United States in the 1930s. The poor who were invisible to so many were highly visible to Lange and she didn't hesitate to point out a problem, saying, "Look at it, look at it." (4)

Her photographs were used in newspapers, magazines and books to bring America's attention to the poor and forgotten. People saw the photographs taken by Lange and the other talented FSA photo staff members and were touched by the tremendous problems shown in the pictures. The compassion that came through in Lange's photographs gave viewers a

reason to act, to obtain help for those less fortunate than themselves. In creating her special photographs, Lange proved that photography (and a woman photographer) could have a profound influence on social change in America.

After her death Arthur Goldsmith reviewed a retrospective exhibition of her work at the New York Museum of Modern Art. He said:

It should not be forgotten that these pictures once were as hot and timely as a newspaper headline or radio broadcast. Miss Lange's purpose was not only to record evidence of suffering and justice but to initiate reform. As a catalyst, she succeeded brilliantly. The photographs...once provoked controversy, helped mobilize the conscience of the nation, inspired John Steinbeck to write The Grapes of Wrath, contributed to the creation of agencies for relief and rehabilitation. Her images...not only recorded historical fact but also helped to alter the course of history itself. (5)

The review by Goldsmith and another by Jeff Perrone offered special insight into Lange's contributions to photography history.

Lange's career role in photography was extremely complex. She was working as a woman photographer with a developing social conscience, but at the same time, that social conscience was not the only factor affecting her work. She also was affected by the need of an artist-photographer to do her work. Susan Sontag attempted to explain this complex situation. She said, "What talented photographers do

cannot of course be characterized either as simply predatory or as simply, and essentially, benevolent." (6)

There is no doubt that Lange's photographs resulted in positive, albeit different, benefits for women in general, for photographers and the photography profession, and for the individuals she photographed.

Lange's work for the FSA during the Depression helped relieve the plight of migrant workers in California and other states by showing Americans that help was needed. Landt and Lisl Dennis called the work of the FSA photographers "a combination of compassion and creative genius." (7) Others have called Lange the best of the FSA photographers.

Lange's compassion had its roots in a deeply felt understanding of the pride of human beings. To Lange, those people who were poor and out of work were still deserving of notice. Through her photographs, she liked to show that individual pride could remain strong in the face of adversity. The stubborn pride that came through in Lange's photos made the subjects more appealing and more real to the viewer. These weren't hopeless drags of society. They were basically good people--like ourselves--to whom bad things had happened. Showing that these people still had pride made them seem more normal, more human.

Lange's work exemplifies American photography as defined by Sontag. She contrasted American photography with more



Library of Congress USF34-18294-C by Dorothea Lange
"Woman of the High Plains"
9

picturesque European photography, noting:

Americans, less convinced of the permanence of any basic social arrangements, experts on the "reality" and inevitability of change, have more often made photography partisan. Pictures got taken not only to show what should be admired but to reveal what needs to be confronted, deplored--and fixed up. (8)

Sontag's definition was not written about Lange's work--but it certainly is an appropriate description of her photography. For most of her career Lange focused her lens on subjects that needed to be fixed up. Her proud victims are difficult to ignore. Viewing them, one wants to help "fix up" their problems. People respond to Lange's photos because her subjects are appealing. In her book, Dorothea Lange Looks At The American Country Woman, Lange selected a quote by J. Russell Smith. It accompanied the photo, "woman of the high plains" and said in part:

A lion does not write a book, nor does the weather erect a monument at the place where the pride of a woman was broken for want of a pair of shoes, or where a man worked for five years in vain to build a home and gave it up, bankrupt and whipped, or where a baby died for the want of good milk; or where the wife went insane from sheer monotony and blasted hope. (9)

In the worst circumstances, Lange allows people's pride to shine through. She understood the importance of personal pride. She made certain that the people she photographed were shown in ways that allowed them to retain that precious

commodity, even when their pride was all they had left. William Stott recognized that Lange's "finest photographs are of people, and these, like the quotations, show a tendency toward the sentimental. Everyone in her portraits has character; nearly all are handsome. And yet--such is greatness--few are simple. Again and again her people have an emotional complexity, an ambiguity that breaks their stereotype and makes us look again." (10)

It is hoped that this heretofore unexplored area of study of Lange's life will add to our understanding and insight into Dorothea Lange as person and as photographer. Both men and women photographers who followed her, who learned from the style she set, and who owe her a great debt, can only gain from increased knowledge of Lange and how she balanced her life and her craft.

NOTES ON CHAPTER I.

(1) Interview with Dorothea Lange by Suzanne Reiss (Berkeley: The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California) 1960-61, p 219, (hereafter cited as Lange-Reiss interview).

(2) Van Deren Coke. "Dorothea Lange: Compassionate Recorder," Modern Photography, Vol. 37, No. 5, May 1973, pp 90, 95.

(3) Daniel Dixon. "Dorothea Lange," Modern Photography, Vol. 16, No. 12, December 1952, p 68.

(4) Philip Green and Robert Katz, Dorothea Lange, Part Two: The Closer For Me, KQED Film Unit Production, June 1965.

(5) Arthur Goldsmith. "A Harvest of Truth: The Dorothea Lange Retrospective Exhibition," Infinity, March 1966, p 25.

(6) Susan Sontag. On Photography (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p 123.

(7) Landt and Lisl Dennis. Collecting Photographs (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977), p 34.

(8) Sontag, On Photography, p 63.

(9) Dorothea Lange. Dorothea Lange Looks At The American Country Woman (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1967), p 28.

(10) William Stott. Documentary Expression and Thirties America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p 229.

Chapter II.

Description Of The Major Sources For The Study

Introduction

This descriptive study expands on the information available about Dorothea Lange by concentrating on heretofore unpublished oral history interviews with Lange, with her husband Paul Taylor, and with those close to her--her contemporaries in the photography world.

Additionally, an effort has been made to glean from the literature the information that may bring into sharper focus the specific talents of Dorothea Lange, the chronicler of Depression America--the nation's conscience in a troubled time.

Her letters, her books, and those written with her husband Paul Taylor, as well as the books, dissertation, theses and articles written about her work were used as resources as well.

This study explores Lange's attitudes as a woman and as a photographer. Also, Lange's compassion for, and empathy with, her subjects is obvious in her photographs. For this descriptive study, oral history interviews with Lange were examined in an attempt to learn more about her thoughts on this important area of her photography.

To decide what material to analyze and what to ignore, selection decisions were based on the method employed by

Karin Becker Ohrn in her dissertation on Lange. Although Ohrn's study covered all of Lange's life and work, guidelines similar to those she used for "in" and "out" decisions could be applied to this smaller study as well.

The selection criteria used for this study were as follows:

- * Lange's comments about her career conflicts versus her family life were selected and organized to allow an understanding of her interpretations of these conflicts in her life.

- * Comments by her husband Paul Taylor and by friends were selected and organized to discover their interpretations of her actions and attitudes.

- * Similarly, comments by Lange and by those close to her which referred to her legendary compassion as a photographer were selected and organized to determine whether the compassion she was noted for was unique to her as a woman, or as an individual.

Explanation

Material from Dorothea Lange's oral history interviews was selected and organized on the basis of categories which represented different elements in Lange's attitudes toward her career, her family, and how one conflicted with the other.

Next, material from oral history interviews with Taylor and with others close to Lange was selected and organized into categories to analyze how each perceived Lange's role as

a woman photographer and as a wife and mother. Because each person viewed Lange from his or her own unique perspective, it was necessary to use many more categories for this area than for the oral history material by Lange.

Finally, material from Lange's oral history was selected to learn her views about the compassion shown in her photographs and so frequently mentioned by critics viewing her work. This analysis of the oral history was done in an attempt to determine the source of Lange's compassionate photographic eye.

These oral histories now are available from the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California. The titles are: "The Making of A Documentary Photographer" (257 pages including the text of Lange's memorial service, letters, and clippings) and "Paul Schuster Taylor: California Social Scientist" (342 pages including an index). There are three volumes to the Taylor oral history, but only Volume 1 deals with his life and work with Lange. Both interviews were conducted by Suzanne Reiss.

Chapter III.

Forces That Shaped The Life And Photographic Approach Of

Dorothea Lange

As Found In The Literature

Introduction

Lange's life and work have been examined in several scholarly papers and two hardcover books. The literature about Lange focuses on her work, her choice of subjects, and on biographical information. What has been omitted is an examination of the conflicts Lange experienced in combining a career and family life. No study has been done to examine the conflict Lange experienced in maintaining a family and forging a career as a woman photographer who, despite these difficulties, injected into her work a unique sensitivity to poor and downtrodden.

For this background study, each work on Lange was examined to find references to Lange's attitudes and statements about how combining a career with family life affected her photography. The body of work on Lange was examined for information that might help answer the question of how Lange's photography was affected by her being a woman and how she managed to successfully combine her magnificent photography career with a family life. Only occasional, brief references to this conflict were found, thus making it obvious that further study of this topic would be appropriate. An additional topic addressed by this study is Lange's legendary compassion, shown in virtually every one of

her photographs. Was it a result of her being a woman, or rather, more simply, a result of her being the unique person whom she was?

Unpublished Studies

Several scholarly studies have been done on Lange's life and work. The most important is Karin Becker Ohrn's 1977 Ph.D. dissertation for Indiana University, "A Nobler Thing: Dorothea Lange's Life in Photography." Other unpublished studies examined for this report include Susan Kaplan's thesis which was written for Goddard College, (1976) "Study and Comparison of Margaret Bourke-White and Dorothea Lange;" and Werner J. Severin's master's thesis written for the University of Missouri, (1959) "Photographic Documentation by the Farm Security Administration, 1935-42." The last is most valuable for the insight it provides into the development and the workings of the FSA.

Published Studies

Of published books, there are two very detailed works about Lange. Probably the most in-depth look at Lange's life is by Milton Meltzer who provided an account that appears to be both factual and non-judgmental. It is an intimate, personal view of Lange's life and work. His book, Dorothea Lange: A Photographer's Life, takes the reader from Lange's earliest childhood experiences, through her successful career, to the final projects she worked on just before her

death. He painted a portrait of an extremely talented, very real human being. He showed his readers Lange the person as well as Lange the photographer. Meltzer touches on the issue of Lange's conflict between family life and career, but does not examine the issue in depth.

Karin Ohrn, on the other hand, concentrated more on Lange's working career than on her personal life in her dissertation and in the book which followed it, Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition. Essentially, the book and the dissertation are much the same.

