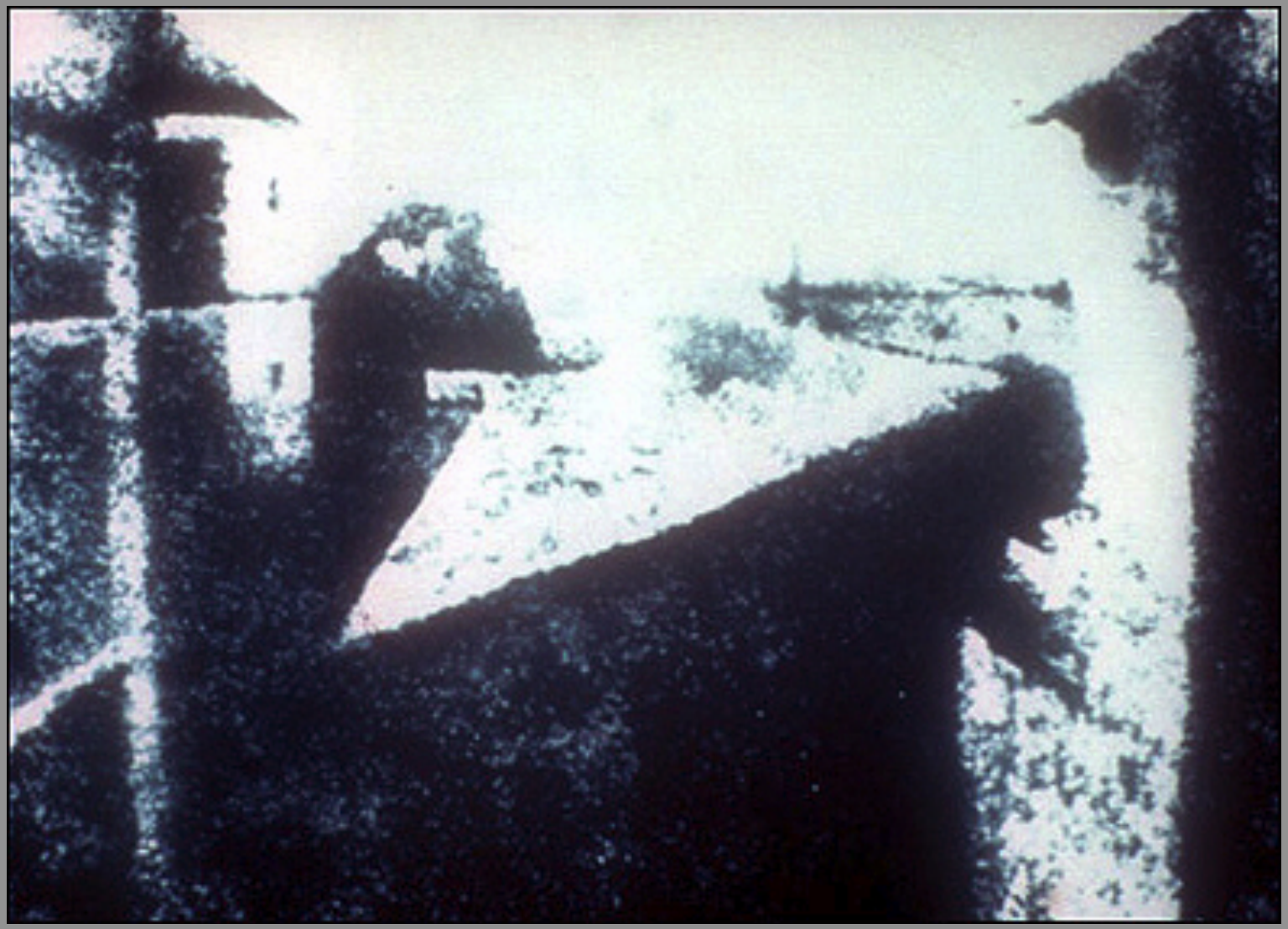
Documentary Photography

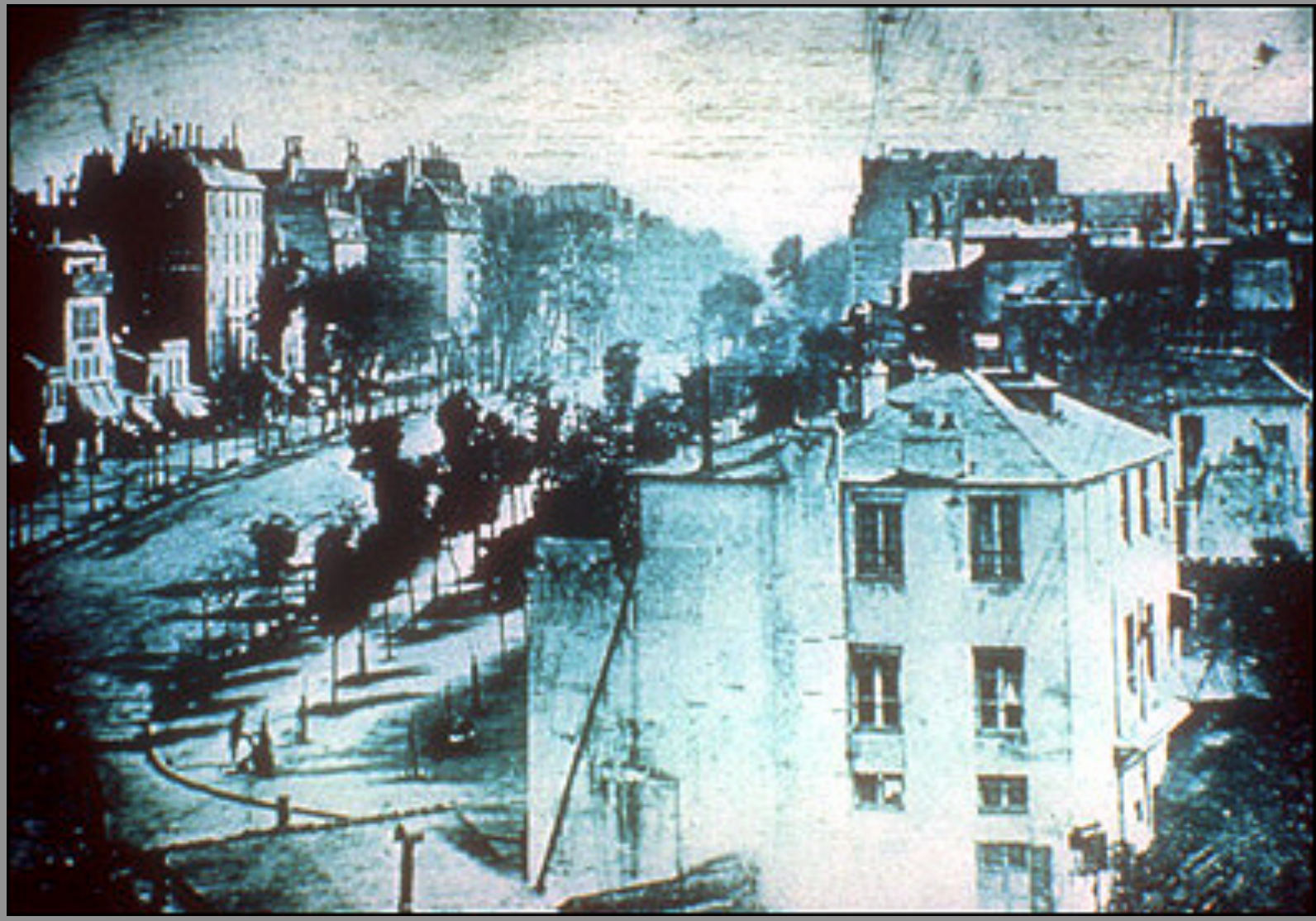
Documentary photography usually refers to a popular form of photography used to chronicle both significant and relevant to history and historical events and everyday life. It is typically covered in professional photojournalism, or real life reportage, but it may also be an amateur, artistic, or academic pursuit.



