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DOROTHEA LANGE IN UTAH, 1936-1938
A PORTRAIT OF UTAH'S GREAT DEPRESSION

by

James R. Swensen

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

Department of Art History

Brigham Young University

June 2000

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

DOROTHEA LANGE IN UTAH, 1936-1938 A PORTRAIT OF UTAH'S GREAT DEPRESSION

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Department of Art History

Master of Arts

In his 1978 biography of Dorothea Lange, Milton Meltzer appraised Lange's 1936 photography in Utah as nothing more than mundane work done for the benefit of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and not for her own benefit as a photographer. Yet, her work in Utah encapsulates the aspirations, goals, and styles of Lange, and gives insight into her vision as a photographer and representative of the New Deal. Through carefully composed photographs, Lange shows the hardships and hope of life in Utah during the Great Depression.

This thesis investigates Lange's photographs in order to gain a greater understanding of the FSA in Utah during the Great Depression, the nature of FSA photography, and her work in general. To accomplish these tasks, it will be necessary to investigate the photographs and their captions, the work of other FSA photographers, local histories, contemporary sources, and FSA scholarship. Using these sources, this

thesis attempts to identify reasons why Lange took the photographs she did.

Using the historical context under which Lange's photographs were made also allows for an examination of Lange's use of visual editing, or, in other words, her artistic manipulation in creating her own vision of the areas she was assigned to photograph. The manner in which she photographed the small rural towns of Consumers, Widtsoe, and Escalante, was not completely indicative of the towns' true nature, or the towns' reality. Rather, the portraits Lange created were personal visions that supported the FSA and her own beliefs and altruistic ideology.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the Great Depression, there have been many books and investigations dealing with the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographers in relation to particular states. The FSA photographs have been used to provide an understanding of the Great Depression in states such as Florida, Texas, and Colorado.¹ In these state investigations, the work of the FSA photographers (Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Russell Lee, Arthur Rothstein, and others), under the direction of Roy Stryker, have been used to educate later generations about the difficult conditions under which their forefathers lived and worked. Some of these state investigations delve into the nature of FSA photography, its individuals, and the context under which the photographs were made. Others are merely picture books that provide nothing more than a visual description of the state during the Depression.

The first purpose of this thesis will be to use the FSA photographs of Utah to create a selective portrait of the state during the later part of the Depression, 1936-1940.

¹Examples include: Robert L. Reid, *Picturing Texas: The FSA-OWI Photographs in the Lone Star State, 1935-1943*, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1994); Michael Carlebach and Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., *Farm Security Administration Photographs of Florida*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993); Stephan J. Leonard, *Trials and Triumphs: A Colorado Portrait of the Depression with FSA Photographs*, (Niwot, Colo. : University Press of Colorado, 1993).

Instead of focusing on the work of all of the photographers who worked in Utah, it will look exclusively at the work by Dorothea Lange from March 1936 to August 1938.

Reducing an examination of the FSA to one photographer and one state removes countless variables surrounding the vast nature of the FSA. It is simply not possible to address the entire FSA with its various complexities, personalities, and the myriad of different geographies and peoples it was assigned to document. Only a reduction of these elements allows for an in-depth questioning of the FSA itself.

Over the last 50 years, Utah historians have often used the FSA – or the Resettlement Administration (RA) as it is also known – photographs to illustrate books and articles regarding the Depression and its impact on Utah's miners and farmers.² Only one source, however, has specifically acknowledged the FSA as the source of these photographs, Brian Cannon's *Life and Land: The Farm Security Administration Photographers in Utah, 1936-1941* (1988). In his treatment of the RA/FSA in Utah, Cannon provides a good summary of the three FSA photographers who traveled through Utah – Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein, and Russell Lee. He also comments briefly on the local conditions under which the photographs were made. Overall, the concise writing of Cannon gives good insights into the FSA actions, but it is limited in its analysis. Partly because it was designed to function as a preface to an exhibition of the same name, it is

²Normally work done in this area is referred to as FSA scholarship, commemorating the agency under which a majority of the photographic work was done. The RA, the agency under which the photography unit began was established in 1935, was absorbed by the FSA in 1937 (See chapter 5). For the purpose of this thesis I will refer to both agencies because a majority of the images and assignments discussed took place in the Spring of 1936 and, therefore, fall under the aegis of the RA and not the FSA.

summary in nature.³

In fact, this reveals an interesting dilemma in FSA scholarship. Often, as with Cannon's *Life and Land* or Carolyn Carr's book on the FSA in Ohio, state investigations present the FSA in an art museum context with its photographers treated as a collection of artists.⁴ While not out of place within an art museum, the FSA photographs were designed to be read in a different context.⁵ Despite the fact that the photographers of the FSA went about their work with an artistic eye, the aesthetic value of the photographs was always secondary. Rather than artistic, the fundamental pursuits of the FSA were historical, sociological, economic, political, and ideological in nature.⁶ Stryker believed that the primary legacy of the FSA was to history. He believed that the photographs were to be the

³The exhibition *Life and Land: The Farm Security Administration Photographers in Utah, 1936-1941* was held in the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Utah State University, January 10-March 6, 1988.

⁴Carolyn Kinder Carr, *Ohio: a Photographic Portrait 1935-1941 : Farm Security Administration photographs: Carl Mydans, Theodor Jung, John Vachon*, (Akron, Ohio: Akron Art Institute, 1980).

⁵See Jack F. Hurley, "The Farm Security Administration File, In and Out of Focus," *History of Photography* vol.17, (Autumn 1993) : 244-252.

⁶Many of the photographers were, in actuality, artists before they joined the FSA. Evans, Shahn, Jung, Delano, and Lange were all trained as visual artists before joining Stryker's team. (Lange was, for a brief time, trained by Clarence White.) Yet, when they joined the Historical Section the objectives of Stryker, Tugwell, the RA/FSA, and the New Deal dwarfed their personal artistic ambitions (Evans may be the exception). As Ansel Adams pointed out to Stryker, "What you've got are not photographers. They're a bunch of sociologists with camera's." Roy Stryker and Nancy Wood, *In this Proud Land: America 1935-1943 as Seen in the FSA Photographs*, (New York: Graphic Society, 1973), 8.

texts for future historians who would use them to understand the Great Depression.⁷

Despite Stryker's insistence on the overriding historical importance of the FSA, however, it is clear that the legacy of FSA photography also extends into the realm of art history.⁸ In fact, as is the case with almost any visual medium, FSA scholarship is, on the whole, more art historical in nature than historical. Dorothea Lange, for example, did not consider herself an artist until late in life.⁹ However, in examining her work it is obvious that she used artistic sensibilities to manipulate her subjects and their environs in order to create a vision that supported her own beliefs and ideology and that of her agency, the RA/FSA. The main contribution of this thesis will be to use the photographs, the historical context under which they were made, FSA scholarship, and the scholarship on Dorothea Lange to understand how and why Lange manipulated the scenes she photographed.

The foundation of any investigation in FSA scholarship must be the photographs and their accompanying captions. Without these fundamental components there would be no basis for deeper examination. According to the FSA scholar Jack F. Hurley, no

⁷*Dorothea Lange: Farm Security Administration Photographs, 1935-1939*, ed. Howard M. Levin and Katherine Northup, introduction by Robert J. Doherty, (Glencoe, Ill: The Text-Fiche Press, 1980), 33. For an example of FSA photography used for historical analysis see John D. Stoeckle and George Abbott White, *Plain Pictures of Plain Doctoring: Vernacular Expression in New Deal Medicine and Photography*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).

⁸For a discussion of the historical relevance of the FSA photographs see Arthur Rothstein, *Words and Pictures*, (New York: American Photographic Book Publishing Company, 1979), 9; Nat Herz, "Dorothea Lange in Perspective. A Reappraisal of the FSA and an Interview," *Infinity* (April 1963) : 7.

⁹Therese Thau Heyman, *Celebrating the Collection: The Work of Dorothea Lange*, (Oakland, Calif.: Oakland Museum, 1978), 10.

investigation of the RA/FSA should be accomplished without these two elements.

According to Hurley, “The very real danger is that historians . . . may actually move the reading of the public and ourselves further from the truth than we might have been simply looking at the FSA photographs, reading their captions, reading the letters [of the photographers] that are available, and drawing our own conclusions.”¹⁰ By building on the photographs and their captions, a greater understanding of the images may then be obtained.

With the photographs and the captions as a basis for examination established, the context of the works can be constructed. According to photo-historian Geoffrey Batchen,

What is still needed [in FSA scholarship] is a specific examination of individual images and series within the project, with attention paid to the way they were used outside and inside the FSA, to the texts and other images that were placed around them, and to the publications and circumstances in which they appeared in the 30's and 40's.¹¹

In essence, Batchen calls for an examination of context. An investigation of the photographs alone would not provide the information needed to analyze the work of the FSA. The photographs must be understood in their context. In examining the FSA photographs of Utah, it will be necessary to understand the greater context in which they were used. This will not only allow for a deeper examination of the RA/FSA assignments in Utah, but will also impart information on the nature of the RA itself.