Like Meltzer, Ohrn briefly addressed the issue of family life versus career. Ohrn reported that Lange's work as a photographer was affected in some ways by the fact that she was a woman. Ohrn pointed out that Lange's chosen role as a wife and mother sometimes interfered with her role as artist-photographer.(1)

Ohrn's stated purpose in writing her book and dissertation was to:

...look at [Lange's] life and work and examine its scope in order to place her well-known photographs within the context of her life in photography: to see what other contributions she may have made to the development of the documentary approach; and to see what her life and work have to offer toward understanding and extending the power of the medium of photography today and for the future.(2)

Lange's Background

Because Lange's personal history has been reported in excellent detail in Meltzer's book, only information essential to understanding Lange's personal motivations will be included here.

Dorothea Lange was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, on May 25, 1895. Meltzer indicated that two personal tragedies in her childhood influenced her for the rest of her life. First, she contracted poliomyelitis when she was seven. At that time there was no vaccine to prevent the disease or the accompanying paralysis. The effect of childhood polio was a permanent limp:

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.(3)

The second event was the desertion of the family by her father, Henry Nutzhorn, a lawyer. He abandoned his family when Dorothea was twelve. This period of Lange's life is covered in detail in the Meltzer book. As a young adult, Dorothea stopped calling herself "Nutzhorn" and took her mother's maiden name, "Lange," instead. In adulthood, she never talked about her father.

Meltzer reported that when the Nutzhorn marriage failed, Dorothea's mother took her two children, Dorothea and Martin, and moved back with her own mother, Sophie Lange.(4)

Dorothea's mother, Joan, obtained work as a librarian. Lange attended school not far from the library so that she and her mother could commute together. When Dorothea's mother worked the night shift, Dorothea had to go alone to Hoboken from New York City. The route she chose took her through the Bowery district. Willard Van Dyke said that Lange used an "invisible" facial expression so that the drunks would not see her or bother her. This ability to appear invisible was discussed by Van Dyke in an early review of Lange's work. Writing in Camera Craft magazine, he said:

Miss Lange appears to take as little interest in the proceedings around her as is possible. She looks at no individual directly, and soon she becomes one of the familiar elements of her surroundings. Her subjects become unaware of her presence. Her method, as she describes it, is to act as if she possessed the power to become invisible to those around her. This mental attitude enables her to completely ignore those who might resent her presence. (5)

Comparing Lange to Civil War photographer Mathew Brady, Van Dyke said:

Both Lange and Brady share the passionate desire to show posterity the mixture of futility and hope, of heroism and stupidity, greatness and banality that are the concomitants of man's struggle forward. (6)

Meltzer theorized that Lange went out of her way to observe unfortunate people. (7)

Life As An Outsider

According to Meltzer, Dorothea was an outsider at her school. She didn't live in the neighborhood. She wasn't Jewish. She didn't share the insatiable desire to learn that she believed her classmates shared.(8) She had few friends. Even as a child she learned to be an observer instead of a direct participant.

Commenting on her dearth of friends as a young woman, Lange said, "I think I didn't do the things they did. I didn't have the outlook they had. I've always had a certain kind of drive...I had something I could call my trade."(9)

Ironically, when Meltzer was conducting interviews for his book on Lange, a few people referred to Lange as Jewish "as an explanation of some negative act or characteristic" they were telling him about. When he told them that the documents showed that she had been born of Lutheran parents, "it didn't seem to matter to them."(10)

When Lange was young, the world did not offer a wide variety of career choices for ambitious young women but Dorothea was not interested in becoming a conformist.

Photographic Beginnings

According to Ohrn, Lange decided that she would become a photographer in 1913. She didn't own a camera, in fact had never taken even one photograph. She didn't know any photographers who would bring her into an apprenticeship. But with the unschooled wisdom of those who instinctively

know the direction of their life's work, Lange "knew" she would become a photographer.(11)

Ohrn reported that Lange's mother and grandmother convinced her to train to be a teacher so that if she failed at photography she would have a skill to fall back upon, an attitude, Ohrn said, that Lange "considered dangerous." (12)

Bowing to pressure, Lange attended the New York Training School for Teachers for a short time.(13) She took advantage of her free time during those years, however. Lange obtained a camera and spent every spare minute working in a variety of photographers' studios in New York. She worked for anyone whom she thought could teach her anything about photography.

Tucker reported that Lange, like Bourke-White and other photographers of the era, enrolled in photography classes taught by Clarence White at Columbia University.

Having learned the basics about photography itself and how to run a studio, Lange was ready to go out on her own.

To See The World

Meltzer explained that Lange and a close friend (Florence Ahlstrom, whom Lange called Fronsie) set out to work their way around the world.(14) They planned to stop and work for a while in San Francisco to earn money to finance their continuing journey. But most of their money was stolen the morning after they arrived in San Francisco. Their dream to travel the world had to take a back seat to the more

immediate problem of paying for food and a place to stay. Both Lange and her friend found jobs right away. Lange worked as a counter clerk, taking in orders for developing and photo-finishing. (15)

Portrait Studio

Ohrn noted that Lange quickly made contacts in the San Francisco photo world. Within a year she had her own portrait studio, financed by a friend. Lange's portrait clients were the wealthy families of San Francisco. They recognized the quality of her work, and portraits by Lange became very fashionable. Lange's son, Daniel Dixon, reported that "the success of those [portrait] sittings established Miss Lange as a kind of vogue among San Francisco merchant prince families." (16) Her excellent photographs drew the attention of some of the most famous photographers of her day.

Among the elite photographers whom she knew in her early years in San Francisco were Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, and Ansel Adams. Led by Adams, these photographers had formed f.64, a group dedicated to showing many tonal variations within negatives (rich black to highlight white). Technical virtuosity was prized above human concerns. Lange was never asked to join the group. (17) Gene Thornton incorrectly refers to Lange as "a member of the f.64 group." (18)

In truth, Lange did not fit with the f.64 group. Throughout her life, Lange prized human concerns far above technical matters. Karin Ohrn explained that although Lange often talked about photographs, she seldom discussed the techniques or technical details of how they were made. Instead, she felt that the technical aspects of photography were secondary to the importance of portraying people, their relationships, and their feelings.

Marriage to Maynard Dixon

The studies of Lange's life and work by Meltzer and by Therese Heyman (Celebrating A Collection--The Work of Dorothea Lange) describe in interesting detail the courtship and marriage of the 24-year-old Lange and the 45-year-old Maynard Dixon, a prominent artist and illustrator. The couple had two sons, Daniel and John. Also, they had occasional responsibility for Constance Dixon, Maynard's daughter from a previous marriage. (19)

Meltzer briefly touched on the topic of this study when he maintained that Lange's domestic responsibilities may have limited her freedom to explore creative avenues in photography. He reported that her responsibilities didn't cause her to give up portrait work. In fact, her portrait work was important to the financial survival of the family and allowed Dixon to work just part-time for an advertising firm, freeing him to pursue his painting the rest of the

time.

Meltzer noted that it was not until late in her life that Lange admitted to herself and to others that she, also, was an "artist," and thus perhaps deserved some time for her own work. In her twenties, she simply didn't take time to pursue her own artistic impulses. Meltzer believed that family responsibilities kept her from exploring creative avenues in her photography. Uppermost in her mind was keeping the family financially solvent and maintaining her household. (20)

She and Dixon maintained separate studios for their work. Meltzer included an anecdote in his book about an interview that Lange gave to a newspaper reporter who was doing an article on the wives of prominent San Francisco residents. Although Lange was described in the article as a photographer herself, it was clear that Dixon was the "artist" and Lange the support person. Meltzer said, "she usually got household chores done before leaving for her studio in the morning--planning the day's schedule for the children, deciding on the meals and ordering the food. When she returned from the studio 'she would shut the door on her work, get dinner and devote the evening' to her two boys and to Constance Dixon." (21)

That may have been the way it was--Lange the photographer working all day at her profession then coming home to work as a housewife in ideal family surroundings. But Meltzer,

striving for a totally factual account rather than attempting to deify Lange, quoted John Collier, Jr., who was often in the Dixon home. "As Collier saw it, [Dorothea] was so concerned with her own work that she could not or would not give the children what they needed." (22)

During those years it was an article of faith that a woman belonged in the home looking after her husband and children. Few women could free themselves of that social conviction. Even when they tried, by choice or necessity, they still carried the double burden of working women in whatever field of activity--the need to be deeply involved with their careers and at the same time to maintain a home and fulfill the demands of close family ties. Tensions were almost inevitable in the family of such a woman, and quarrels between Maynard and Dorothea broke out again and again. (23)

Woman's Work

Photo-historian Anne Tucker said that it is harder for women to become successful photographers than it is for men because of societal pressures.

Women are usually discouraged from becoming working professionals: they are expected to prefer the full-time role of wife and mother. (24)

Women are expected to fill service jobs, while men fill administrative jobs, Tucker said. Women are expected to have a sensitivity to the needs and preferences of others. Tucker is convinced that the photography profession is a difficult one for a woman. A woman must "overcome many social and

economic barriers peculiar to women...If she succeeds in clarifying her unique vision, she must be prepared for the neglect, even hostility, of a male-dominated art world." (25)

Still, being a woman photographer isn't all bad, Tucker found. While some of society's expectations hold women back as photographers, the expectation that women will have and use an intuitive knowledge of people has been beneficial, allowing women to sharpen their perception skills to improve their art, Tucker believed.

Lange's Compassion--Was It A Feminine Trait?

Tucker pointed out that Bourke-White, Diane Arbus, F. B. Johnston and Berenice Abbott were magazine photographers, being paid for their work in a highly-competitive, male-dominated field. All four of these women took a detached, impersonal approach. "Photographs made by these women are those the public is most likely to assume were made by men," she said. (26) Tucker noted that these photographers, unlike Lange, concerned themselves with "external reality, not with personal relationships nor with inner preoccupations." (27)

Lange's compassion may have been obvious because, as Pare Lorentz said, she recorded things "as they are, not as they should be; not as some doctrine insists they should be, and not as they might be in a better world." (28)

Lorentz explained the difference in style between most

men photographers and Lange. He complimented Lange's simplicity of style:

While I know more about movie cameramen than I do about still photographers, to me most men in both crafts attempt to get too much into a photographic scene. You send a cameraman out to photograph a mountain and he'll come back with a cabin in the foreground, a high power line in the distance and a hunt club running through a meadow...

I think your man is frightened of being simple, of showing no personal style or distinction in his work.

The result is that most of them have the same style. I would almost wager that given the assignment of showing one scene of the Sacramento River, the entire membership of the ASC would return with exactly the same shot, and a very complicated one it is. First you find the biggest tree along the banks of the river. Then you hide behind it. Next, you pull down one branch, heavily covered with leaves, over your lens. Having given yourself these insurmountable handicaps, you photograph the Sacramento River. (29)

Historically, women photographers have made room in their lives for their careers in a variety of ways. Kasebier and Alisa Wells delayed their careers until their children were older. Bourke-White gave up a personal life in favor of her career. Lange subordinated her career and her photography goals to be an anchor for her family.