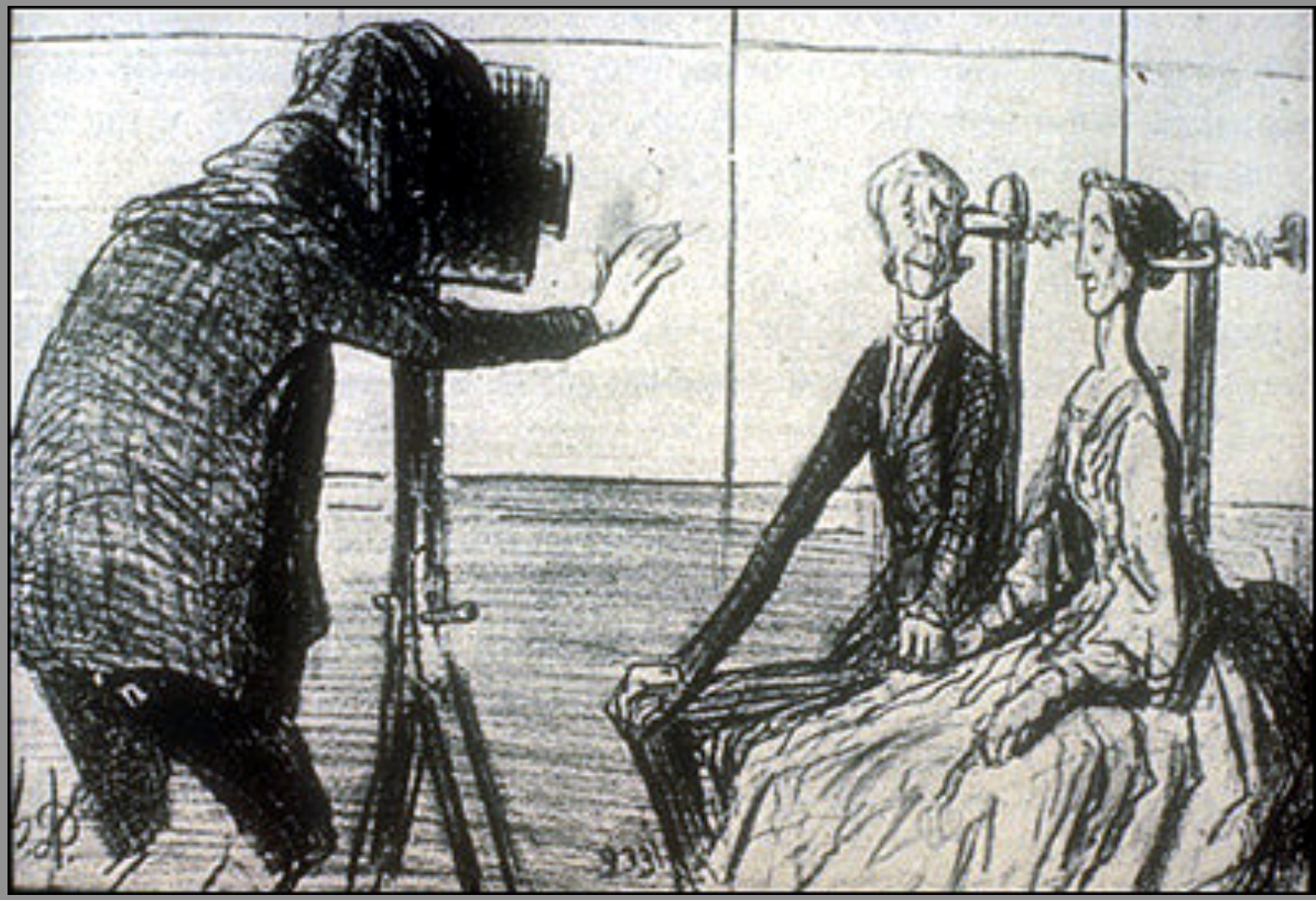
First known photograph, Niepce, 1826 or 7

several days of exposure in the camera were required.

Photography is said to document a moment in time. Time stops.



Louis Jacques Daguerre, *Le Boulevard du Temple*, 1839, Daguerreotype. Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.



Photography had been around for about 20 years before the Civil War, but its flowering began just before conflict broke out.

Photography during the Civil War had a wide-reaching impact on the public's perception on everything from their leaders to the nature of warfare.

This photograph of a scene in Antietam, Md. shows bodies, possibly moved in order to keep the church in the background. The photograph was taken by Alexander Gardner, who worked for a time as an assistant to Matthew Brady.

Matthew Bradey was a Civil War photographer hired by the US government to photodocument the war.

Often called the father of photojournalism, many photos attributed to him were actually taken by others.

Wounded Soldier in Deserted Camp,

Matthew Bradey secured permission from Lincoln to follow the troops in what was expected to be a short and glorious war; he saw only the first engagement, however, and lost his wagons and equipment in the tumult of defeat.

Deciding to forgo further action himself, Brady instead financed a corps of field photographers who, together with those employed by the Union military command and by Alexander Gardner, made the first extended photographic coverage of a war.

Although it is still popularly believed that Brady produced most of the surviving Civil War photographs, he actually made few field photographs during the long war. Instead, he focused his energies on acquiring and publishing (over his own imprint) negatives made by his ever-expanding team of operators.

TIMOTHY O' SULLIVAN, *A Harvest of Death*, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1863. Negative by Timothy O' Sullivan. Original print by ALEXANDER GARDNER, 6 3/8" x 8 3/4". The New York Public Library (Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, Rare Books and Manuscript Division), New York.