The methodology used in understanding and constructing the context of the

¹⁰Hurley, *In and Out*, 245.

¹¹Geoffrey Batchen, “Seeds of Plenty, Seeds of Want,” Review of *Official Images: New Deal Photography* (1987), *Afterimage* v.15 (April 1988) : 18.

RA/FSA in Utah will be the same technique that was used in constructing the images. Roy Stryker, the head of the RA's photographic unit, required his photographers to study out an area before leaving for the field. They were to study maps and the geography of the area, local histories, oral histories, source books – such as the 'Bible' of the RA/FSA – J. Russell Smith's *North America*, 1925, government reports, lectures, and WPA reports.¹² With this informational background, Stryker believed that his team was prepared to photograph the needs or strengths of an area.

In essence, this investigation of Utah will work in reverse of how the photographers prepared. Instead of using all the background information to understand the area, the information will be used to help understand the photographs. The same tools – the histories, maps, lectures, etc. – will be used to more fully understand the intent and purpose of Lange's work in Utah. The investigation will also be aided by contemporary voices such as authors, Wallace Stegner and Sherwood Anderson, photographers Robert Disraeli and Lange's friend Willard Van Dyke, and the documentary film director Pare Lorentz. Their observations provide contemporary views of circumstances similar to those Lange observed.

Not only is it necessary to understand the photographs, captions, and context of an FSA assignment, but a true investigation of any specific area must include the area

¹²Robert T. Hammarlund, "Portrait of an Era," *US Camera* vol. 25 no.11 (November 1962) : 88; Stryker and Wood, 13; Jack Delano, *Photographic Memories*, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997),

itself.¹³ Unlike other photographers in the FSA, Lange believed that the only way to understand an area was to experience it first-hand.¹⁴ In this sense, the physical makeup of an area becomes vital information in constructing the nature of an assignment. Experiencing the sites visited by Lange in Utah, the towns of Consumers, Widtsoe, Escalante, provides vital information that allows for a closer examination of her aims, methods, and techniques. Thus the site becomes evidence.

With an understanding of the photographer, the RA/FSA, and the site itself, this investigation can address the second objective of this thesis – the question of visual editing. Visual editing is the questioning of how much the photographer's hand is present in the photographs themselves, or, in other words, how have the photographers manipulated or composed their images to support their own agenda / vision, or that of the agency in which they were employed.

In the remainder of this introduction the issue of visual editing, or Lange's artistic manipulation, will be investigated. The introduction will also examine the RA and the nature of Lange's photography. Then, in chapters two, three, and four, Lange's work will be examined in the rural communities of Consumers, Widtsoe, and Escalante with special attention given to how Lange visually edited these areas in order to highlight the vision

¹³As far as I am aware, the only other investigation that has actually gone to the original sites of the photographs is Bill Ganzel's *Dust Bowl Descent*, (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1984). The purpose of Ganzel's revisit was, in essence, to see what had happened to the sites and people of the FSA photographs. *Dust Bowl Descent* is, therefore, more nostalgic than exploratory.

¹⁴James Curtis, *Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth: FSA Photography Reconsidered*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 13-15.

she wished to portray.

The issue of how much visual editing was present in the work of the FSA is a source of debate in current scholarship. Most of the debate concerns the questioning of how much altering an FSA photographer can do before he or she violates the code of documentary photography. Technically, documentary photography is straight photography. It is a photographic style in which the scene is captured exactly as it is found without posing, altering, or manipulating the subject, objects, the negative, or the contact print itself. Hurley, leery of the recent distortions in FSA scholarship, believes and defends the point that the FSA photographers were completely true to the premises of the documentary style. He argues that their works are ‘honest’ and ‘true’, or, in other words, the photographs have not been artistically manipulated. According to Hurley, “Lange and the other photographers disliked created shots and tried to avoid them.”¹⁵

Representing the opposite position to which Hurley is opposed, is the argument of James Curtis. Curtis postulates that the FSA photographers used a certain amount of “directorial intrusion” in the creation of their photographs.¹⁶ Through an investigation of the work of Evans, Lange, Lee, and Rothstein, Curtis calls into question the rigidity of the documentary style. For him the photographs of the FSA are constructions. He suggests that the photographers regularly posed their subjects and manipulated their homes and surroundings, and even their emotions to capture the vision they desired.

¹⁵Hurley, “In and Out,” 248.

¹⁶This is Hurley’s expression for describing Curtis’ view on the interaction between the photographers and their subjects. Hurley, “In and Out,” 247.

In actuality, both Hurley and Curtis are correct in certain areas. It is a safe assumption that the photographers tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. Their objective was to truthfully capture the reality of the scenes they experienced. It is certainly possible for a photographer to compose a photograph without obstructing the reality of the moment. In that sense they are “honest” photographs and “true” to their subjects. Yet, with all of the evidence, mainly in the form of letters between Stryker and his photographers, it seems very likely that there were instances when the photographers intruded into the lives of their subjects. Technically, in so doing, they violated the documentary style’s insistence on the completely dislocated photographer.

In truth, what is needed is a reappraisal of documentary photography. It must be a reappraisal that loosens documentary photography’s absolute ties to reality. A new definition must allow the artists’/ photographers’ hand to be present in the work itself. Today, it is understood that photography is not an unquestionable truth. One no longer believes that it is a mirror on the world because photographs are always constructed in some manner.¹⁷ A photographer always manipulates the scene when deciding what to photograph. To view a photograph is not to view an exact copy or a reality of the scene, but is to view the photographer’s vision of that reality. In that sense, the photographer will always be a visual editor deciding what to include or exclude as he/she looks through the viewfinder. This editing process gives photographers certain license and control over what it is they photograph. Thus, every photograph is a composition and an interpretation.

¹⁷Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 6.

Susan Sontag, in *On Photography* (1977), grapples with this issue among the FSA photographers,

The immensely gifted members of the Farm Security Administration photographic project of the late 1930's (among them Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, Russell Lee) would take dozens of frontal pictures of one of their sharecropper subjects until satisfied that they had gotten just the right look on film – the precise expression on the subjects' face that supported their own notions about poverty, light, dignity, texture, exploitation, and geometry. In deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects.¹⁸

Sontag's idea of the photographers' "own notions" is important. It supports the concept that the photographers of the FSA used visual editing in creating their own visions. This vision, a photographic construct, was specifically designed to support their own ideologies and that of the Federal agency they supported.

What is important to remember is that the process of visual editing does not diminish the work of the FSA photographers. Rather, it makes their vision and their desires (and that of the group as a whole) one of the most significant and noteworthy issues in FSA photography. The artist's hand, therefore, is important in understanding the vision they wished to portray. In order to understand Lange's photographs of Utah, it is important to understand Lange and her desires, as well as the objectives of the RA in sending her to the state. Ultimately, the Utah portrayed in Lange's photography is her own vision of the state.

In her 1936 assignments in Utah, Lange demonstrated her ability to visually edit the area she photographed by filtering out the particulars that did not support the vision

¹⁸Sontag, 6.

she desired to create. In the small mining town of Consumers, Lange edited out the more modern areas of the town, the multi-story buildings, and the well-kept offices, in favor of the town's more destitute sections. This editing was done to draw sympathy for the poor miners and their families, who were in dire need of Federal help. In order to validate the RA and its resettlement program, Lange similarly captured the decrepit homes and crumbling barns of Widtsoe, rather than focusing on the areas of the town that were relatively well kept.¹⁹ Finally, in Escalante, Lange, by means of her carefully selected views, did not capture the entire character of the little town. Rather than show the town as it actually was, she used her photographs to support her romantic notions toward the small Mormon town on the desert frontier and its pioneer heritage. In all three assignments, Lange's work was not a reality of the scene, but a created reality that validated her position and the nature of her assignment.²⁰

This practice of visual editing, in truth, goes against what Lange claimed to practice. Her method was "Hands off! Whatever I photograph, I do not molest or tamper with or arrange."²¹ This applied to the posing of her subjects and her technique, in that she

¹⁹The same might apply to Lange's work on the Tooele / Rush Valley assignment. Not only did her photographs reflect the nature of the project (land over human concerns), but they did not capture the nature of the area at all.

²⁰David P. Peller, *Hope Among Us Yet: Social Criticism and Social Solace in Depression America*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 46. See also Charles Shindo, *Dust Bowl Migrants in the American Imagination*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 2.