Photography is flexible enough to allow all these different approaches. From its beginning, photography technology has been available and equally accessible for both

men and women argued Jeff Perrone in an article in ArtForum. He contrasted photography with painting which, he said, "involved a long, academic apprenticeship and struggle, one demanding that an aspiring artist give his or her life over to it. For a woman this involved giving over much more." (30)

Lange A "People" Photographer

Kaplan reported that both Lange and Bourke-White had primary responsibilities to their employers. She said that Lange felt a secondary responsibility to the people she photographed. According to Kaplan's research, Bourke-White felt no such responsibility. (31)

Lange, unlike Bourke-White and others, became involved with her subjects. She established an intense rapport with those she photographed. Her approach was intuitive as well as rational and she became involved on both an intellectual and an emotional level. (32)

Lange hoped her photographs would help people feel, and feeling, understand one another's problems.

That thought was echoed by Peter Pollack in The Picture History of Photography. He said, "Lange's warmth and human sympathy guided her camera toward the bewildered faces of migrant workers and their families." (33)

Doherty said that Lange "was moved above all by the hardships of the migrant workers and tenant farmers." (34)

In the Time-Life book, Great Photographers, Lange is

said to have "proved to have a unique capacity to make explicit the human toll of the Depression. She achieved impact not because she used tricks or unusual techniques but because the depth of her compassion guided her camera." (35)

When people's problems were too great, Lange would not intrude with her camera. Ohrn reported that Lange's philosophy:

...was rooted in her long-standing belief that cameras should not invade those moments of extreme stress when people are experiencing a loss of personal pride. The additional factor was Lange's emotional make-up; she could not bear to photograph the stark tragedy or horror magazine photographers occasionally encountered, and had always pulled back from photographing the sensitive aspects of some subjects. (36)

Depression Economies

Meltzer pointed out that when the Depression struck, many people's lives changed. For Lange and Dixon, the coming of hard times meant that they would have to make some economies in their lifestyles. They chose to close their home, send their two young sons (ages four and seven) to boarding school, and to move into their own studios.

This arrangement was less expensive than running a house and two studios, and Lange and Dixon thought their work should take priority over home life. However, the decision was extremely difficult for Lange. She had worked hard to provide a secure life for her husband and children, and this

separation recalled the pain of her own childhood, when her father had abandoned the family...The strain had its positive side; it drove Lange's work into new areas.(37)

Awakening Social Consciousness

Ohrn reported that at this time Lange felt a need to do photography of a more serious nature than her portrait work. She wanted to "go on to a kind of photography that would demand a greater personal commitment." (38)

W. Eugene Smith discussed Lange's photography career in an article published in Popular Photography. Describing her entry into street photography, he said:

In 1932 the discrepancy between her studio world and the world of the drifting and jobless men she could see from her studio window was poignantly obvious, and she knew that her compassionate interest in human beings could not be contained solely within the portraits she was doing. Even as it hurt, she went among them, and out of the involvement brought us some of the most searching, utterly human statements of that time.(39)

Perrone maintained that women found photography to be "socially and morally useful," a medium that women could use "to record their horror at the social injustices they encountered in that world." (40)

Lange explained her attitude toward photographing the world as it is in an Aperture magazine article written in collaboration with her son, Daniel Dixon. She said, "Bad as it is, the world is potentially full of good photographs.

But to be good, photographs have to be full of the world." (41)

Taking Photography to the Streets

A woman called "The White Angel" had organized a soup kitchen in the neighborhood near Lange's studio. It was to this breadline that Lange went when she first decided in 1932 to begin street photography. The resulting photograph, "White Angel Breadline" has become one of her most famous works. (42)

Lange's focus on average people in trouble would later shock a complacent public into the realization that the Depression was indeed a disaster for certain sectors of the population.

Roy Lubove said that Lange was:

...one of a group of gifted photographers who were both the product of an era in American life and photography and the creators of a particular kind of documentary vision--humanist and reformist. This orientation was central to Lange who viewed her work as a kind of photographic social science, documenting the hardships of the rural impoverished in words as well as photographs; she hoped that the photography would encourage the necessary political action to improve their circumstances. (43)

From the first photos of the White Angel Breadline, Lange took every opportunity she could to get out into the streets with her camera. Therese Heyman said that Lange "was a woman who saw what was happening and made other people see

it." (44)

Her street photos were first exhibited by Willard Van Dyke in his Oakland gallery in 1934. That October, Van Dyke reviewed Lange's photography in an article in Camera Craft magazine. Van Dyke said that Lange:

sees the final criticism of her work in the reaction to it of some person who might view it fifty years from now. It is her hope that such a person would see in her work a record of the people of her time, a record valid of the day and place wherein made, although necessarily incomplete in the sense of the entire contemporary movement. (45)

Meltzer noted that among those who saw Lange's exhibit at Van Dyke's gallery was social scientist Paul S. Taylor, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Taylor saw more than mere record-keeping possibilities in Lange's photographs. He was touched by them. He especially liked a photo of a speaker with a microphone. He called Lange to arrange use of the shot to illustrate a magazine article he had just written. More, he saw the potential for Lange's dynamic photographs to add force to his reports on migratory laborers. (46) Taylor had been taking photos himself to use with his reports, but they did not have the impact and force that he saw in Lange's work.

Meeting Taylor

Taylor reported that in January 1935 the Rural Rehabilitation Division of the California State Emergency

Relief Administration asked him, in his capacity as field director, to conduct research to recommend a suitable program to help the migrant workers. The officials asked Taylor what staff he needed. Taylor, in an article for American West magazine, told the story of his initial hiring of Lange:

"Well, about three or four assistants and a photographer," [Taylor replied.]

"Why do you need a photographer? Would social scientists generally ask for a photographer?"

"No," I acknowledged, "they would not." I explained that I wanted to bring from the field itself visual evidence of the nature of the problem to accompany my textual reports made to those unable to go into the field but responsible for decision.

The office manager suspended further discussion when he put Dorothea Lange on the payroll as a typist. In the budget no provision had been made for a photographer. (47)

Taylor explained that Lange was hired on a probationary basis, but when they returned from the field armed with photographs and information, the value of a photographer was affirmed. Lange's photos were passed around the table at a meeting of the California State Emergency Relief Commission. The Commission voted to spend \$200,000 to fund Taylor's program. The question, "why a photographer?" was not raised again, Taylor said.

Chester Morrison explained that Lange taught people "how to use the camera's eye to interest even governments in

people."(48)

Van Deren Coke pointed out that Taylor needed photographs to "convince public officials that these dispossessed people had to be cared for by government agencies. [Lange's] pictures were effective because they were believed."(49)

Although Lange's photographs had proven the impact that a visual image could have, the task of making those photographs was a difficult one.

Meltzer reported Lange saying that migrant workers especially were hard to photograph because:

Their roots were all torn out. The only background they had was a background of utter poverty. It's very hard to photograph a proud man against a background like that, because it doesn't show what he's proud about. I had to get my camera to register the things about those people that were more important than how poor they were--their pride, their strength, their spirit.(50)

Lange showed the strength and spirit of the poor not only in her photographs but in the captions which echoed the exact words used by the subjects. The captions helped to explain that the photo subjects were ordinary people fallen on hard times. Later, Lange's son, Daniel Dixon said that "ugliness and horror were not the subject of her photographs; the subjects were the people to whom ugliness and horror have happened. Her attention is not given to misery but to the miserable. Her concern is not with affliction but with the

afflicted." (51)

Richard Conrat, Lange's darkroom assistant during the last two years of her life, told an interviewer that what most impressed him about Lange was "the way she had the ability to sympathize and identify with another human being and respond to that person not merely as a symbol, like so many photographers do in their pictures." (52)

In an interview with Kaplan, Taylor explained that Lange "understood that documenting people must include documenting the context in which they survive...or don't, and also the effect they have on the environment itself." (53)

The captions for most of Lange's photos, like the one for the shot of the migrant mother, helped the people she photographed to retain some of their dignity and to explain themselves as real human beings. Critics reviewing Lange's work recognize the extraordinary value of her captions. For example, one typical statement was quoted by Pare Lorentz: "I've wrote back that we're well...but I never have wrote that we live in a tent." (54)

Beaumont Newhall, in the foreword to Dorothea Lange Looks At The American Country Woman said, "Dorothea had a sense of words as acute as her sense of picture. Not enough has been said of it." (55)

Taylor praised Lange's talent for recording the important statements by subjects. He told Kaplan, "She considered

Library of Congress USF34-9875-C by D. Lange Tom Collins with drought refugee family



their words to be an integral part of the documentation." Taylor explained that Lange asked only the sort of questions that she would have been willing to answer herself. (56)

Stott quoted Frederick Lewis Allen, who, in 1947, wrote that one of the "strangest things about the Depression was that it was so nearly invisible to the casual eye." (57) Lange's eye and a careful ear helped her to see and record evidence of the devastation of the Depression so that she could show others and thus get help for those who needed it.

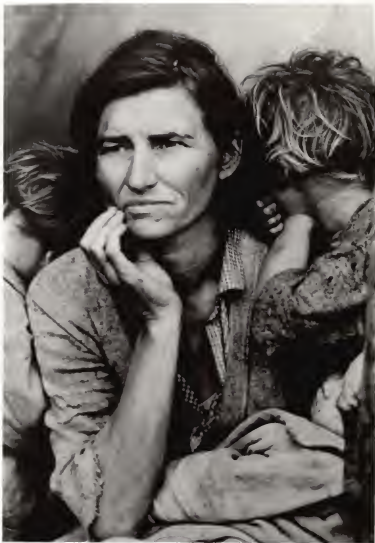
Recognizing people when you see them is one thing; photographing them is another. On the face of it there is no trick to taking pictures of poor people. You simply stand around a filling station until a migrant family pulls up, take out your camera, press the button, and there you are.

But your Texans, and Okies, and Southern Highlanders are proud people. They do not like you to invade their privacy, poverty-stricken though it may be. Yet they trust a chattering little woman with a camera slung over her shoulder on sight, and not just because she is earnest, and deeply interested in them as people, rather than as photographic subjects--but because she is one of them...