Slowly, over the misty fields of Gettysburg--as all reluctant to expose their ghastly horrors to the light--came the sunless morn, after the retreat by [General Robert. E.] Lee's broken army. Through the shadowy vapors, it was, indeed, a "harvest of death" that was presented; hundreds and thousands of torn Union and rebel soldiers--although many of the former were already interred--strewed the now quiet fighting ground, soaked by the rain, which for two days had drenched the country with its fitful showers.

This paragraph opens the text that Alexander Gardner wrote to accompany this photograph in Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War. Both text and image eloquently capture the war's toll of death and destruction, especially apparent after the Battle of Gettysburg, which took place from July 1 to July 3, 1863. Although Gardner's caption identifies the men in the photograph as "rebels represented...without shoes," they are probably Union dead. During the Civil War, shoes were routinely removed from corpses because supplies were scarce and surviving troops needed them.

Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg **from** *Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the War, (1865)*
Alexander Gardner

Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg is from Alexander Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the War (1865)—a collection of 100 photographs of the United States Civil War (1861–65). It shows the tragic aftermath of the Battle of Gettysburg, focusing on one dead solider lying inside what the photographer called a "sharpshooter's den." This photograph became the subject of controversy because later analysis revealed that Gardner had staged the image to intensify the emotional effect it would have on the viewer—a practice not uncommon at the time. Gardner moved the corpse of the dead solider and propped up his head to face the camera. The rifle next to the soldier's was not his own, but rather a gun that Gardner carried with him.

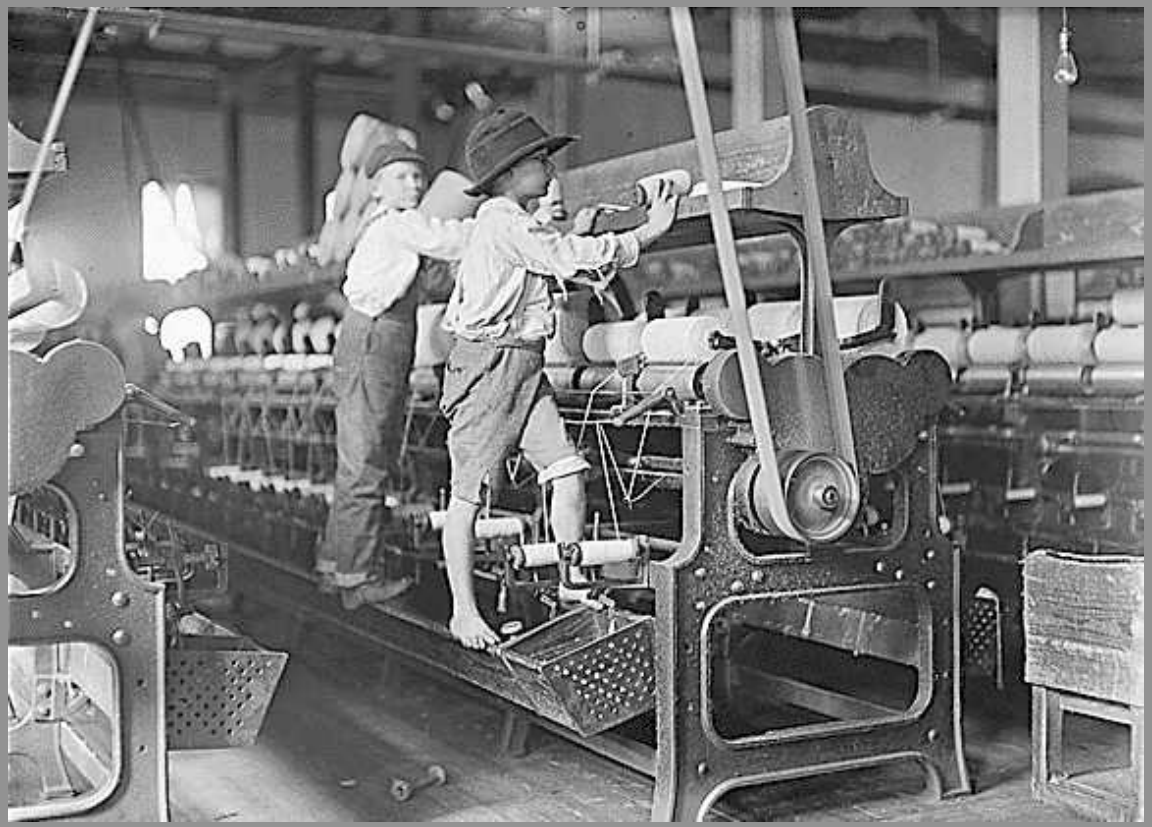
KIDS AT WORK

LEWIS HINE AND THE CRUSADE AGAINST CHILD LABOR

RUSSELL FREEDMAN

Lewis Hine was trained as an educator in Chicago and New York. A project photographing on Ellis Island with students from the Ethical Culture School in New York galvanized his recognition of the value of documentary photography in education. Soon after, he became a sociological photographer in 1912.