²¹Quoted in Daniel Dixon, "Dorothea Lange," *Modern Photography* (December 1952) : 68.

would not retouch her work in the dark room.²² Her self-proclaimed objective was to “Deal with what is” and “Retire from what might be.”²³ Her motto was to be found in the lines from Francis Bacon that hung over her studio door,

The contemplation of things as they are
Without error or confusion
Without substitution or imposture
Is in itself a nobler thing
Than a whole harvest of invention²⁴

Lange believed that her photography was to “mirror the present and document for the future.”²⁵ All of these principles regarding the truth and reality of her photography equaled Stryker’s view of what his photographers should look for. Stryker’s definition of documentary photography was photography that captured the “dignity of fact.” Its primary objective being the pursuit of the truthful image.²⁶

Although Lange believed in “not reconstructing reality” she understood that she

²²Heyman, *Celebrating the Collection*, 63. In regard to her retouching of photographs see Curtis, 66-67.

²³Lange quoted in Peller, 89.

²⁴These lines may be found in almost any work related to Lange. Lange tacked this quotation onto her darkroom door in 1923, and it remained there until her death in 1965. *Dorothea Lange*, intro. by George P. Elliot, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), 1.

²⁵Paul S. Taylor, *Paul Schuster Taylor: California Social Scientist*. vol. I, An interview by Suzanne Reiss, (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, 1973), 238a.

²⁶Roy Stryker, “Documentary Photography,” *The Complete Photographer* vol.7, ed. Willard P. Morgan, (1970), 1181.

could not remove her own perceptual filters.²⁷ Any reality Lange could construct would be a personal recreation of the thing she was photographing.²⁸ In a slight retreat, a photograph, according to Lange, was not “a factual document per se” but was a creation filled with meaning and significance.²⁹ For Lange, documentary photography is capturing “What is it really?”³⁰ Yet, answering this question could never be completely objective because a photograph is always determined by the taste and conscience of the photographer.³¹

During the Depression, Nathan Asch traveled the nation hoping to find the “real” America. He expected to find the same “proud fighters” that were visible in Lange’s work. Instead he found a people who were completely devastated by their hardships.³² This prompts the question of whether Lange’s documents were indicators of reality. In his 1940 article, “Have You Seen Their Faces?”, Hartley Howe complemented Lange for her “remarkable sympathetic insight into human beings,” but noted that this comes as a result of “occasionally verging on sentimentality.”³³ This sentimentality is apparent in how Lange

²⁷Herz, 10; Zoe Brown, *Dorothea Lange: Field Notes and Photographs*, Master Thesis John F. Kennedy University, 1979, 36.

²⁸Peller, 108. See Sontag, 5-8.

²⁹Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 158.

³⁰Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 158.

³¹Sontag, 6.

³²Peller, 17-19. Asch published an account of his travels entitled *The Road: In Search of America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1937).

³³Hartley Howe, “Have You Seen Their Faces?” *Survey Graphic* 29:4 (April 1940) : 237.

photographed the poor. She became so good at it that it seems that throughout her career she photographed “only the poor.”³⁴ This was her forte. Even in the beginning, in images such as *White Angel Breadline* (figure 1), 1933, she became so proficient in ennobling her subjects that she was able to make the lowest in society seem much higher than their status allowed. Her subjects, no matter how poor, always possessed wholesome virtues. She always captured dignity over despair.³⁵ As William Stott points out, Lange never showed the vices of the poor; they all have character and nearly all are handsome.³⁶ They were well fed and relatively well dressed.³⁷ In all, Lange’s subjects were simplified and ennobled.³⁸

In fact this was the general feeling of the Historical Section. Each photographer held to the battled notions and premises of documentary photography, but they also realized that a pure document was not always possible. Stryker’s “integrity of truth” had to be formed and molded in order to capture the decisive moment or the mood he

³⁴Pare Lorentz, “Dorothea Lange: Camera with a Purpose,” *US Camera* vol. I (1941) : 95.

³⁵Stryker and Wood, 184. Lange’s images were fairly slanted to focus on the positive side of the scenes she encountered. In fact, rarely did the FSA photographers capture the brutal aspects that did exist. Stryker made sure that the images his photographers captured did nothing to remove humanity and dignity from their subjects. For a deeper discussion see Maurice Berger, “FSA: The Illiterate Eye (1985),” in *How Art Becomes History: Essays on Art, Society, and Culture in Post-New Deal America*, (New York: Icon Editions, 1992).

³⁶William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 57, 229.

³⁷Berger, 9.

³⁸Stott, 56-57.

demanded. For Stryker, “The documentary attitude is not a denial of the plastic elements which must remain essential criteria in any work. It merely gives these elements limitations and directions.”³⁹ He was not afraid of advising his photographers on how to maximize their photography, nor was he afraid of telling them to pose or construct images as they saw fit.⁴⁰

It seems that his photographers took the dual notion to heart.⁴¹ For Rothstein, the subjects of documentary photography needed no embellishment. In his own words, a documentary photographer “loves life and accepts his environment rather than being an escapist who is concerned with life’s cosmetics.”⁴² “For a documentary photographer,” he continues, “simple honesty enhances the picture with the dignity of fact.”⁴³ Yet, as demonstrated in his infamous cow skull photographs from 1936, Rothstein was not above manipulating a scene in order to create the right image.⁴⁴ This applied to other

³⁹Stryker quoted in Robert J. Doherty, introduction to *Dorothea Lange: Farm Security Administration Photographs, 1935-1939*, Vol. I, ed. Howard M. Levin and Katherine Northup, (Glencoe, Ill: The Text-Fiche Press, 1980), 34.

⁴⁰Karin Becker Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition*, (Baton Rouge Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 102.

⁴¹By “dual notion” I refer to the idea that documentary photographers must always remain true and honest toward their subjects (i.e. they must not alter their subject or environment), while, at the same time, manipulating, altering, moving, and even posing a subject in order to get the photograph they desired. Accomplishing both would be paradoxical.

⁴²Rothstein, *Words and Pictures*, 6.

⁴³Rothstein, *Words and Pictures*, 6.

⁴⁴Rothstein photographed a found cow skull in a variety of different environments to capture the drought conditions in South Dakota. This became a problem when a local

photographers in the section as well. Walker Evans was known for constructing scenes to create the exact composition he desired.⁴⁵ For John Vachon “a good photograph” involved exaggeration and even false composition.⁴⁶ Jack Delano, who joined Stryker’s staff in 1940, understood that the photographs he was to take were not pictures “in the raw”, but images that were to be delicately composed.⁴⁷

Like Stryker and the other photographers in the section, Lange knew that it was impossible to have a completely factual document. A completely factual document was, in fact, impossible for anyone to construct. Instead, the photographers and their emotions were to have a place in their photographs. “[A] good documentary,” Stryker insists “should tell not only what a place or a thing or a person looks like, but it must also tell the audience what it would feel like to be an actual witness to the scene.”⁴⁸ Emotion, it seems, counted just as much, if not more than fact.⁴⁹ Therefore, true documentary photography, and especially Lange’s work, depends as much on the emotions and personal vision of the

newsman discovered the photographs and used them to embarrass FDR during a visit to the state. See Jack F. Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 86-92.

⁴⁵Peller, 93; Curtis, 43-44+

⁴⁶Peller, 91.

⁴⁷Peller, 91. According to Heyman, Lange’s work often contained images that were carefully composed. For her, Lange’s work captured “complex literary compositions” that revealed her true genius as a photographer. Heyman, *Celebrating the Collection*, 63-64.

⁴⁸Roy Stryker quoted in Stott, 29.

⁴⁹Stott, 9.

photographer as on the actual reality of the scene itself. Daniel Dixon, in contemplating his mother's work, stated that Lange's photographs were not interpretations, nor impressions, but "forms of self expression."⁵⁰ No photographer can, in this sense, be divorced from his or her work. The biases, emotions, ideologies, knowledge, and opinions of the photographer will always come through in their photography. Documentary photography's quest to find the essence of "What is it really?", Lange concedes, will always include a portion of "how [the photographer] feels."⁵¹

Lange was exceptionally gifted in capturing the 'feeling' of a scene. As demonstrated in the complex emotions she photographed in Widdowson, she was expert at capturing what the situation felt like to her. She personally witnessed the hope and the misery of resettlement, and masterfully captured these emotions with her camera. Her vision of the scene may not have been exactly the way it was for everyone, but it was a scene that she personally experienced. Through her eye, the miners and their families in Consumers became a people filled with fight and perseverance in a community fraught with poverty. Lange's sympathy for the miners and their families is clearly demonstrated in her images of the town's poverty. Finally, Escalante, for Lange, was an enduring community, pushed by depressions, but stabilized by tradition, belief, and pride. The town is a romantic throwback to the American values of the Mormon frontier. All three portrayals may not have been exactly correct or "true", but each one fit the emotional description Lange wished to portray.

⁵⁰Daniel Dixon, 69.

⁵¹Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 158.