Her people stand straight and look you in the eye. They have the simple dignity of people who have leaned against the wind, and worked in the sun and owned their own land. (58)

According to Homer Page, who wrote of Lange in an article titled, "A Remembrance of Dorrie," in Infinity magazine:

"Dorothea was simply after the truth of the matter. As long as she could hold onto life, she perceived this truth by a constant scrutiny of what the world was doing to people and what people were doing to their world." (59)



Library of Congress USF34-9058-C by Dorothea Lange
"Migrant Mother"

Migrant Mother

Although Lange always emphasized that she wasn't a "one picture photographer," her most famous portrait, that of the "Migrant Mother," has become one of the best known photographs of all time. Her compassionate portrayal of the migrant mother drew the public's attention to the starvation common among migrant workers. George P. Elliott, in the introductory essay for the Lange retrospective at the New York Museum of Modern Art, said:

This picture, like a few others of a few other photographers, leads a life of its own. That is, it is widely accepted as a work of art with its own message rather than its maker's; far more people know the picture than know who made it. (60)

Paul Taylor, in an article in American West magazine, told the story behind the first publication of Lange's most famous photo and its immediate social impact.

The photographer had made her way to the [San Francisco] News office with hardly-dry prints in hand. The editor lost no time notifying the United Press. The UP immediately contacted relief authorities, who sent a representative to the pea pickers camp at Nipomo to tell the faintly cheering pickers that food was on its way from Los Angeles.

Then the News published the story, with two poignant photographs of a starving mother and her children beside a lean-to tent shelter. Their car had been stripped of tires which were sold to buy food. Beside the photographs was a

column detailing the story, with a cross-reference to the lead editorial, "Starving Pea Pickers."

With the news in print, the editor acknowledged the photographer's effectiveness in a sincerely appreciative letter accompanied by clippings of photographs, news, and editorial columns. Nowhere in the newspaper did the name of the photographer appear; in those days photographers were anonymous. (61)

Hope Stoddard, in her book, Famous American Women, said:

The picture's impact was explosive. Papers throughout the U.S. printed it. Editorials commented on it. This picture more than any other led President Franklin D. Roosevelt to get help from Congress, with the result that a chain of sanitary government camps with medical services was finally built for the migrant workers. (62)

Robert J. Doherty estimated that "Migrant Mother" has "gone to press more than 10,000 times, with probably millions of impressions. The power of the image is so great and its potential for interpretation so broad, that it has become a generic symbol to many different people." (63)

Lange referred to her experience photographing the migrant mother as her most memorable assignment. In an article for Popular Photography magazine Lange related how she came to take the photo:

It was the end of a cold, miserable winter. I had been traveling in the field alone for a month, photographing the migratory farm labor of California--the ways of life and the

conditions of these people who serve and produce our great crops. My work was done, time was up, and I was worked out.

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 freed, 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 me 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 that 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 the subject? Isn't this just one more of the same? Besides, if you take a camera out in this rain you're just asking for trouble. Now be reasonable, etc., etc.

Having well convinced myself for twenty 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 twenty 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 thirty-two. 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 that 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.

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...

The negative now belongs to the Library of Congress, which controls its use and prints it. Whenever I see this photograph reproduced, I give it a salute as to an old friend. I did not create it, but I was behind that big, old Graflex, using it as an instrument for recording something of importance. The woman in this picture has become a symbol to many people; until now it is her picture, not mine.

What I am trying to tell other photographers is that had I not been deeply involved in my undertaking on that field trip, I would not have had to turn back. What I am trying to say is that I believe this inner compulsion to be the vital ingredient in our work: that if our work is to carry force and meaning to our view we must be willing to go all-out. (64)

Roosevelt's Reforms

Stott reported that the government's response to hard times in the nation was the creation of new agencies to tackle the problems. A 1935 executive order created the Resettlement Administration (later succeeded by the Farm Security Administration) to "do something" about rural poverty in the United States.

Stott maintained that people counted more than ideas to Roosevelt. Thus, he was an ideal president for this "documentary decade" because he had a "documentary imagination," Stott said. (65)

Meltzer reported that:

The immediate effect of these changes upon Taylor and Lange was to enlarge their sphere of operations. Before this, they were confined to California. Now the Rural Rehabilitation Division was given a regional assignment, which added the four states of Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona to their own. Lange would operate under the Information Division of RA...Her job listing was changed to Field Investigator, Photographer...Taylor, in this first half of 1935, was on two-thirds leave from the university. (66)



Severin explained that it was around this same time that Kansas native Roy Stryker was appointed to another position in the RA Information Division. He was named Chief of the Historical Section. His job, despite his title, was to "find ways to bring the agency's programs before the public." (67)

Severin thoroughly covered the history of the FSA in his thesis. According to Severin, the historical division "appears to be the first, and only, government unit to make extensive use of socially significant pictures to arouse public opinion." (68)

Pare Lorentz claimed that Lange's influence on the new photography division was profound:

Since there was no such thing as FSA when she "started photographing people on the streets" and since her pictures set a pattern for the style of work since then, I feel it is correct to say that Lange had more influence on Stryker's remarkable photographic section, than the section had on Lange. (69)

Christopher Cox said:

With the possible exception of Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis who made studies of workers and slum conditions in New York in the 1890's and early 1900's, there were no precedents in America for the kind of photographs Lange now started to make. She instinctively joined a cultural movement to reveal the changes in the lives of the American people. (70)

Ironically, although Stryker had been impressed with the documentary photography of the great Lewis Hine, he refused to hire him for this project. Meltzer reported the poignant

story:

Lewis Hine, now in his early sixties and desperate for work, tried for two years to get a job with Stryker, but, thinking him too old, Stryker never took him on, using lack of funds as an excuse. (71)

Divorce From Maynard Dixon

When Taylor and Lange met, both were married to other individuals. According to Meltzer, both their marriages had been unhappy for years. (72) They divorced their spouses and married each other. They turned their honeymoon into a working holiday and their lives proceeded in much the same fashion from that point on. The relationship appeared to have been successful.

The FSA--Conflicts Amid Productivity

According to all reports, Lange's career working for Roy Stryker had its ups and downs. They agreed on the importance of their work. Ohn reported, "Before any of the other photographers understood the implications of this work, Lange and Stryker were discussing ways that photographs could be used as historical documents and resources for creating social change." (73) Unfortunately, they disagreed about many other things. Among their disagreements was an on-going argument via the mails about whether Lange would have a darkroom in California or whether she must mail her negatives to Washington. They bickered over the quality of her negatives. Another critical problem appeared to be money.

Stryker's photographers needed funds for equipment, processing, and salaries. And his unit seemed never to have enough funds. (74)

By 1940 the funds that had been promised to Stryker's unit were rerouted to other purposes. He had to dismiss some of his photographers and Lange was one of those fired.

Doherty maintained that Lange lost her job because she was the "least tractable" of the photographers in Stryker's unit. When he was pressured to reduce the size of his staff he chose the person with whom he had the most difficulty getting along. "The explanations given at the time seem thinly disguised rationale for removing a too-demanding staff member," Doherty said. (75)

A letter from Stryker to Jonathan Garst on November 30, 1939, confirmed Doherty's opinion. Stryker wrote:

I am sure I did what anyone in my place would have done. I selected for termination the person who would give me the least cooperation in the job that is laid before me. I can assure you this was no easy job. I think I appreciate as fully as anyone, perhaps more so, the contribution Dorothea has made to the photographic file of the FSA, and certainly to the presentation of the migrant problem to the people of this country. I know that judgments of art are highly subjective. And yet, subjective or not, I had a decision to make, I made it to the best of my ability. (76)

The Grapes of Wrath

The wide publication of FSA photos in books, magazines

and newspapers influenced many people, including, Severin said, novelist John Steinbeck. The Grapes of Wrath was published in 1939 and shocked the nation.

It is known that when Steinbeck began work on the novel, he studied FSA's photo file. The Steinbeck description of Tom Joad and the migrant in Lange's photograph, "Ditched, Stalled and Stranded." could be the same person.

However, Pare Lorentz insisted that The Grapes of Wrath came about independent of Lange's influence. In a letter to editor T.J. Maloney, Lorentz said:

I think you were either misled or misinformed in tying up John Steinbeck with Dorothea Lange as you have in your advertising for the annual. As a matter of fact, Dorothea Lange was taking pictures of migratory workers in 1935 when I went to Washington to set up a movie division. But without having met her or John Steinbeck, I did write a very fine story in June of 1934 for "Newsweek" on the drought, and it was due to that story that I chose the story of the Great Plains rather than the TVA to do as my first picture for Tugwell. At the same time, John Steinbeck was profoundly upset by the riots going on around Salinas, where he was born and raised. When he wrote "In Dubious Battle" he was interested in the violence and the farmers whom he knew rather than in the migrants who were being shot at. Thus, while Dorothea Lange was the first person to photograph the migrant workers, and while I was the first movie man to make a picture about the drought, there was no correspondence or even conversation among any of the three of us in those first years of work...I do not feel, then, that any of us is indebted to each other in any way. (77)



Library of Congress USF34-2470-E by Dorothea Lange
"Ditched, stalled and stranded" (as cropped)

An American Exodus

While Steinbeck expressed his concern for social problems of the time with The Grapes of Wrath, Lange and Taylor developed a book of their own. Called An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion, it combined photographs with the actual words of the subjects to document the exodus of farm people from the land.

Pare Lorentz critiqued An American Exodus. He said:

As a picture book [it] is not well presented. There are captions, brief essays, clippings from newspapers, and brief quotations from agricultural economists set in with the photographs. While all together the book does present a definitive study of the great migration from the land, it would have been more effective had the economics been presented in one section, and the pictures, so much more powerful, captioned merely with their tragic one-line quotations from the people. As it is, the book is the best study of our impoverished farmers that has been published during the past ten years. (78)

The Final Conflict: Career Versus Family

Meltzer quoted a letter from Lange to her stepdaughter, Margot Taylor Fanger, which pointed out the difficulties Lange faced in combining her work with her family responsibilities. Lange was 54, with health problems, but had gone back to work, working every day. Her letter said:

...when that goes on [working every day] all else is neglected. Paul comes home expecting a good 6 o'clock supper (Sioux City style) and finds me blank on

the subject. Twice last week he ate pancakes (---and said they were good) without a salad, even.(79)

Lange's role as Mrs. Paul Taylor sent her to Egypt when he accepted a year's appointment as visiting professor at the University of Alexandria. She went, Meltzer said, but reluctantly. She would have preferred to stay in the U.S. and photograph here, but felt her place was with her husband.(80)

Lange faced an even more difficult decision when she learned that she was dying of cancer. Should she spend her remaining time with her family or should she use her energies to do more photography? She had been approached to do a retrospective show for the Museum of Modern Art. Robert Coles, in Photographs of a Lifetime, commented on her dilemma:

Such torment was, of course, not hers alone. Millions of women, and, in their own fashion, men, have to struggle with the contrary demands of their home life, their working life.(81)

Lange opted to work on the retrospective show for the Museum of Modern Art although she died before the project was completed. John Szarkowski, who worked with her to select photographs for the show, said that Lange had the impulses of the severe artist and the urgent explainer. (82)

Kaplan reported that Lange was always strained by her loyalties to her family and to her work. "She could not

devote herself completely to either but she would try to do just that." Taylor told Kaplan that Lange managed to be "superb" in both the role of wife and mother and that of photographer. (83)

Ohrn quoted Lange's son, Daniel Dixon, describing his mother as "an intensely domestic woman--one whose feeling of family, for family, was almost mystical." (84)

Although Lange appears to have had a number of difficulties in maintaining the ideal family life that she believed was important, the fact that she attempted it separated her from other photographers of her time. For example, Margaret Bourke-White collaborated with Erskine Caldwell on You Have Seen Their Faces, a book similar to Lange and Taylor's An American Exodus. The two married but were divorced when the marriage began to interfere with Bourke-White's career.