For nearly ten years Hine was the photographer for the National Child Labor Committee, contributing to exhibitions and the organization's publication, The Survey.



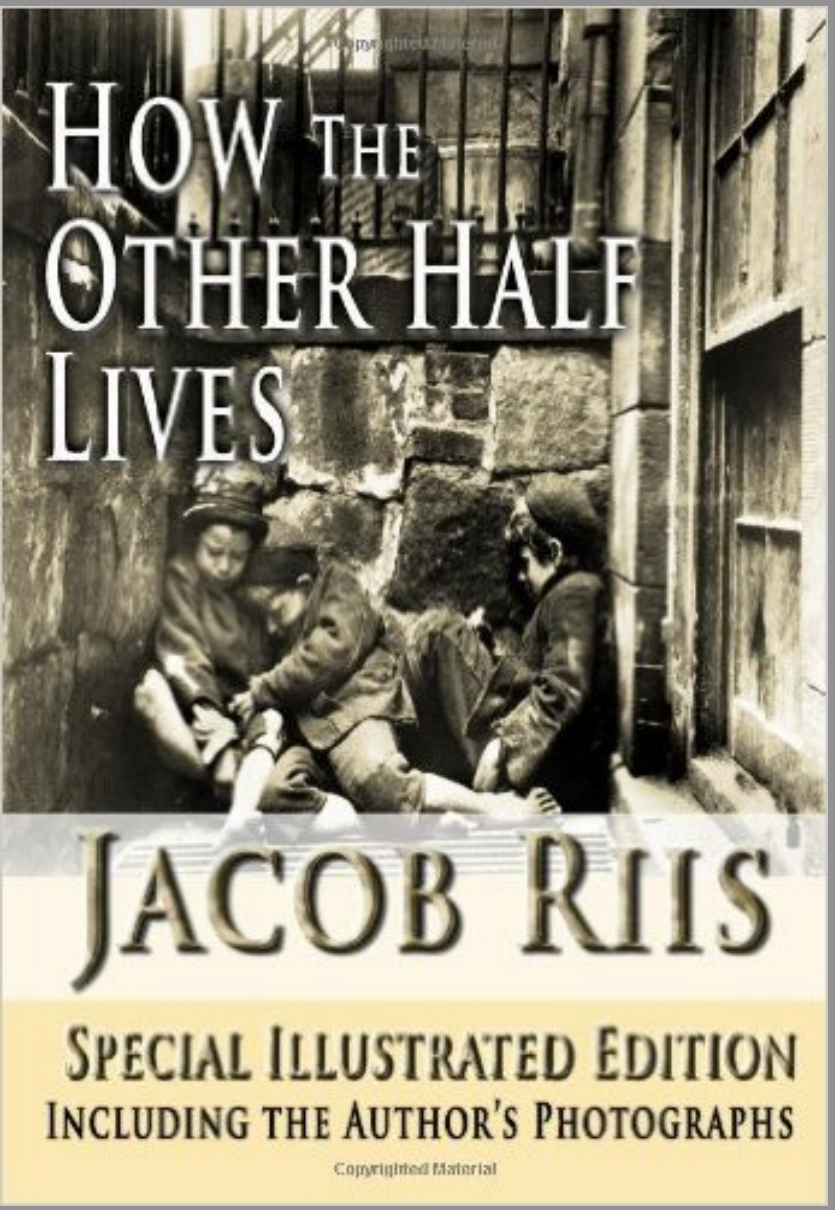
Hine's work for the NCLC was often dangerous. As a photographer he was frequently threatened with violence or even death by factory police and foremen.

At the time the immorality of child labor was meant to be hidden from the public. Photography was not only prohibited but posed a serious threat to the industry.

In order to gain entry into these mills, mines and factories, Hines was forced to assume many guises.

During the Great Depression Hine again worked for the Red Cross, photographing drought relief in the American South, and for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), documenting life in the mountains of eastern Tennessee.

He also served as chief photographer for the Works Progress Administration's National Research Project, which studied changes in industry and their effect on employment. Hine was also a faculty member of the ethical Culture Fieldston School.



Jacob Riis (1849-1914) was a pioneering newspaper reporter and social reformer in New York at the turn of the 20th century.

His then-novel idea of using photographs of the city's slums to illustrate the plight of impoverished residents established Riis as forerunner of modern photojournalism.

Jacob A. Riis: *Revealing New York's Other Half* features photographs by Riis and his contemporaries, as well as his handwritten journals and personal correspondence.