The Resettlement Administration (RA) was created by executive order on May 1, 1935.⁵² Its creation stemmed from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's concern for America's rural population that had, for more than five years, suffered greatly from the effects of the Great Depression. Roosevelt's administration aimed at helping the "forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid."⁵³ The President appointed one of his own, Rexford Tugwell, a member of his famed "Brain Trust," as the head of the new agency. Tugwell's RA was, in fact, a conglomeration of existing agencies already aimed at helping the agricultural sector: the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's (AAA) Land Policy Section, the Interior Department's Subsistence Homestead Division, and the Land Program and Rural Rehabilitation Division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration.⁵⁴

Roosevelt gave the RA three directives; each specifically aimed at helping America's agricultural population. The first directive was to oversee the resettlement of destitute or low-income families from areas that were not productive to lands that could provide a greater economic opportunity.⁵⁵ Secondly, the RA was to "initiate and administer . . . approved projects" such as land rehabilitation and flood control.⁵⁶ Lastly,

⁵²Doherty, 21.

⁵³Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 48.

⁵⁴Doherty, 21-22.

⁵⁵Doherty, 22.

⁵⁶Doherty, 22. The construction of the Tropic Dam is a good example of a project administered by the RA.

the administration was to make available low interest loans that could help the farmers, farm tenants, and croppers who were in dire need of aid.⁵⁷ The combined objective of the three programs was to aid the one-third of the nation that Roosevelt saw as “ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.”

Due to the “big government” nature of the RA’s programs, Tugwell knew that his administration would come under serious attack and scrutiny from more conservative members of the Federal government. In the more conservative circles his agency was seen as “strange as it is unexpected,” socialist, and even communist.⁵⁸ He also knew that the RA could not survive misrepresentation.⁵⁹ He, therefore, created an ambitious public information program within the RA, designed to propagate faith in his agency and its programs.⁶⁰ This Information Division would broadcast the positive aspects of the RA through radio programs, magazines, yearbooks, circulars and bulletins, and documentary films.⁶¹

Arguably the most successful sector of Tugwell’s Information Division was the photography division or, as it became titled, the Historical Section. For Tugwell,

⁵⁷Doherty, 22.

⁵⁸Tugwell’s programs were a far cry from the conservative belief that the government could “not spend [its] way to prosperity.” S.A. Spencer, *The Greatest Show on Earth: A Photographic Story of Man’s Struggle for Wealth*, (New York: Double Day, Dorant and Company, Inc., 1938), 158, 172, 176-177; *Newsweek*, “Farm Trouble: Cooperative and ex-director call each other communist,” (January 16, 1936): 40-41.

⁵⁹Baldwin, 113.

⁶⁰Baldwin, 117.

⁶¹Baldwin, 117.

photography was a perfect medium through which to publicize the activities of the RA. He believed in the camera's power to educate the viewing public.⁶² He knew that a carefully composed photograph would be innocently and automatically believed to be reality. He stated, "You could never say anything about photography – it was a photograph, it was a picture. This was something you couldn't deny. This was evident."⁶³

Tugwell learned of the power of photography years earlier as an economics professor at Columbia University. He understood the power that photographs and text could jointly produce. For his book *American Economic Life* (1925), Tugwell hired a young professor of economics, Roy Stryker, to be his photography editor.⁶⁴ In the end, Tugwell was so impressed with Stryker's work that he included him as one of the authors of the book itself. When the time came to appoint a chief for his Historical Section, Stryker was again chosen to handle the job of organizing and directing the photographic aims of Tugwell.

Stryker was a perfect choice for the job. As mentioned above, he was already experienced in collecting and organizing photographs. Although he was never involved in the actual picture-taking, he was extremely keen as to what his agency needed.⁶⁵ Second,

⁶²Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 12; Edward Steichen, ed., *The Bitter Years, 1935-1941*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962), iii.

⁶³Heyman, *Celebrating the Collection*, 70.

⁶⁴Rexford Tugwell, Thomas S. Munro, and Roy Stryker, *American Economic Life*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925).

⁶⁵Stryker detailed his involvement, "I never took a picture and yet I felt a part of every picture taken. I sat in my office in Washington and yet I went to every home in America." Stryker and Wood, 9.

he was educated in economics and supported the radical economic programs of the RA. In addition to this, he was an excellent teacher with the capability of transmitting his energy and enthusiasm to his students – or his photographers.⁶⁶ Lastly, having been raised on a small farm in Colorado, he knew the various details of agriculture: its rewards, and its hardships.⁶⁷

Tugwell gave Stryker the task of documenting the activities of the agency. His team was required to cover the various RA projects that dotted the country; from the Greenbelt communities, such as Hightstown, New Jersey, to the resettlement of small rural towns, such as Widtsoe, Utah. The collected photographs would then be used by members of Congress to push for legislation, or loaned out to various magazines such as *Time*, *Fortune*, *Survey Graphic*, or even *Junior Scholastic*.⁶⁸ These outlets would, in turn, generate good publicity for the RA. In a letter to Dorothea Lange, Stryker reminded his photographer, “I am terribly glad that the photographs have had such wide use. That, after all is the first purpose of our existence – to get as much good publicity as we can for the Resettlement Administration.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 35.

⁶⁷Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 34-35.

⁶⁸Maren Stange and others, *Official Images: New Deal Photography*, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 1. For the uses of the photographs see Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America, 1890-1950*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 108-113.

⁶⁹Stryker to Lange, October 30, 1936, quoted in Heyman, *Celebrating the Collection*, 69.

This “good publicity” was admittedly positive propaganda for the agency.⁷⁰ The photographers were to take photographs that supported the RA, the New Deal, and ultimately President Roosevelt.⁷¹ In order to collect such photographs, Stryker and his team would have to believe that the RA was acting in the best interest of their subjects. In photographing the poorest third of the rural poor they believed that they were showing the formidable need for the RA and its programs. They were to make the RA look like a savior and a mode of rescue for those trapped in poverty, whether in the Dust Bowls, mining camps, or on the road to California.

As the head of the Historical Section, Stryker was responsible for pushing the agenda, or more specifically, the ideology of the RA. He was, in essence, a professional ideologist commissioned and paid to accentuate and broadcast the positive aspects of the RA while repressing those aspects that could harm the agency.⁷² The positive representation of the RA was to be generated through his photographers. In order to gain support for his agency Stryker had to use his position as director of photography to educate the public, a role which he took very seriously.⁷³ As an educator, his primary objective was to transform the average viewer into a supporter of the RA. This was to be

⁷⁰Baldwin, 119. See also Heyman, *Celebrating the Collection*, 76.

⁷¹Doherty, 33.

⁷²According to Althusser, there must be a shifting balance between ideology and repression in any “apparatus”, whether it be state or private. See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

⁷³Curtis, 11.

done through his section's photography, for he believed that photography could influence and alter people's thinking.⁷⁴ In this sense, Stryker was not merely an educator but was a propagator of RA propaganda.

The Historical Section's photographers were, in truth, Stryker's medium of representation. Through them the agenda of the agency could continue to propagate as long as they photographed America. Their product, the photographs, was the form of education by which Stryker could spread the positives of the RA throughout Congressional circles, and throughout the private sector. Yet, according to Stryker, "[The photographers'] loyalty was not to me, but to an idea."⁷⁵ For Stryker, his photographers produced because they believed in the tenets of the RA and the New Deal, and not because they simply needed employment.

This prompts the question: to what idea did Dorothea Lange subscribe? Lange was deeply devoted to the New Deal. In a 1936 letter to Stryker, Lange stated her allegiance, "I've said before that you can call on me for anything I can do to further the cause which we are both so vitally interested in."⁷⁶ Unlike Stryker, however, Lange was not committed to any particular political ideology.⁷⁷ She was deeply dedicated to the RA/FSA, not on

⁷⁴Cornell Capa, forward to Steven W. Plattner, *Roy Stryker USA, 1943-1950: The Standard Oil Photography Project*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 7.

⁷⁵Roy Stryker, "The Lean Thirties," *Harvester World*, (February -March 1960) : 15.

⁷⁶Lange to Stryker, November 1936, quoted in Hurley, *In and Out*, 250.

⁷⁷When asked about whether Lange had any affiliations with Communism or any other group, Paul Taylor, Lange's second husband responded, "No, no, not political or otherwise. No she didn't belong to any, she didn't even belong to the f/64 photographers club . . . She didn't belong to any thing." Her son Daniel Dixon also confirmed that Lange

political grounds, but for altruistic reasons. In visiting the various RA/FSA programs across the nation she had seen the New Deal help America's rural population. She supported the ideology of Stryker and the New Deal because she felt it helped those in need.⁷⁸ In other words, her dedication was to humanity and not to Roosevelt. By producing empathetic photographs of America's farmers, migrants, and the utterly destitute, she knew that she could aid her agency's cause. For her it did not matter whether this was propaganda. In her own words,

Everything is propaganda for what you believe in, actually, isn't it? . . . I don't see that it could be otherwise. The harder and the more deeply you believe in anything, the more in a sense you are a propagandist. Conviction, propaganda, faith. I don't know, I never have been able to come to the conclusion that that's (sic) a bad word.⁷⁹

Whether or not the work of the RA/FSA was propaganda or not was immaterial for Lange. By making the agency look as effective and essential as possible, she was accomplishing her inner objective of aiding America's poor.