Heyman attempted to put Lange's life and career in perspective as she explained, "While Lange met with ill health, family upheavals and reconsolidations throughout her life, in her career she seems, characteristically, always to have been at the right place at the right time." (85)

NOTES ON CHAPTER III.

- (1) Karin Becker Ohrn, Dorothea Lange And The Documentary Tradition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p 235.
- (2) Ibid., p xiv.
- (3) Lange-Reiss interview, p 17.
- (4) Milton Meltzer, Dorothea Lange [A Photographer's Life] (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), p 9.
- (5) Willard Van Dyke, "The Photography Of Dorothea Lange--A Critical Analysis," Camera Craft, Vol. XLI, No. 10, October 1934, pp 464-465.
- (6) Ibid., p 467.
- (7) Meltzer, Photographer's Life, p 12.
- (8) Ibid., p 10.
- (9) Lange-Reiss interview, pp 78, 80
- (10) Meltzer, "Using Oral History: A Biographer's Point of View," Oral History Review, 1979, p 43.
- (11) Ohrn, Documentary Tradition, p 4.
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) Ibid.
- (14) Meltzer, Photographer's Life, p 33.
- (15) Ibid., p 45.
- (16) Daniel Dixon, "Dorothea Lange," Modern Photography, Vol. 16, No. 12, December 1952, p 71.
- (17) Therese Thau Heyman, Celebrating A Collection--The

Work Of Dorothea Lange (Oakland: The Oakland Museum, 1978),
p 54.

(18) Gene Thornton, Masters Of The Camera (New York:
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Chapter IV.

Family Life Conflicts With Career As Mentioned In Oral Histories

Introduction

Although scholars have studied Dorothea Lange and her work, very little of the published information deals with the conflicts that she faced in combining her outstanding career with a personally satisfying family life.

The topic itself is enticing--there are references in many of the articles and books to Lange's conflict between career and family. But the issue has not been explored in depth. Also unexplored are Lange's attitudes about the legendary compassion that she brought to her photography. Critics have praised her from the start of her career for her empathy for the downtrodden. But how Lange felt about this empathy has not been fully explored.

For this thesis, oral history interviews with Lange and with Paul Taylor were studied for every reference to the conflict between Lange's career and her personal life. Every comment Lange or Taylor made about that conflict in the more than 500 pages of oral history interviews is included in this chapter. Disappointingly, there was not as much material on this topic as one would hope. This can be attributed to several factors. Most important is the timing of the interviews. They were conducted in 1960 and 1961, a time

when feminist consciousness was not yet the force that it is today. Secondly, the interviewer did not frame her questions to delve deeply into this conflict in Lange's life, possibly because her own consciousness had not been raised. One could speculate that if the interviews had been conducted 15 years later Lange might have delved much deeper into a discussion of this conflict. That she commented on it at all is testimony to its importance in her life. In spite of the fact that the women's movement had not come about, Lange expressed some of the same concerns that other women would voice in the years to follow. Lange didn't have the benefit of the women's movement to raise her consciousness, yet she came to many of the same conclusions on her own that feminists would voice later. It is important to realize that even though the interview was not conducted from a feminist point of view, Lange still managed to inject her own strongly feminist views about the conflict between her career and her personal life. Considering the times in which she lived and worked, and the tone of the oral history interviews, it is impressive that she made any comments at all on the situation. The few comments she made are therefore even more important when viewed in that context.

That it is difficult for women to pursue a photography career as Lange did is evidenced by the turmoil within her life. She made decisions that many women would not, or could

not, have made. For example, she boarded her young sons with friends so that she could go on the field trips that resulted in some of her best and most famous work. Yet she felt guilty about neglecting her family.

Still, Lange said that she should have had more time for her work. Studying Lange's life raises questions about what sacrifices women must make to have the same freedom that most men have to pursue their careers.

Lange's Personality

From verbal accounts by her peers, Lange appears to have been a difficult person to know. Ansel Adams said she couldn't (or wouldn't) make "small talk."⁽¹⁾ If others didn't want to discuss her work or the social issues that concerned her, she quickly ran out of conversational topics. Some of her associates said Lange had difficulty in relationships with people. She sympathized with broad social issues but may have been unable to convert that knowledge to an empathy with individuals.

Willard Van Dyke said "People admired Lange, but very few people liked her."⁽²⁾

Family Relationships

Paul Taylor would have disagreed with Van Dyke. He was one of Lange's most vocal supporters in both her professional career and in her family life. Her second husband, Taylor maintained that Lange was an outstanding success in both her family life and in her career:

She was a tremendous human being, you see. Look at her human relations! All her love to her grandchildren, to my grandchildren--just see the range of her human contacts. That tells you what a wonderful human being she had to be; otherwise, she wouldn't have had relationships like that. And her art, her photography, included all in the same way. It was an integral part of her life, not separate from it.⁽³⁾

One of the great capacities of Dorothea was her relationship with people. She was supreme at that. Whether it was her relationship with people in her family or the people whom she photographed on the road, she was marvelous and you can see the evidences of it.(4)

Taylor believed that he and Lange "were perhaps alone or unique in what we combined between us." (5)

The First Marriage--Dixon

Lange's relationship with Taylor was better than her relationship with her first husband, Maynard Dixon. She said later that, with Dixon, she hadn't really been involved with the "vitals of the man." She came to that realization after living with Taylor in a more workable relationship.

Now I know what it is to live with someone with whom you really live, who will share, or wants to share. That's a terrific thing. At that time [while married to Dixon] I didn't know what it was like to live with a person who shared their life with you.(6)

Lange had been hesitant about her marriage to Dixon. She said that she was a little afraid of him, without knowing why. She speculated that it might have been a fear of absorption of her world into his.(7)

Lange cited a mistake she made in her first marriage--she was never courageous enough to give Dixon the "uncomfortable time" which he occasionally needed to spur him on to do his best.(8)

Courage is the greatest thing. All

these things we need to live with--"Good will toward men," "Peace on earth"--are sublime, but courage is it. Makes trouble, but to live with courage opens up distant worlds. I don't know so many people who do.(9)

Courage to confront a loved one "destroys a certain peace and harmony" Lange said.

Dixon's Sketching Trips

To gather material for paintings, Dixon frequently went on sketching trips. Even before they had children, Lange rarely went along on these junkets.

It was only on a few of these trips that I was able to go, because before I had children I had activities I couldn't afford to leave, commitments, I mean. And after I had children, it wasn't easy to do. I was never quite sure enough what our livelihood would be, and I wanted to--this sounds as though I'm putting a good light on my own motives, but as I look back it's true--I wanted to help him. See, I helped him the wrong way; I helped him by protecting him from economic difficulties, where I shouldn't have done that; I should have helped him in other ways. It wasn't necessary, but I guess it was for his security, and my thought was that if there wasn't any money my work would keep us afloat, would keep us going. You know, it constantly comes up. The things you do, when you want to do what's right, so often are so wrong.(10)

Lange and their two children accompanied Dixon to Taos, New Mexico, for a prolonged sketching trip in 1930-31. Lange said she couldn't photograph during that time because she hadn't "stated her terms with life,"(11) as she phrased it.

Her desire to maintain a family life may have prevented her from dictating those terms. At that point in her life she chose family over photography.

Referring to Paul Strand, whom she observed that year working purposefully in New Mexico, Lange said she was not able to do what Strand did. Although she had small children, it wasn't just the responsibilities of motherhood that kept her from pursuing photography with a single-minded sense of purpose.

I have to hesitate before I say that I was too busy. Maybe I kept myself too busy. But that thing that Paul Strand was able to do, I wasn't able to do. Women rarely can, unless they're not living a woman's life. (12)

Boarding The Children

For Lange and Dixon the Depression was a cause of concern. Although there was no fear of their family going hungry, they knew that tough economic times would reduce their incomes significantly. Even the wealthy individuals who were their clients could be expected to reduce expenses if their own incomes were reduced. Both Lange and Dixon had separate studios in addition to the home they shared with the family. In a move toward greater economy, the couple decided to send their sons to boarding school in San Anselmo, to close their home, and to move into their own studios. The decision was a painful one for Lange and continued to haunt her whenever she spoke of it.

We put the boys in a day school in San Anselmo where they had arrangements for boarding pupils. John was only four and Dan was only seven and this was very, very hard for me to do. Even now when I speak of it I can feel the pain. I carry these things inside, and it hurts me in the same spot that it did then.(13)

We didn't rent a house. I lived in my studio and Maynard lived in his, three buildings away.(14)

Lange believed that circumstances beyond her control had resulted in these personal changes that helped to channel her photography into new directions:

If the boys hadn't been taken from me by circumstances, I might have said to myself, "I would do this, but I can't because..." as many women say to themselves over and over again, which is one reason why men have the advantage. I was driven by the fact that I was under personal turmoil to do something.(15)

Although my mind was over in San Anselmo most of the time and I didn't like to be separated from the children, it drove me to work, and I worked then as I would not have done, I am sure, if I had gone back into my habitual life.(16)

Conflict Between Family and Photography

When a man states that he wants a family, no one assumes that he also means that he intends to give up his career. When a woman makes the same statement, it is often assumed that she will forego her career in favor of family life. In 1925, when Lange had her first child, most people believed that a mother belonged at home with her children.

When Lange's children were small, she devoted most of

her energies to them, and a smaller portion of her time and effort to her photography.

All the years that I lived with him [Dixon], which were fifteen years, I continued to reserve a small portion of my life. I think that's the best way I can put it. I reserved a portion of my life always--out of some sense that I had to--and that was my photographic area. Still, the most of life and the biggest part, the largest part of my energy, and my deepest allegiances, were to Maynard's work, and my children.