Lodgers in a crowded Bayard Street tenement - "Five cents a spot."

Street Arabs in Crowded Sleeping Quarters, 1890

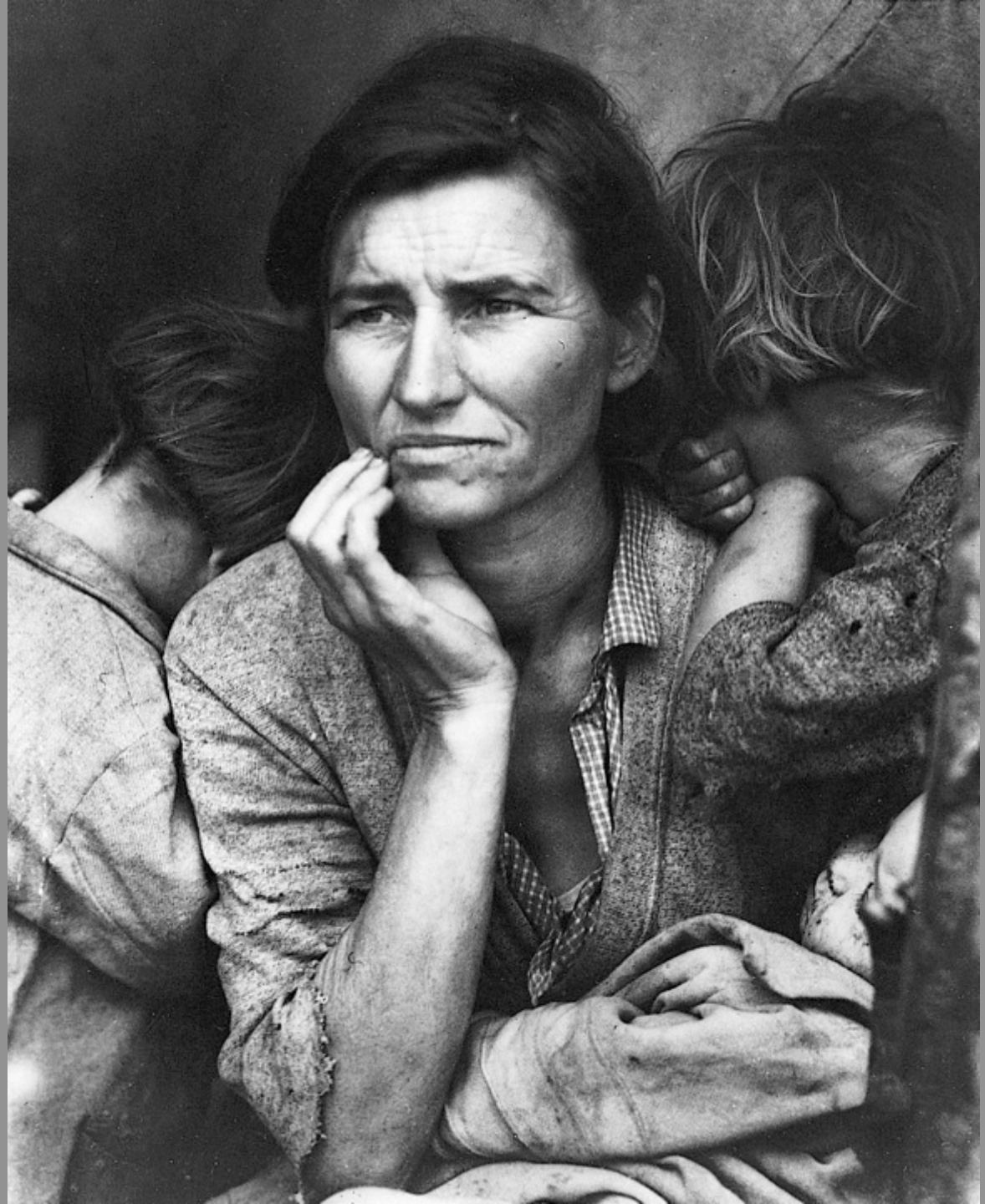
***Slum District**, 1890*

Dorothea Lange (May 26, 1895 – October 11, 1965) was an influential American documentary photographer and photojournalist, best known for her Depression-era work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Lange's photographs humanized the consequences of the Great Depression and influenced the development of documentary photography.

From 1935 to 1939, **Dorothea Lange's** work for the Resettlement Administration and FSA brought the plight of the poor and forgotten – particularly sharecroppers, displaced farm families, and migrant workers – to public attention. Distributed free to newspapers across the country, her poignant images became icons of the era.