While the overall objectives of the Historical Section were clear, the direction and style of Stryker's group were initially extremely vague.⁸⁰ This allowed Stryker the freedom to create, or rather, generate a style that would be effective in showing the conditions of

"had no interest in politicians." Taylor, *Paul Schuster Taylor: California Social Scientist*, 222; Elizabeth Partridge, ed. *Dorothea Lange: A Visual Life*, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 68. See also Heyman, *Celebrating the Collection*, 47.

⁷⁸Clark Kerr, "Paul and Dorothea," in *Dorothea Lange: A Visual Life*, ed. Elizabeth Partridge, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 41.

⁷⁹Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 206.

⁸⁰Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 36.

the poor, and in supporting the agency. Stryker's staff would become innovators of a documentary style in the tradition of earlier documentary photographers like Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine.⁸¹ For Stryker, this new documentary style was "an approach, not a technique; an affirmation not a negation. . ."⁸² The photographs his staff were to capture were to be "true images," without manipulation or alteration performed after the image was captured on film.⁸³ The photographers were strongly commissioned to realistically capture their subjects while not robbing them of their spirit or humanity.

Seeking out the poorest third of America's rural population was not the only thrust of the Historical Section. While documenting the plight of the rural poor, Stryker also intended to create a uniform portrait of America. In doing so he fulfilled Tugwell's aim: "to introduce Americans to America."⁸⁴ Even from the beginning of the RA, according to John Vachon, Stryker had "a half-formed concept that it might be appropriate to gather together a collection of photographs of all aspects of American rural life, with emphasis on what had gone wrong."⁸⁵ Stryker wanted to show the positive and unique aspects of rural

⁸¹Of Hine, Ben Shahn stated, "Hine was one of the Greats. I don't know a photographer who has not been conscious of, and influenced to some extent by, Lewis Hine." Judith Mara Gutman, *Lewis Hine and the American Social Conscience*, (New York: Walker and Company, 1967); Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 122. See also Stange, 92.

⁸²Roy Stryker quoted in Doherty, 34.

⁸³See Roy Stryker, "Documentary Photography," *The Complete Photographer* vol.7. ed. Willard P. Morgan, (1963), 1178-1183.

⁸⁴Stryker and Wood, 9.

⁸⁵John Vachon, "Tribute to a Man, an Era, an Art," *Harpers'* (September 1973) : 96. See also *Documenting America, 1935-1943*, ed. Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly W. Brannan, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 38-39.

life while highlighting the negative. In other words, he wanted to document America.

Both the positive and negative photographs of rural America were to be extremely effective in Stryker's hands. Negative images, focusing on destitution and poverty, could be used to show the needs of America's farms. They could produce an emotional response that would hopefully answer the call to "Do Something."⁸⁶ Ultimately, they would show the tangible need of the RA. The positive photographs would not only be essential in showing the effectiveness of the RA and its programs, but would show that America was persevering; that it was preserving its virtues and its traditions. The photographs would show that America still had hope in the future.

For the creation of this new documentary style, Stryker was extremely dependant on his photographers. If Stryker was talented and gifted in selecting, editing, and organizing the thousands of photographs that crossed his desk, he was even more talented, some would say lucky, in selecting his photographers.⁸⁷ The first photographers hired were Arthur Rothstein, Carl Mydans, and Walker Evans. Rothstein was a recent Columbia graduate and former student of Stryker. He was a quick learning young photographer with

⁸⁶When the photographs of the FSA were shown at the International Photographic Salon, many of the visitors responses were recorded. More than once the simple call to "Do Something" was recorded on the comment cards. Edward Steichen, "The FSA Photographs," *US Camera* vol. 1 (1939) : 62-63.

⁸⁷Even from the beginning of his work with photography Stryker was surrounded by talented photographers. For Tugwell's *American Economic Life* Stryker worked with the aging Lewis Hine. Stryker needed to hone his sense of photography (Hine's work helped train his eye) and Hine needed the money (Stryker provided the funds). Years later as the director of the Historical Section, Stryker would continue to work with artists who were already established, such as Evans, Shahn, and Lange. Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 52-54.

a good eye and technical know-how. Mydans went on to a long career with *Life Magazine* following his relatively brief stint with the RA. Evans was an extremely gifted photographer known for his delicately composed photographs. In the years to come Stryker would hire other talented photographers, notably Russell Lee, Marion Post-Wolcott, John Vachon, and Jack Delano.

While Evans would provide the artistic foundation and pictorialism of the group, his room-mate, the mural painter Ben Shahn would provide the groundwork for the human aspect of the FSA's Historical Section.⁸⁸ Unlike the others, Shahn was not a member of the Historical Section, but was a member of the RA's Special Skills Division. Although not a member of his group, Shahn was a tremendous influence on Stryker, especially in developing the direction of the Historical Section. Stryker even sent Shahn out on assignments and included his photographs in the RA's collection. One piece of advice, given by Shahn, was particularly important for Stryker. At a crucial time in the section's development when Stryker was foggy about the direction he needed to pursue, he received counsel from Shahn.⁸⁹ "Look Roy," Shahn advised, "You're not going to move anybody with [a picture of] eroded soil - but the effect this soil has on a kid who

⁸⁸No photographer hired by Stryker would have the impact that Evan's photography created, especially on the younger members of the staff. Arthur Rothstein and John Vachon, in particular, developed their own styles upon studying the work Evans sent to the Washington office. Not far behind, Lange's work would have the second greatest impact on the group, but in a completely different vein. While Evan's work emphasized the pictorial aspects of photography composing cool, even classical, compositions, such as *Graveyard and Steel Mill, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1935*, Lange's work was, decidedly, human and sympathetic in its outlook. See Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 44-54.

⁸⁹At the time Stryker was instructing Rothstein to photograph letters that crossed his desk, and requesting pictures of eroded soil.

looks starved, this is going to move people. You just can't move anybody with this kind of photography."⁹⁰ This was to be the primary direction the section would take. The most important and timely photography of the FSA would be the photographs describing the "unblinking" poverty of the rural population and its effect on humanity.⁹¹ Yet, it would not be Shahn who would lead this emotional and sentimental pursuit; that distinction would go to the next photographer Stryker hired, Dorothea Lange.

Lange would be the fulfilment of Shahn's statement.⁹² Her photography was the compassionate counterpoint to Evan's cool compositions. Like the work of Walker Evans, Lange's work was to be a tremendous influence on the Historical Section, eventually permeating to every member.⁹³

While Stryker and his team were developing a tangible style in Washington D.C., Dorothea Lange had already developed a similar style in California. She had done this completely on her own at least two years before joining the Historical Section.⁹⁴ By the

⁹⁰Ben Shahn quoted in Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 50.

⁹¹Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 112.

⁹²Even Shahn agreed with this. According to Hurley, Shahn was present when the first of Lange's work was brought into Stryker's office. Her photographs had an instant impact on Shahn, and he even called them a "revelation". See Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 52.

⁹³Her influence was to be so persuasive that years later Lange believed that it was her work, sent to Stryker's office in 1935, that started the whole thing. See Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 168.

⁹⁴Unlike many of the RA / FSA photographers, Lange was already an established and proficient photographer before joining the staff. Consequently, she required less molding and directing from Stryker who, as editor and dictator, was, as John Tagg points out, the co-author of the photographs themselves. See John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts

early 1930's, Lange had become an established portrait photographer in San Francisco. Similar to her later RA/FSA work, she became known for her sensitivity toward her sitters and insight into their character. This sensitivity, which later evolved into a deep sympathy, was developed years earlier.

At the age of seven, Lange was struck by polio. The disease produced a profound, but well masked, limp in her walk that she carried throughout her life. On her ailment Lange stated, "I think it perhaps was the most important thing that happened to me and formed me, guided me, instructed me, helped me, and humiliated me. All those things at once."⁹⁵ The effect of her ailment would be an aid and an influence in her photography. Because of her small frame, quiet nature and marked limp, Lange would not be perceived as a threat. Her handicap made her less threatening to her subjects. More importantly, her polio helped her understand, feel, and see the inner strengths of her subjects. Like Lange, her subjects would be crippled, not in body, but by crushing economic circumstances.

Equally important in the development of a profound sympathy for her subjects was her general awareness and affection for other human beings. Following a failed attempt to photograph a summer landscape in 1929, Lange decided that from that point on she "would only photograph the people that [her] life touched."⁹⁶ Photography for Lange was a communicative medium. Although mechanical and cold, the camera for her was a way of knowing her subjects, not only physically but emotionally. Friend and photographer

Press, 1988), 169. See also Stryker and Wood, 9; Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 52, 68.

⁹⁵Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 17.

⁹⁶Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 148; Ohrn, 22.