I had energy and health in those days. I had a family to hold together, and little boys to rear without disturbing him too much, though he was very good to us. But it was sort of myself and the little boys, and he. It wasn't so much he and I, and the little boys. I thought I was protecting him, helping him in his work. (17)

Taylor seemed to understand Lange's continual conflict between her career and her role in the family.

She said to me more than once that, in a way, she felt pulled apart all her life. That I think is what she meant. Here she was living so vital a role at home, so important, so essential a part of the family, at the center of it. Then, here she was at the same time trying to do something which required her to be out of the home, too. Not that she couldn't photograph in the home, but in the home she couldn't do the outside photographing. (18)

Although Taylor praised Lange's success in her family relationships, and her son, Daniel Dixon, eulogized her as a woman "whose feeling of family, for family, was almost mystical," and one for whom nothing was more important than

family life, friends saw the situation differently. (19)

Long-time family friend, Christina Gardner, said, "Dorothea knew the importance of maternity [but] she wasn't a very maternal person." Gardner believed that Lange's maternalism was extended to her brother rather than to her sons. (20)

Willard Van Dyke stated that when Lange was planning to leave Dixon, she tucked her son Daniel into bed and explained "as quietly and as non-emotionally as she was able to do what she was about to do and Danny said, 'Well, you got what you wanted again, didn't you?'" (21)

Child Care

Like most working mothers, Lange faced the question of what to do with the children--where do they go while mother works? Even though her children were older when she was married to Taylor, the matter was always an important consideration for Lange. She was trying to maintain a home, yet at the same time, pursue a career. She constantly felt the pull of the two conflicting goals. Finding appropriate child care added to the problems. Taylor explained:

You've got to take care of the children during the summer, to see that they have a place, so they are all right. Then you go off and do the work outside.

I suppose she meant that the man just takes things for granted, and figures that the woman has the first responsibility of being the center of the home, while he has the first

responsibility of bringing in the support by doing his job outside. I suspect that is the difference that she felt--for her there was a first responsibility in the home, as well as a first responsibility to her photography. And that pulled her apart. That, I think, is what she meant. I think one can understand that. But being pulled apart didn't seem to impede her high accomplishment in either the home or in her work outside of it.(22)

For Lange, the conflict between family and career was an ongoing battle that she fought every day of her life. It pulled her one way and then another. She wanted both. Her desire to maintain both a career and a satisfying personal life was tremendous. Yet for her it was impossible to be totally satisfied with the effort that she put into either her career or her family because she always wondered if she couldn't, or shouldn't, be doing more.

I would disappoint my family very much if I devoted myself to photography. I'd have to step out. And as far as my husband is concerned, he would understand it, but he wouldn't know how to adjust to it, really.(23)

You know, you think choices are made for you; well, they're made for you because you make them. Only I know...Only the practitioner knows, because he has the insight, what is possible, and how he hasn't even approached it.(24)

In what must be a classic understatement, Taylor admitted that "it was not altogether easy" combining the children from two marriages, two careers, and the responsibilities of a home and family.

Taylor said although he and Lange worked as a team in the field, when they returned home one of the team members had "to do the cooking." In that sense, Lange was "not a liberated woman," Taylor said. (25)

"She wasn't free as a bird, of course," Taylor explained. (26)

Lange disliked the annoying little "must-do" things that are expected of a woman as a wife and mother. She specified things like going to cocktail parties, or to dinners honoring people she might not even know. As the wife of Taylor, a faculty member at the University of California, Berkeley, Lange had many of these small duties. She saw them as interruptions and irritations: Obstacles that got in the way of her devoting herself wholeheartedly to photography.

What it takes to pursue my purposes is uninterrupted time, or time that you interrupt when you want to interrupt it. It means living an utterly different way of life, inexplicable to some people. My closest friends will call me in the middle of the morning and say, "Oh, are you busy? I'll just take a minute, but...would you do me a great favor...and, so on and so on." I had thought maybe I would be a little stiffer about it, with myself and with others. But I don't think it's going to be possible. I think that's pretty well decided. I would like to do it. But it would be this kind of thing. And I'm not focusing entirely on myself, I'm speaking of the difference between the role of the woman as artist and the man. There is a sharp difference, a gulf. The woman's position is immeasurably more complicated. There are not very many

first-class women producers, not many. That is producers of outside things. They produce in other ways. Where they can do both, it's a conflict. I would like to try. I would like to have one year. I'd like to take one year, almost ask it of myself, "Could I have one year?" Just one, when I would not have to take into account anything but my own inner demands. Maybe everybody would like that...but I can't.

It's almost impossible. Almost. (27)

In 1962, Taylor retired from the university and agreed to go to Egypt as a visiting professor at the University of Alexandria. Lange did not want to leave the country--she wanted to stay in the U.S. and photograph. But Taylor wanted her to accompany him. Again, duty to family won out over her own career goals.

Dorothea told me she didn't really want to go to Egypt. She was getting back in shape and wanted to photograph in this country. She wanted to go back over our old trails. But I had committed myself to go to Egypt, and of course I wanted her to come with me. So she came, about three weeks behind me. When she got there she reminded me again that Egypt was not her choice, but mine. She did it in the nicest way, you understand: there was such frankness between us. She meant what she said: left to her, photographing in the United States was what she wanted to do. But of course I had agreed that this was what I was going to do, and I guess I had the main leverage and she had to come in tow. (28)

Lange was driven to photograph in the U.S. She realized that her photographic ability was at its peak. Freed from the constraints of pleasing an employer, having no one to

answer to but herself, she believed she could do her best work. She said being on one's own is more difficult, more engrossing, than working on assignment, because the photographs reveal not only what the photographer sees, but also his or her own purpose. However, pressure from Taylor to accompany him on his travels, and her own health problems continued to plague her, preventing her from doing as much photography as she wanted to do. (29)

Time For Photography

Lange maintained that women did not have the same freedom that men had to go off on their own to pursue private dreams and purposes.

Willard Van Dyke agreed. He said "women were not given the same kind of break, and they had to fight for it." (30)

Lange regretted that she hadn't had more time in her life to devote to documentary photography. She felt that documentary photography had not progressed as quickly as it should have. She said:

I myself feel somewhat of a failure because had I been willing (able?) to devote myself to do what is necessary to do in the way of years of work and effort and developing that field, I might have pushed it further, a whole lot further. Often I feel this keenly, that I might have and didn't (couldn't). (31)

Lange said of her portrait work:

I didn't do anything phenomenal. I wasn't trying to. I wasn't trying to be a great photographer. I never have. I

was a photographer, and I did everything
I could to make it as good as I
could.(32)

Lange The Compassionate

In Lange's unpublished notes is her comment, "A
photographer's files are, in a sense, his autobiography."(33)

If that is so, Lange's autobiography is a story filled with
compassion and a deeply-felt desire to help those who were
less fortunate than herself. Her compassion had its roots in
a genuine desire to improve the lot of the poor and
downtrodden. She was a friend of the masses. She honed her
photo skills so that she could show compassion in her photos
and make others feel, understand, and offer help to those who
needed it so badly.

Lange's compassion began at an early age and was based
on her childhood experiences. After school, Dorothea
"studied" in the staff room of the library where her mother
worked. She said later that she didn't study, she just read
books and looked out the window.

The staff room had windows that
looked out on, and into, tenements, and
in the spring and in the summer, until
the winter, the windows were open and I
could look into all these lives. All of
a tradition and a race alien to myself,
completely alien, but I watched...I'm
aware that I just looked at
everything...Something like a
photographic observer. I can see it.(34)

Lange developed her compassionate photographic eye at an
early age. She told of looking out a window of a flat over

the Hackensack Meadows.

Looking over to the flats where there were yards in between, wooden fences, washlines, these red brick buildings that are still there, looking out over to the west, over the Hackensack Meadows, late in the afternoon, I said to this person, "To me, that's beautiful." And this person said--I was a child, I was fourteen then--this person said, "To you, everything is beautiful." Well, that startled me, because I hadn't realized it. It also helped me. I thought everyone saw everything that I saw but didn't talk about it, you see. (35)

Early in her documentary photography career she photographed a self-help co-op group in Oroville, California. The people were running a sawmill and trying to eke out a living through barter for goods they needed. Lange regretted that her lack of experience caused her failure to capture the essence of the situation.

I remember that whole business of being up there as something very sad and dreary and doomed.

They were so very much on the bottom that they lacked everything...there was nothing to hand. It was all in the hope, and in the glimmer of a possibility of success. In the meanwhile there wasn't too much to eat and what there was was old carrots and turnips. Not enough oil to run the engine, not enough shingles for the roof, not enough of anything excepting courage on the part of a few. It was a sad thing...But we photographed that...I didn't do it very well. I could do it now, but I went up there thinking I could photograph something that would help them and get more people interested. I did it optimistically, you see, and I

didn't know enough at that time. I did it the way a photo-journalist would if he had an ax to grind. I didn't realize what I do now. Had I, I'd have a real document, a real record. But I have none because I didn't really see it. (36)

On one of her first field trips working for Taylor, Lange was appalled that the social workers who worked all day with migrant workers, seeing their plight and their terrible living conditions, could return to the hotel and order dinners that cost \$1.75.

For \$1 you'd get a pretty good dinner. To work with migratory laborers and then go into a hotel and order a dinner that cost for one person \$1.75 was inhuman. (37)

Getting Involved With The Subject

From working with Arnold Genthe, Lange learned that the best subjects to photograph are those with which the photographer is involved. For example, she said Genthe loved women, and therefore he was able to make the plainest woman look wonderful in his photos.

Taylor heard Lange say:

Try to photograph something that you love or hate, not that you are indifferent to. (38)

In other words, Taylor explained, the "intensity of the feeling is important" to successful photography.

Lange followed her own advice. Her special interest--the subject that she loved, was people--downtrodden humanity. Her subjects had troubles, but they also had



Library of Congress USF34-9694-E by Dorothea Lange
People living in miserable poverty, Elm Grove, Okla.

dignity. Taylor said that her message, particularly in *American Exodus*, was:

These people are worth helping!
They are down and out, but they are not
the dregs of society. They've just hit
bottom, that's all. (39)

Ansel Adams said "I think her basic thing in life was to really consider the underdog." (40)

Comparing how Lange and Adams photographed people explains the fundamental difference between the two photographers, according to Taylor. The frontispiece to a 1931 article by Taylor had been taken by Adams. He used a Lange photo as a frontispiece to a 1934 article and liked to compare the two. The Adams photo was of two cotton pickers, the Lange photo of a man at a microphone. Taylor said:

Ansel Adams has perfection of composition, fine definition, everything is fine, but it is as though the cotton pickers were just stopped cold. Now perhaps I am exaggerating a little bit, and of course Dorothea's photograph of the man at the microphone is stopped motionless in a sense, but I assure you, not cold! Study the two photographs and I think you get a sense of the difference between those two photographers, each excellent in his own way. (41)

Lange emphasized that although everything is difficult to photograph well, it is easier to photograph whatever it is that interests us.