White Angel Bread Line, San Francisco, 1933

Migrant Mother, became the iconic photo of the Depression, and one of the most familiar images of the 20th century.



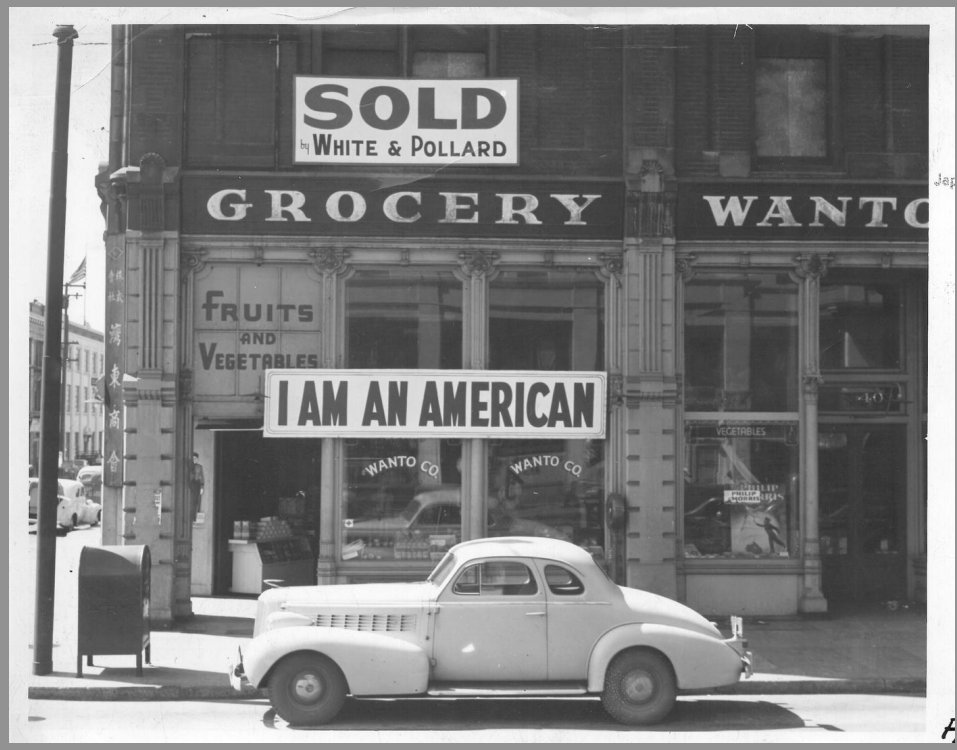
DOROTHEA LANGE, Migrant Mother, Nipomo Valley, 1935. Gelatin silver print. Copyright © the Dorothea Lange Collection, The Oakland Museum of California, City of Oakland (gift of Paul S. Taylor).

After taking a job as a photographer for the Resettlement Administration, a New Deal agency tasked with helping poor families relocate, Lange one day found herself in Nipomo, California, at a campsite full of out-of-work pea pickers. The crop had been destroyed by freezing rain; there was nothing to pick. Lange approached one of the idle pickers, a woman sitting in a tent, surrounded by her seven children, and asked if she could photograph them.

She took 6 pictures that day.

She took 6 pictures that day.

In 1941, Lange was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for achievement in photography. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, she gave up the prestigious award to record the forced evacuation of Japanese Americans from the West Coast, on assignment for the War Relocation Authority (WRA).



She covered the internment of Japanese Americans[1] and their subsequent incarceration, traveling throughout urban and rural California to photograph families preparing to leave, visiting several temporary assembly centers as they opened, and eventually highlighting Manzanar, the first of the permanent internment camps.

Walker Evans was interested in photographing the vernacular—the indigenous expressions of a people found in roadside stands, cheap cafés, advertisements, simple bedrooms, and small-town main streets.

Roadside stand near Birmingham

For fifty years, from the late 1920s to the early 1970s, Evans recorded the American scene with the nuance of a poet and the precision of a surgeon, creating an encyclopedic visual catalogue of modern America in the making.