Willard Van Dyke noted this early in Lange's career: "Miss Lange's real interest is in human beings and her urge to photograph is aroused only when human values are concerned."⁹⁷ Another contemporary Pare Lorentz also noted Lange's sympathy towards others. "As far as I can see," he noted, "if Lange has any point of view it is that she likes people."⁹⁸ This dedication to others came out in her work. The individuals she photographed, no matter their station in life, were photographed as fellow humans with values, concerns and emotions.

By the early 1930's Lange began to sense a discrepancy in her photography. She found that her studio work was not indicative of the real world that passed by her window in the form of the homeless, penniless, and jobless.⁹⁹ Eventually, she found herself wandering out to the streets to photograph their harsh reality. According to Paul Taylor, her second husband, Lange was compelled to photograph what was around her out of her desire to help.¹⁰⁰

Her famous image from 1933 *White Angel Breadline* (figure 1), demonstrates Lange's already acute sensibilities two years before joining Stryker's team. The compassion and sympathy, for which Lange became known, are clearly evident in this work in the sensitive treatment of the poor man in the back of the breadline just outside of

⁹⁷Van Dyke, 462.

⁹⁸Lorentz, 98.

⁹⁹Milton Meltzer, *Dorothea Lange: A Photographer's Life*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1978), 70.

¹⁰⁰Taylor, *Paul Schuster Taylor: California Social Scientist*, 43.

her studio. Her image shows a dedication to humanity and a genuine concern for even the lowest being.¹⁰¹ It captures Lange's feelings toward the forgotten man as well as her strong devotion to social justice. In *White Angel Breadline* Lange captured the emotion of the scene, her experience being caught timelessly in the photograph itself.

The change to photographing on the streets as opposed to the studio was also facilitated by her contact with the sociologist Paul S. Taylor. Taylor, a Jeffersonian Democrat firmly committed to the New Deal and to improving the agricultural conditions of the west, hired Lange in 1935 as a photographer for his research with the Rural Rehabilitation Division of the California State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA).¹⁰² Taylor strongly believed that photography was an essential component to his work as a researcher. “[To] be able to see what the real conditions were like,” Taylor stated, “my words would not be enough . . . to show the conditions vividly and accurately.”¹⁰³ By August, 1935, both Lange and Taylor began work for the RA. They shared the same regions, and often similar assignments. At around the same time, both divorced their spouses and they were married on December 6.¹⁰⁴ Sharing parallel assignments and regions allowed them to work as a team while using their talents to

¹⁰¹W. Eugene Smith, “One Whom I Admire, Dorothea Lange (1895-1965),” *Popular Photography* (February 1966) : 88. See also Lorentz, 98.

¹⁰²Karen Tsujimoto, *Dorothea Lange: Archive of an Artist*, introduction by Therese Thau Heyman, (Oakland: Oakland Museum of California, 1995), 10-11.

¹⁰³Taylor quoted in Tsujimoto, 11.

¹⁰⁴Meltzer, 128.

complement one another.¹⁰⁵ Taylor would provide the text and Lange would supply the visual imagery.¹⁰⁶

Lange became an official member of the Historical Section in August 1935 when she was transferred from SERA to the RA.¹⁰⁷ She was allowed to work from her home in Berkeley. From there she was to cover most of the western United States. The region which she was assigned, Region IX, covered Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, California, and Nevada. Returning from an early assignment in late February 1936 she captured what would be the most famous picture of her career and arguably of the FSA as a whole. On that cold February day she photographed a poor family in a pea-picking camp near Nipomo, California. The image would be known as *Migrant Mother* (figure 2). Less than a month later Lange set out for Utah to cover several RA projects that were scattered throughout the state.

It is curious to question why Utah, a traditionally conservative state, received so much aid from Roosevelt's New Deal.¹⁰⁸ Without question the most obvious reason was a

¹⁰⁵See Heyman, *Celebrating the Collection*, 55-57; Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 176.

¹⁰⁶For the quintessential example of their work as a team see Dorothea Lange and Paul S. Taylor, *An American Exodus; a Record of Human Erosion* (1939).

¹⁰⁷Sandra Phillips and others, *Dorothea Lange; American Photographs*, (San Francisco: Chronicle books and the San Francisco Museum of Art, 1994.), 26.

¹⁰⁸It is a curious question especially when considering that the Presidency of the LDS Church, Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark, and David O'Mckay, publicly opposed Roosevelt's election. In the election of 1936 they even encouraged the Church to support the Republican Candidate for President, Landon. In spite of their wishes, Utah, which was, at the time, seventy percent Mormon, gave Roosevelt 69.3% of the vote showing that they overwhelmingly supported FDR's presidency. See Brian Q. Cannon, "Mormons and the

desperate need of relief. When Lange arrived in Utah, the state was entrenched in the Great Depression. At one point more than 60,000 Utahns, or 35.8% of the total population, were unemployed.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, thousands of farms and ranches faced foreclosure.¹¹⁰ In 1933, the Governor of Utah, Henry Blood, was forced to look to Washington for aid.¹¹¹ Governor Blood, known as a better expediter than innovator, was able, through personal solicitation, to secure millions of dollars for Utah's families from New Deal funds.¹¹² As a result, various New Deal programs began to spread throughout the state. By 1933, 36,151 families had received aid from the Federal Government. By July, 1934, 107,053 of 508,000 Utahns had obtained help directly from the New Deal.¹¹³

New Deal: The 1936 Presidential Election in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* vol. 67 no.1 (Winter 1999) : 4-22. In what could possibly be a fallout from the Presidency's disapproval of the New Deal there was a 1953 incident in which Lange and Taylor (well known New Deal'ers) met with President Clark for permission to photograph the communities of Gunlock, Toquerville, and St. George for *Life* Magazine. After their meeting, Taylor and Lange thought that they had received his approval. However, when they arrived in southern Utah they were notified that their party was "unauthorized." As it turned out, this was only the beginning of their problems on this assignment. See Taylor, *Paul Schuster Taylor: California Social Scientist*, 242-244.

¹⁰⁹Richard D. Poll, ed., *Utah's History*, (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1989), 482.

¹¹⁰*Utah's History*, 482; G. Melvin Foxely, interview by the author, March 1998, Salt Lake City, Utah, transcript in possession of the author.

¹¹¹*Utah's History*, 485.

¹¹²In the first year of his tenure as Governor, Blood made two trips to Washington D.C. On both occasions he met personally with President Roosevelt to discuss Utah's problems. R. Thomas Quinn, "Out of the Depression's Depths: Henry H. Blood's First Year as Governor," *Utah Historical Quarterly* vol. 54 no.3 (Summer 1986) : 233, 216-239.

¹¹³*Utah's History*, 483; Leonard Arrington, *Utah, the New Deal and the Depression of the 1930's*, (Ogden, Utah: Weber State College Press, 1983), 11.

For every one dollar Utahns sent to Washington in taxes they received seven dollars in aid.¹¹⁴ The Federal Government spent \$569.99 per capita in Utah, the ninth highest amount in the United States. In total, it spent \$289 million to help pull the state out of the depression.¹¹⁵

The RA projects Lange was sent to photograph were only a part of the New Deal's overall relief program in Utah. Other "Alphabet Agencies" were also active throughout the state, including: the CCC, PWA, WPA, AAA, FERA, NYA.¹¹⁶ Each of these agencies were vital in helping Utah fight its way out of the Great Depression. Not only did they inject money into the state, but they provided needed jobs as well. The programs in Utah were so giving that FERA, for example, was referred to as "Santa Claus."¹¹⁷

Unlike other photographers in the Historical Section, Lange would not study out an area before she arrived. While other photographers, such as Rothstein and Lee, studied books, reports, and consulted maps and Stryker on the nature of the assigned area, Lange

¹¹⁴*Utah's History*, 483.

¹¹⁵*Utah's History*, 495.

¹¹⁶Brian Q. Cannon, *Life and Land: The Farm Security Administration Photographers in Utah, 1936-1941*, (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1988), 1. The full names of these agencies are as follows: CCC – Civilian Conservation Corp, PWA – Public Works Administration, WPA – Work Projects Administration, AAA – Agricultural Adjustment Administration, FERA – Federal Emergency Relief Administration, NYA – National Youth Administration.

¹¹⁷This observation was made by Lorena Hickok, chief investigator for Harry Hopkins administrator of FERA, on her visit to Salt Lake City, September 1, 1934. Lorena A. Hickok, *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 322.

would set out without a planned itinerary.¹¹⁸ In 1934, Willard Van Dyke stated, “She feels that setting out with a preconceived idea of what she wants to photograph actually minimizes her chance for success.”¹¹⁹ Without scrutinizing an area ahead of time Lange believed that she was going in under her own power, and thereby maximizing her instincts.¹²⁰

This would be important for her work in Utah. Without studying out the area or the project, the only knowledge she would bring with her was that which she had previously acquired. Ultimately, the way in which she photographed the people and places of Utah was shaped by her earlier travels to the state. In 1933, Lange spent two months in small Mormon communities and camping in the rugged wilderness of southern Utah with her first husband, the painter Maynard Dixon, and their family.¹²¹ Lange and Dixon were impressed by the economic and social resiliency of the small Mormon villages they visited.¹²²

Her experiences in these communities directly affected how she would photograph her assignments as an agent for the government in 1936. The way she photographed Maryann Savage, an old Mormon handcart pioneer of Toquerville, in 1933 (figure 3), would be the same way she would photograph a Mormon immigrant forced to leave her

¹¹⁸Hammarlund, 88.