After unsuccessful attempts to photograph things in nature that she liked, Lange came to the realization that

people were her special area. She decided that she would only photograph the people that her life touched.(42)

Lange said she was compelled to begin her documentary photography as a "direct response to what was around me." (43)

From the window of her studio on Montgomery Street, she saw the victims of the Depression. In fact, she said she was "surrounded by evidences of the Depression." (44) She decided, "I'd better make this happen," took her camera into the street, and photographed the "White Angel Breadline." (45)

Lange realized that she was deeply involved, through her compassion, with the victims of the Depression. Therefore, it was easier for her to photograph the poor and downtrodden than to photograph trees and flowers. She had found her special niche in photo history.

The things that are easy to photograph
are the things that people get very much
involved in. Then they can photograph
them. (46)

She said that when she first started in photography she had "an uncertain technique, but an outlook," a "direction."

I was pretty sure that I was working in a
direction. I don't know just what that
direction was; I don't know to this day
quite. I had launched myself, educated
myself in a scrappy, choppy unorthodox
way, but I don't know a better way, if
you could go through it, than that. (47)

Lange's Handicap

Lange believed that her handicap (she limped as a result of childhood polio) gave her an advantage in dealing with

Library of Congress USF34-18227-C by D. Lange Family walking to Krebs, Oklahoma



people.

Where I walk into situations where I am very much an outsider, to be a crippled person, or a disabled person, gives an immense advantage. People are kinder to you. It puts you on a different level than if you go into a situation whole and secure...

My lameness as a child and my acceptance, finally, of my lameness, truly opened gates for me.(48)

Social Issues Important

The criticism that women are too preoccupied by detail did not apply to Lange. She understood the social implications of the FSA work, even when the other FSA photographers did not.

She always saw the big picture: Lange's notebooks were filled with quotes of what her photo subjects said, but she usually didn't take their names. Her goal was to show overall problems, and she saw the broad picture.

Working To "The Last Ditch"

Although Lange's friends exclaimed at how much she accomplished, Lange said she always felt tired. When people asked her, "How do you do it all?" Lange replied:

Well, you do, really, what you must do. You can't deny what you must do, no matter what it costs. And with me it was always expenditures to the last ditch. I know the last ditch. I've lived on the last ditch.

I realize more and more what it takes to be a really good photographer. You just go in over your head, not just

up to your neck, which I--you know, we all have very good reasons why we don't do things. I don't know what I could have done; I didn't do it.(49)

Lange spoke of having a drive that other young women of her time didn't have. "I've always had a certain kind of drive that very young women and adolescent girls don't, I think." Perhaps it was that drive that caused her to work to the "last ditch."

On Being An Artist

Lange said she didn't have any of that zeal to be an artist that many of the people with whom she associated all her life had.

I've always thought of myself--and in those years also--as finding ways to learn what I thought was a very interesting job, a trade. It was a very good trade, I thought, one that I could do. It was a choice. I picked it. But I never picked the role of artist. And I never have had very much faith in that category. I never have had the slightest interest in the argument, "Is Photography An Art?"

I liked photography so much that I wanted it to be good and later on I wanted it to be really excellent and stand by itself. But to be an Artist was something that to me was unimportant and I didn't really know what it meant. I viewed with suspicion those people to whom it was important. Generally they were second-raters.(50)

In the years just before her death, Lange finally admitted to herself that she was an artist.

I've denied the role of artist. It

embarrassed me, and I didn't know what they were talking about...But there comes a time when you have a right to ask someone to stop and look at something because this is what you think is important.(51)

I think many unhappy people are people who have the conception. They have enough stretch in them so that they see what is possible. That immediately puts it to them: Yes or No. Freely put. But the others, they never see it. They are innocent and they live effortless lives meeting their little troubles as they come in a very noble way. But this other burden isn't on them.(52)

Critics had known all along that Lange was an artist.

In fact, Pare Lorentz said Lange "would have been an artist in any form in my opinion. She didn't look [at things] like ordinary people."(53)

At the same time, she accepted her family responsibilities, never avoiding family duties by using her status as an artist as an excuse. Taylor said:

You can see her sense of family responsibility in a very complex situation, what she bound together in a personal sense...[she did] nothing to convey the impression "Now, I am an artist, now you've got to excuse me and let me go my way"...You can see the family she built.

She was centered right here, on her family and on her work, on what she was trying to do.

Never, never did she make you feel, "I am a photographer, I am an artist, I am an extraordinary person." Never. But she was all of these.(54)

Critics never panned Lange's pictures, but her darkroom skills had often come under fire. She expected "everything" from a photograph, so was never satisfied with less than perfection in a print. She said she suffered from "darkroom terrors."

Those darkroom terrors, they still remain. It still is a gambler's game, photography. I have a streak of that gambler. (55)

Willard Van Dyke said:

I don't think she was very interested in the fact that the mount had to be the right color and that the print had to have a [tonal range]. The prints made of her work by other people are so much better than her own, her work is just incredible. (56)

Conclusions

Lange stands out as one of the greatest photographers of all time. She was a founding force in the birth and growth of both documentary photography and photojournalism. She led the way for documentary photographers, both male and female, who followed her. She had a strong sense of purpose and the ability to fulfill that purpose. That she happened to be a woman who also demanded a family life made her task more difficult, but it didn't impair her vision.

Continuously, throughout her life, she was strained by loyalties to her family and to her career. She was never free to devote herself entirely to either aspect of her life. She tried to do both. Family members said that she was

successful in her relationships with them. Photo historians agree that she was successful as a photographer.

What does it take to successfully combine career and family? Looking at Lange's life, we might conclude that talent, desire, and a willingness to work "to the last ditch" were the keys to her success. Many women with a talent like Lange's would have opted to pursue their careers to the highest peak and give up a family life. Others, with an equally strong need for a family, would have postponed, or avoided, a career. But Lange, possibly because her own experiences as a child deserted by her father were particularly hurtful to her, demanded a family as well as a career. The family she required may have been a compensation for an unhappy childhood. The need for a career was probably due to a combination of factors including her enormous talent and her emerging social consciousness.

Lange's career role was complex because she not only was seeking excellence in her photographs, she was communicating a social message. Her compassionate eye composed images that demanded a response from the viewer. Her photographs had a purpose--to relieve the problems of the troubled masses. Her compassion was not merely a result of her being a woman, but rather of her being a unique, sensitive individual. Other women photographers active at the same time--notably Margaret Bourke-White and Imogen Cunningham--had similar skills, but

lacked Lange's compassion.

When Lange took a photograph, her compassion came through in the final print. She often talked about the need for her photographs to be a vehicle to help the unfortunate. She said the "voiceless" victims needed someone to show their problems to the nation--she took the responsibility seriously and provided the victims a visual voice through her photographs.

Lange found a subject that interested her--people--and pursued that interest to the end of her life.

Despite the continual conflict between her need to photograph and her desire to have a family life, Lange managed to combine the two in a personally satisfying way. The statements she made in the oral history interviews, although relatively few in number in view of the size of the oral history, add perspective to the difficulties she faced in confronting this lifelong conflict.

Every comment she made in the oral history interview about the conflict between her career and her family life has been included here. Because women were not encouraged to combine careers with families at any time during Lange's life, it is particularly enlightening that she understood the problems of such a combination. The women's movement had not become a major force in the country even by 1960 when Lange was interviewed, she was not interviewed from a feminist

point of view, yet she still managed to inject her opinions on this important conflict in a woman's life. Considering the depth of Lange's understanding, it is unfortunate that she couldn't have lived to express her views on the women's movement. Based on the comments she made in the context of her own times, one imagines that she might have had strong feminist views that she would have expressed in a fascinating way.

Afterword

Locating Research Material on Dorothea Lange

Introduction

There have been a large number of popular articles and two hardcover books written about the life and work of Dorothea Lange. However, left unexplored has been her somewhat amazing achievement of combining an outstanding career with a family life.

The goal many women have to combine a career with a family has received a great deal of media attention as a phenomenon of the 1970s and 1980s. I believed that it might be enlightening to see how a career woman of an earlier generation successfully combined the two. Lange pursued a career in a predominantly male profession at a time when many women were content to stay at home and cook, clean, and maintain their families. Lange, however, wanted it all. Her story is of interest not only for her outstanding achievements as a photographer, but for her balancing skills in keeping her career going while acting as an anchor for her family.

Additionally, Lange is known for the feeling that she brought to her photography. She had been called the "compassionate recorder." I wanted to determine whether Lange's compassionate eye was unique to her as an individual. Lange's work has been the topic of many critical reviews

where others have talked about her compassion. It has become almost legendary in photographic history. Because Lange is such a major force in the birth and growth of photojournalism, studying her career and life in depth promised to provide valuable new information.

Getting Started

I began my literature search with a small but excellent book on Lange by Therese Heyman. Celebrating A Collection: The Work of Dorothea Lange, was written by Heyman to accompany a Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition of Lange's work. The first major retrospective exhibition of Lange's photographs from the Oakland Museum collection began at the museum in the summer of 1978 and traveled until 1981 with the book.

Heyman's book introduced me to the Oakland Museum, which was the recipient of Lange's lifetime collection of negatives and memorabilia related to her work. The collection consists of more than 40,000 negatives, vintage prints, field notes, letters, journals, manuscripts, and projects. A collection of unpublished research on Lange also is housed there, as are oral history transcripts, films, and other materials of interest.

At first, I used Heyman's book as a roadmap to guide me to what might be available about Lange. I had hoped to

conduct all my research from Kansas by borrowing materials through inter-library loans, the mail, and phone interviews.

My stay-at-home approach worked well at first. Heyman's book introduced me to the Indiana University dissertation, "A Nobler Thing: Dorothea Lange's Life in Photography," written by Karin Becker Ohrn. Ohrn's dissertation turned out to be one of the most informative works on Lange. I was able to obtain a copy through inter-library loan from Kansas State University's Farrell Library.