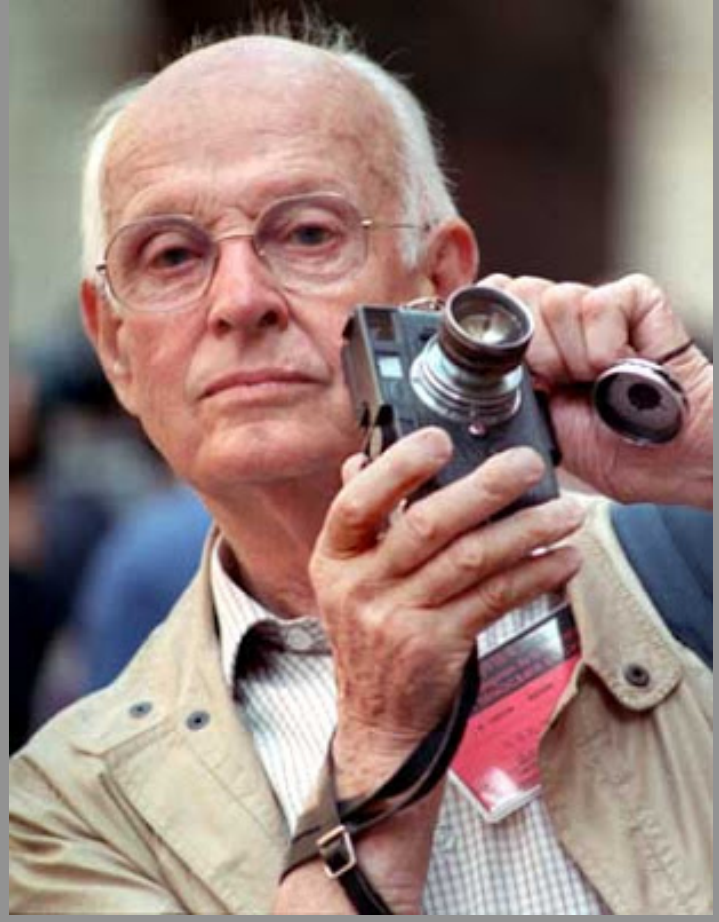

CHEROKEE PARTS STORE
GARAGE WORK
973
USED

In 1930. During the Great Depression, Evans
began to photograph for the Resettlement Administration, later known as the Farm Security Administration (FSA), documenting workers and architecture in the Southeastern states.

Evans's photo of Allie Mae Burroughs, became a symbol of the Great Depression

In 1936 he traveled with the writer James Agee to illustrate an article on tenant farm families for Fortune magazine;

the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* came out of this collaboration.



Henri Cartier-Bresson discovered the Leica - his camera of choice- in 1932 and began a life-long passion for photography. In 1943, after escaping from a prisoner of war camp he photographed the liberation of Paris.

In 1947, with Robert Capa, George Rodger, David Seymour and William Vandivert, starter Magnum Photos.

For more than twenty-five years, he was the keenest observer of the global theater of human affairs—and one of the great portraitists of the twentieth century.

His inventive work of the early 1930s helped define the creative potential of modern photography, and his uncanny ability to capture life on the run made his work synonymous with “the decisive moment”—the title of his first major book.

Man on a Bicycle,


SANG

,

James Van Der Zee was a renowned, Harlem-based photographer known for his posed, storied pictures capturing African-American citizenry and celebrity.

Van Der Zee would photograph Harlemites of all backgrounds and occupations, though his work is particularly noted for its pioneering depiction of middle-class African-American life.

The photograph, entitled "*Peaceful Family,"* (1936) is one of the hundreds of photographs of the middle class in Harlem.

Although left unidentified, the family and its socioeconomic background is evoked through imagery. The father in business attire hovering over his wife and mother of two illustrates a humble, cohesive foursome on an average day in their home.

Classroom #2, St. Marks School, NYC, (1941) is a photograph of a school classroom in Harlem.

The African American students are of the middle class, attending Catholic school and all wearing uniforms.

The nun, poised in the background, is helping a young female with her classwork.

Frank Capra worked regularly as a photojournalist, and between 1936 and 1939 made several trips to Spain with his companion, Gerda Taro, to document the civil war. His photographs from this conflict, including his most famous image, Death of a Loyalist Soldier (1936), were heralded almost immediately for their stunning impact; Picture Post termed him "the greatest war photographer in the world" in 1938.

Death of a Loyalist Soldier (1936),

Running for Air Raid Shelter, 1937 and 1939—Spanish Civil War

When World War II began, he moved to America
and worked freelance for LIFE, Time, and other publications. From 1941 to 1946, he was a war correspondent for LIFE and Collier's, traveling with the US Army and documenting Allied victories

Invasion of Normandy, 1945
Raising the Flag at Iwo Jima,

In 1948-1950, he photographed the turmoil surrounding Israel's declaration of independence.

He traveled to Hanoi in 1954 to photograph the French war in Indochina for LIFE;

shortly after his arrival, he stepped on a landmine and was killed.

Robert Capa made photographs that achieved their exceptionally powerful effect through his strong connection to and affection for people.

This attitude, and his use of the small 35-millimeter camera, allowed him to approach his subjects and throw himself into the action as no one else.

The result was a breakthrough in the history of photojournalism.