¹¹⁹Van Dyke, 464.

¹²⁰Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 174.

¹²¹Meltzer, 78.

¹²²Sandra Phillips and others, *Dorothea Lange; American Photographs*, 32.

home in Widtsoe (figure 4). In both images Lange emphasized their pioneer characteristics. They are shown as strong, resilient, and enduring despite their age.

The only investigation of her assignments Lange undertook was the reading she would do after she had returned home.¹²³ This reading would help her in the weeks it took her to prepare the captions of her photographs.¹²⁴ Not only did Stryker require his photographers to record the conditions of an assigned area, but he also required them to record the words, feelings, and information of their subjects in the form of captions. For Stryker, the photograph's caption was essential in categorizing and using the works. Lange's captions, in particular, reveal a sense of detail and sympathy equaling that of the photographs themselves. Supporting this notion is Taylor's comment that "her ear was as good as her eye."¹²⁵

For the captions, Lange would include not only the basic information, such as the date and location, but would also include quotations from her subjects. Stryker suspected that Lange's captions were not always exact, but he knew that her "great feeling for human beings" was converted into "words for her captions."¹²⁶ These words often revealed her commitment to the RA and her belief that she was helping those she

¹²³Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 174.

¹²⁴Ohrn, 103.

¹²⁵Eugenia Parry Janis and Wendy MacNeil, ed., *Photography Within the Humanities*, (Danbury, N.H.: Addison House Publishers, 1977), 33.

¹²⁶Interview with Stryker, *Just Before the War*, introduction by Thomas Garver, (Balboa, Calif: Newport Art Museum, 1968), n.p.

photographed.¹²⁷ Lange believed that the captions were to give background “that fortifies [the photograph] without directing the person’s mind.”¹²⁸ Therefore, the full understanding of her photographs depended not only on the visual clues but on her written word as well.

In her Utah photographs, Lange’s captions give important insight into her experiences. Often her captions do not reveal the purpose in taking the photograph, usually imparting nothing more than the month, year, and location. More often than not, however, she imparted information that revealed her objective in taking the photograph, and insight into the towns’ predicament or make up. The most important captions are the select few that give insight into her subjects’ lives. Without these clues it would be difficult to decipher her precise intentions.¹²⁹ Yet, as is often the case with Lange’s work, her images are able to speak for themselves. The captions frequently aid in understanding the significance of her photographs. However, it is the images which are typically the most telling.

With such a large region, it would have been nearly impossible for Lange to adequately and extensively cover every area in need. Overall, her work in Utah was extremely brief as she devoted only enough time to cover the primary RA projects

¹²⁷A clear example is Lange’s photograph of the young mother and child in Widtsoe. See caption for LC-USF-34-1323-C (figure 37).

¹²⁸Ohrn, 103.

¹²⁹Lange often recorded what she heard on her assignments in her field notes. This information would then be used to write the captions. In analyzing the Utah portion of her notes, it is apparent that many notes were not transferred to the captions.

underway. She arrived in Utah on March 25, 1936, and stayed into early April.¹³⁰

During her visit, Lange primarily covered three areas. She began by photographing one of Carbon County's small and poor coal mining towns, Consumers. For her next assignment she would cover the resettlement of Widtsoe. Lastly, she would travel to the small and isolated Mormon settlement of Escalante. Each area featured an RA project, such as the Widtsoe Land Use Adjustment Project, or the potential need for one, as shown in Consumers and Escalante. She would photograph each area differently according to the nature of the RA assignment. The work in these three areas would make up more than 95% of her work in the state.

Lange's work in Utah stretches from the misery of Consumers to the hope of Escalante. Widtsoe, a natural transition, displays both qualities. While exhibiting the poverty, destitution, and misery of the town, it also reveals a hope for the future not found in any other Lange assignment. In all, these emotions fulfilled Lange's purposes as a photographer for the Federal Government and as a woman who cared for the well being of those she captured on film.

As a member of the RA's staff, Lange would return to Utah on only two more occasions. In May, 1936, she returned, most likely accompanied by Paul Taylor, to photograph the building of the Tropic dam and the Rush Valley Project located in an area

¹³⁰Dorothea Lange Field Notes, Oakland Museum, 24. For assistance in reading the notes I have used Zoe Brown's deciphering found in Zoe Brown, *Dorothea Lange: Field Notes and Photographs*, Master Thesis John F. Kennedy University, 1979. This source is very helpful, especially in trying to read Lange's quickly scribbled notes. From this point on in citing the field notes I will simply do so by indicating the page number found on the original notes.

40 miles south of Tooele.¹³¹ Her final visit to the state was in August, 1938, as she returned home to California from an assignment in Mississippi.

As a member of the RA, Lange was responsible for making the agency look as necessary as possible. Tugwell and Stryker knew, this was essential for its survival. In each of the towns Lange photographed in 1936 she constructed, through her own visual editing, distinct portraits of the areas she was assigned to visit. These well crafted portraits, in essence, were Lange's own vision that supported the RA, as well as her own beliefs and ideology. The visions of Consumers, Widtsoe, and Escalante were not specifically designed to show the true nature of the towns, or its reality, rather, the photographic portfolios were constructed to fit the needs of Lange and the RA.

¹³¹See Paul S. Taylor, "From the Ground Up," *Survey Graphic* (September 1963) : 524-529+.

CHAPTER 2

CONSUMERS

“DUMPING GROUND OF THE WEST”

Only three years before Lange’s 1936 arrival in the coal camps of Carbon County, the abundant natural resources of the area were highly praised. One brochure, aimed at tourists, boasted that the county was the “Coal Mining Center of the West” and “one of the largest producing centers in the world.”¹ The collective effort of the area’s numerous coal mines produced two million tons of coal in 1931 and payed out \$8,525,000 to its three thousand employees. The region was touted as the “greatest undeveloped coal region of the Union.” Yet, by the time Lange arrived in early spring, the greatest undeveloped region in the United States was about to remain undeveloped forever. Mining in Utah has always had its ups and downs, and in 1936 the industry was definitely down.²

When the Mormon pioneers arrived in Utah, the desire to become a completely self-sufficient people drove them to find accessible coal that could service their Zion.³

¹*Carbon County: Coal Mining Center of the West*, Advertising brochure, (Salt Lake City: Paragon Press, 1933).

²J. Russell Smith, *North America: its People and the Resources, Development, and Prospects of the Continents as Home of Man*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co. 1925), 609.

³The lack of abundant timber along the Wasatch front made the need of coal a matter of major importance. The small amounts of wood that were available were needed to build

Brigham Young felt that rich coal fields were essential in successfully colonizing the West.⁴ Coal fields such as Coalville, Iron County, and the Sanpitch Mountains were quickly developed. These areas, however, were soon surpassed when an abundantly rich source was discovered in the Book Cliffs of Carbon County.⁵

In Carbon County, a system of railroads took the coal to the cities of the west, and, in turn, brought in a diverse ethnic mix. The mining towns around Price and Helper were filled with a myriad of nationalities: Greeks, Serbs, Japanese, Italians, Finns, Slovenes, Mexicans, and many others.⁶ The mine's payroll typically included names like Fratto, Brodnick, Miljak, and Carlucci.⁷ Unlike the rest of the Mormon dominated state, Carbon County boasted a richly heterogenous atmosphere. In contrast to the areas Lange would visit in subsequent Utah assignments, the coal camps of Utah were not Mormon. Mormon miners continued to work in Carbon County, but instead of being an overwhelming majority, they were simply one group of many that called the coal towns their home.⁸ For

homes and furniture.

⁴Alan Kent Powell, *Next Time We Strike: Labor in Utah's Coal Fields, 1900-1933* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1985), 14.

⁵At the time, Utah boasted 11 rich coal fields with the majority of the coal coming from Carbon and Emery counties. Utah State Planning Board, *A State Plan for Utah; Progress Report, April 15, 1935*, (Salt Lake City, 1935), 149.

⁶See Allen Kent Powell, "Land of Three Heritages, Mormons, Immigrants, and Miners," in *Carbon County: Eastern Utah's Industrial Island*, ed. Phillip Notarianni, (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1981).

⁷Payroll of the Blue Blaze Coal Mine, Consumers, Utah, September 1933.