Next, I hoped to examine Susan Kaplan's thesis, "Study and Comparison of Margaret Bourke-White and Dorothea Lange," from Goddard College. This time the road was not so smooth. I tried the usual borrowing route through inter-library loan. The answer came back, "No." Undaunted, I filled out a purchase form from University Microfilms, wrote out my check, mailed it, and settled back in anticipation of receiving the thesis in a few weeks. Instead, within a couple of weeks, I received my check back along with the notation that University Microfilms could not obtain that thesis for me. Now for the direct approach: I called the Goddard College library. Although the librarians were pleasant, they were firm. I was welcome to come into their library and read the thesis, but their policy was to never lend out copies of theses. Even when I explained that I was calling from Kansas and that a trip to Vermont to review the thesis was not

easily accomplished, they remained firm. They said that if I could obtain a letter from Kaplan granting permission to copy the thesis they would xerox it for me and I could pay for xeroxing and mailing and obtain it for my use. So, being nothing if not persistent, I called the Goddard College alumni office and obtained the last known address for Susan Kaplan. In the letter I requested permission for the Goddard College library to xerox her thesis. I sent the letter. It was never returned, but never answered, either. I had just about given up hope of seeing Susan Kaplan's thesis.

I was particularly anxious to see Kaplan's thesis because she had included eleven pages of notes from an interview she conducted with Lange's second husband, Paul Taylor, who is now deceased.

I was temporarily at a dead end.

Next, I obtained all the material that I could through inter-library loans. I had no difficulty getting all of Lange's own books: An American Exodus, Dorothea Lange Looks At The American Country Woman, and To A Cabin. Ohrn's book, Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition, was readily available. Also, the other major biography of Lange by Milton Meltzer, Dorothea Lange: A Photographer's Life, was easy to locate.

Magazine articles were referenced in both Meltzer's book and Ohrn's dissertation and led me to a wealth of information

on Lange. Of the quantity of information about her, I was surprised that so little addressed the questions I wanted to explore.

I was fortunate that Meltzer and Ohrn had compiled such outstanding bibliographies because the standard sources for such information were woefully inadequate. I consulted a variety of directories at Farrell Library with minimal success. America: History and Life yielded just twelve citations, some of them duplicates. A computer search yielded only two citations, neither helpful. I quickly came to a dead end with the material that I was able to locate locally.

I telephoned the Oakland Museum and was referred to the Art Department where Therese Heyman presides over the photography collection. Unfortunately, the day I called, Heyman was not in. I tried two more times before I was able to reach her. Heyman encouraged me to come visit the collection--she said that was the best way for me to conduct my research for the thesis. I agreed, but at the time could foresee no possibility of financing such a trip. She suggested that I look over the "Guide to the Dorothea Lange Collection" in the back of her book and let her know what materials I was interested in. Obviously she couldn't xerox the entire collection and ship it off to me. I had to set some parameters.

After studying the "Guide," I determined that I needed to see some of the interview transcripts, some folders from Lange's FSA career containing notes, clippings, and reports, and Kaplan's thesis. I tried to call Heyman back the next day and again had poor success in reaching her. After a couple more attempts on subsequent days, I did reach her. (Experience taught me that the best times to phone her were Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Pacific time (excluding noon to 1 p.m.) This time Heyman referred me to her assistant, Loretta Gargan, who was to be my guide through the collection. Heyman and I had agreed that any material that I wanted could be xeroxed and mailed to me. The exception was Kaplan's thesis. Heyman said that she couldn't copy someone's thesis. For other material, I was to pay a charge per page, plus an hourly rate for a student to do the xeroxing. This was an excellent agreement, I believed, because it would be less expensive than travelling to California. I would have my material at a fair cost and be able to complete my research.

Unfortunately, although I followed up with a letter explaining what I needed, I never heard from the Oakland Museum staff. Several months passed and I became concerned when I failed to hear from them. I contacted Loretta Gargan again. No, they had not had time to assign anyone to my project and nothing had been done. It was clear that if I

wanted to make use of the collection I needed to go to California myself.

In my job, I am allowed one trip each year for continuing education and I had hoped to attend a photography workshop. The best places for what I wanted to accomplish were the Maine Photographic Workshop or the Brooks Institute Workshop. Because Brooks is in Santa Barbara, California, I opted to go there and add a few days to my trip to visit the Oakland Museum. Although I have lived in southern California, the northern part of the state was new to me and I had no idea that Santa Barbara was a six hour drive from Oakland. But I learned!

As soon as my trip was okayed, I contacted Therese Heyman to tell her that I would be visiting the museum to conduct my research. She prefers that visitors doing research come on Mondays and Tuesdays when the museum is closed. Because of my workshop schedule I could not make it on those days, but she was agreeable to my coming for the latter part of the week.

I checked out of my Santa Barbara motel room at 4 a.m. and headed up the coast to Oakland. Confirming the theory that if something can go wrong it will, a multiple-car pileup had closed the freeway into the Oakland area. As a former Californian, I felt confident that it would be best to take a detour westward toward the coast rather than wait for the

California Highway Patrol to clear the freeway. My decision proved correct when I heard later on the news that the traffic had remained backed up for several hours. Still, my detour took me about an hour out of my way and brought me into San Francisco rather than Oakland. I took the bridge over the San Francisco bay back into Oakland and to the museum. But the delay had cost me precious time at the museum. Loretta had expected me earlier and when I didn't arrive on time had gone on to another project. I had to return later in the day.

Despite my rather inauspicious start, things went very well during the remainder of my working time at the Oakland Museum. Therese Heyman allocated a small table in the corner of her office for my use and Loretta Gargan went again and again to the collection to lug back whatever treasure I asked for next.

I did get to see Kaplan's thesis and it was valuable, especially for the interview notes from her conversation with Taylor. I gazed, a little awestruck, at Lange's field notes. Her talent for cutlines and headlines obviously written quickly during a long day of shooting thrilled me. But it was the transcripts of the interviews with Lange and with people who knew her well that really made the trip worthwhile. These valuable documents enabled me to return home and write about this amazing woman.

These oral histories now are available from the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California. The titles are: "The Making of A Documentary Photographer" and "Paul Schuster Taylor: California Social Scientist." There are three volumes to the Taylor oral history, but only Volume 1 deals with his life and work with Lange. Both interviews were conducted by Suzanne Reiss.

An early piece of advice that I kept in mind throughout my notetaking, compiling, and writing was Dr. Carol Oukrop's admonishment to set good guidelines for my "in" and "out" decisions. This became particularly important as I conducted research in Oakland. The volume of material was huge. I couldn't possibly see or absorb all of it in the few days I had at the Oakland Museum, but I needed to analyze as much as possible for its relevance to my topic.

In addition, I wanted photographs to illustrate my thesis. I opted to purchase prints from the Library of Congress which houses the negatives of the photographs Lange made during her years with the FSA. This process turned out to be painfully slow. If I were doing it again I would order the prints from the Oakland Museum instead. The cost is only slightly more and I believe that it would be easier to inquire about the status of an order.

All in all, long distance research turned out to be

exceedingly difficult. If I were starting over, I would select a topic far closer to home. Although Lange's life and work has been inspiring and invigorating to study and write about, overcoming a 1500 mile distance from primary sources to researcher has been a real challenge.

NOTES ON CHAPTER IV.

- (1) Ansel Adams, interview by Therése Heyman, The Oakland Museum, Carmel, California, September 1976, p 15.
- (2) Willard Van Dyke, interview by Therese Heyman, The Oakland Museum, Berkeley, California, May 1977, p 9.
- (3) Paul S. Taylor, interview by Suzanne Reiss (Berkeley: The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California) 1970, p 297, (hereafter cited as Taylor-Reiss interview).
- (4) Ibid., p 237.
- (5) Paul Taylor, interview by Therese Heyman, The Oakland Museum, Berkeley, July-August, 1976, p 7.
- (6) Lange-Reiss interview, p 123.
- (7) Ibid., p 95.
- (8) Ibid., p 123.
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Ibid., p 122.
- (11) Ibid., p 140.
- (12) Ibid., p 139.
- (13) Ibid., p 141.
- (14) Ibid.
- (15) Ibid., p 147.
- (16) Ibid., p 144.
- (17) Ibid., pp 97, 102.
- (18) Taylor-Reiss interview, p 297.

(19) Daniel Dixon, Spoken at Memorial Service for Dorothea Lange on October 30, 1965. Appendix to Lange-Reiss interview, pp 240-242.

(20) Christina Gardner, interview by Therese Heyman, The Oakland Museum, Oakland, August 1975, pp 73, 68.

(21) Willard Van Dyke, interview by Therese Heyman, The Oakland Museum, Berkeley, May 1977, p 8.

(22) Taylor-Reiss interview, p 298.

(23) Lange-Reiss interview, p 219.

(24) Ibid., p 157.

(25) Taylor-Reiss interview, p 150.

(26) Ibid.

(27) Lange-Reiss interview, pp 219-220.

(28) Taylor-Reiss interview, p 277.

(29) Lange-Reiss interview, p 216.

(30) Van Dyke interview, p 8.

(31) Lange-Reiss interview, p 156.

(32) Ibid., p 90.

(33) Lange unpublished notes, The Oakland Museum collection.

(34) Lange-Reiss interview, pp 14, 15.

(35) Lange-Reiss interview, p 19.

(36) Ibid., pp 165-166.

(37) Ibid., pp 160-161.

(38) Taylor-Reiss interview, p 300.

- (39) Ibid., p 217.
- (40) Adams interview, p 17.
- (41) Taylor-Reiss interview, p 120.
- (42) Lange-Reiss interview, p 148.
- (43) Ibid., p 145.
- (44) Ibid., p 144.
- (45) Ibid.
- (46) Ibid., p 164.
- (47) Ibid., p 56.
- (48) Ibid., pp 17, 19.
- (49) Lange-Reiss interview, p 156.
- (50) Ibid., pp 75, 76.
- (51) Ibid., p 214.
- (52) Ibid., p 157.
- (53) Pare Lorentz, interview by Therese Heyman, The Oakland Museum, Berkeley, November 1976, p 19.
- (54) Taylor-Reiss interview, pp 221-222.
- (55) Lange-Reiss interview, p 53.
- (56) Van Dyke interview, p 9.

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WOMAN'S WORK:
An Analysis Of
Dorothea Lange's Photography Career
In Conflict With Family Life

by
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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the question of how a great woman photographer, Dorothea Lange, combined a demanding career in documentary photography with a personally satisfying family life.

Lange came into national prominence during her tenure as a photographer for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) during the Depression. Her photographs, famous ones like "Migrant Mother" and others, lesser known but also effective, proved to the nation that hard times had come for many Americans.

Lange was more than a photographer. Photography was the vehicle she used to bring about social change. She had empathy for the victims in society, for the downtrodden. This compassion showed in her photos. This thesis also explores Lange's compassion which is so highly visible in her photos.

A study of Dorothea Lange's photography career is particularly appropriate with the women's movement encouraging women to explore every available opportunity to enrich their lives. Although women today may believe that combining career and family life is a new challenge, examining Lange's life shows that it is not. This thesis examines how Lange met the challenge and combined an outstanding career with a family life, even though the combination was considered avant garde in the 1930s.