⁸Despite the fact that many Mormons continued to work the mines in the west, it was in truth a catch-22. The Mormons needed the coal for their stoves and yet the mining

most of those in the mines, Utah was not a gathering place or a Zion, but a land of economic opportunity.⁹

The Great Depression was not the beginning of hard times for Carbon County's coal mines. In fact, by the time the stock market crashed in October 1929 the mines had already endured eight years of depression. The year 1920 marked the beginning of a national coal recession that would, in truth, last until the surging economy of World War II. By 1921, Utah's coal mines began to feel the impact of the national slide and were forced to curtail their production.¹⁰ In 1920 the mines produced six million tons of coal. In 1929 that total was down to five million tons. By 1932 the total was less than three million tons of coal.¹¹ Conditions were so dire that by 1933 Governor Blood lamented in his

industry did not provide the stability the leaders of the church wanted for their followers. Brigham Young favored farming over mining. The shifting nature of the mines presented a sharp contrast to the much more stable family farm. George Q. Cannon, an Apostle of the Church, stated of Young's council to farm instead of mine, "Instead of happy homes and strong and healthy settlements with which Utah is now filled there would be starving villages and poor mining camps scattered throughout the state." (Although he is directly discussing gold and silver mines the principle is the same.) Dr. J. Eldon Dorman also recalled the relatively low number of Mormons in Consumers and National. According to Dorman, on any given Sunday there would only be four or five members going to church held in National's school house. George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth: discourses and writings of President George Q. Cannon*, Jerreld L. Newquist ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1974), 236; Dr. J. Eldon Dorman, interview by the author, August 1999, Price Utah, tape recording in possession of the author.

⁹Powell, "Mormons, immigrants, and miners," 6.

¹⁰Thomas Alexander in *Utah's History*, ed. Richard D. Poll, (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1989) 465.

¹¹Utah State Planning Board, 197-198.

inauguration speech, “Our mines are nearly all closed.”¹²

Despite the economic downturn, new mines were developed in Carbon County. One of the most important was the Gordon Creek area that was developed with the discovery of a large and rich vein up the North Fork of Gordon Creek.¹³ Three new mines were developed to exploit this newly discovered vein: Sweets Coal Company, National Coal Company, and Consumers Mutual Coal Company.¹⁴ In 1924, the Blue Blaze Coal Company bought out the Consumers Mutual Coal Company, and modernized the mine both “inside and out.”¹⁵ The three mining areas were serviced by the Utah Railway, which carried their coal hauling from one to 2000 tons per day per mine down the Gordon Creek valley.¹⁶ By the time Lange photographed National and Consumers, these relatively new mining communities were as devastated by the depression as any other coal mining community in the nation.

The dismal economy of the Great Depression only made the mining situation worse. Between 1929 and 1933 Utah’s mineral production dropped by a staggering eighty

¹²Quoted in R. Thomas Quinn, “Out of the Depression’s Depths: Henry H. Blood’s First Year as Governor,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* vol. 54 no.3 (Summer 1986) : 217.

¹³Stephan Carr, *The Historical Guide to Utah Ghost Towns*, (Salt Lake City: Western Epic, 1972) 81.

¹⁴Powell, *Next Time We Strike*, 25.

¹⁵The modernizing included a new tipple and two large cement apartment houses. J. Eldon Dorman, *Confessions of a Camp Doctor and Other Stories*, (Price, Utah: Peczuh Printing Company, 1995), 67.

¹⁶Carr, 81.

percent.¹⁷ Eventually the lowering of wages, lack of representation, and poor living conditions lead the miners of Carbon County to strike in 1933.¹⁸ The strike was successful and by 1934 the miners of Carbon County received the benefits and rights they demanded. They were now “organized, united, represented, stronger, and resilient for the first time since 1901.”¹⁹ However, despite their newly acquired rights, the conditions in which they lived were still quite desperate.

The New Deal of Roosevelt, under the aegis of Tugwell’s Resettlement Administration, wanted to improve the miners’ desperate situation. It hoped to help the nation’s miners by facing “the critical and appalling housing conditions of the mining industry in a realistic manner,” and to in some way improve their lot.²⁰ To accomplish this objective, the Federal Government planned to provide small loans to the miners so that they could build sturdier homes and cultivate small gardens. They hoped that these measures would “shield [the miners] from the insecurity of company housing and seasonal

¹⁷Leonard Arrington, *Utah, the New Deal and the Depression of the 1930's*, (Ogden, Utah: Weber State College Press, 1983), 9.

¹⁸In 1928, for example, the miners of Consumers suffered a pay cut from \$7.50 a day to \$6.00 for a day’s work. The demands of the 1933 Strike included regular paydays, pay for down time, back pay, and a 15% reduction in company house rent. The members of both unions, the leftist NMU (National Mining Union) and the UMWA (United Mine Workers Association) participated in the September strike. After months of quarreling amongst themselves, they organized in order to improve their situation, pay, and representation. For additional reading on the strike of 1933 see Powell, *Next Time We Strike*, 175-193. See also Helen Z. Papanikolas, "Unionism, Communism, and the Great Depression: The Carbon County Coal Strike of 1933," *Utah Historical Quarterly* vol. 41 (Summer 1973): 273-280.

¹⁹Powell, *Next Time We Strike*, 193.

²⁰Walter N. Polakov, “Hovels that Miners Call Home,” *Shelter* (October 1938) : 7.

employment.”²¹ In new homes with small gardens, the RA hoped that the miners would be less dependant on the government for help.²²

Often ignored outside Carbon County, Utah’s coal mining towns were struggling to survive. The towns suffered due to poor housing and poor working conditions, as well as from seasonal and erratic working schedules. The RA needed to expose the poverty of the mining towns in order to improve the situation. Lange was to use her camera in the small mining towns of Utah to create sympathy for the miners. Her vision was to capture the clear destitution of the circumstances and the poverty of the families and their homes. This portrait of poverty was to be carefully constructed to gain sympathy so that the RA would have no difficulties in proposing and implementing relief programs for the towns.

Lange arrived in the area of Consumers on March 27, 1936.²³ Her assignment was to “create a candid field report describing in cold, matter of fact terms, without adjectives and without moralizing, the housing problems facing the coal miners of [Utah].”²⁴ By the

²¹Brian Cannon, *Life and Land: The Farm Security Administration Photographers in Utah, 1936-1941*, (Logan, UT: Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, 1988), 4.

²²Milton Meltzer, *Dorothea Lange: A Photographer’s Life*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1978), 139.

²³Dorothea Lange Field Notes, 24. Upon arriving in Utah Lange took a taxi to the Hotel Utah, paid for stamps, camera assistance, and a telephone call. Later she met up with Ann Sundwall, Assistant Director of Employment W.P.A., and headed out to her assignments. While the field notes are rich in some areas they are extremely spotty in others. Piecing her complete activities together from her notes is often rather difficult.

²⁴Polakov, 10. Although Polakov’s article was written two years after Lange’s assignment (his words were directed toward the FSA and not the then dissolved RA), it still captures the essence of Lange’s given objectives. The numerous candid photographs of the miner’s shacks indicate that her assignment must have followed the same primary objective.

time she arrived, the mining areas, which were earlier considered the area's main tourist draw, were crumbling under the weight of hard times. To capture images of poverty and poor conditions Lange could have selected any of the area's mining camps, for each was suffering under the weight of the Great Depression.²⁵ For her assignment Lange chose the Gordon Creek area, and more specifically the towns of National and its neighbor to the west, Consumers. Ironically these were two of the newest coal camps, but they had already fallen into difficult circumstances.

Part of Lange's overall success, as a socially conscious photographer, depended on her ability to find the most dire situations possible. Her appointment as a photographer for the RA, in fact, depended on depicting the plight of the lowest third of the population.²⁶ Even before she began working for the RA, the photographer Willard van Dyke commented on Lange's ability to search out potential sites. He noted, "In an old Ford she drives to a place most likely to yield subjects consistent with her general sympathies."²⁷ The documentary film director Pare Lorentz noted, "Dorothea Lange is a little, soft-voiced, bright-eyed woman with a weather-beaten face who, for six years, beret cocked over one ear, has been stalking the back roads of the country photographing the poor."²⁸ As illustrated only weeks earlier in capturing her most famous image, the *Migrant*

²⁵Dr. Eldon J. Dorman interview.

²⁶Jack F. Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 60.

²⁷Willard Van Dyke, "The Photographs of Dorothea Lange - A Critical Analysis," *Camera Craft* (October 1934) : 464.

²⁸Pare Lorentz, "Dorothea Lange: Camera with a Purpose," *US Camera* vol. I (1941) : 95.

Mother, Lange had developed an uncanny ability to search out impoverished circumstances.²⁹ This ability would now be applied to the coal camps of Utah. To find a scenario that would best illustrate her assignment, she traveled up the small winding backroads of Carbon County until she found what she desired; two small camps – Consumers and National – buried in snow and mud along the hillside of the steep ravine. This is the area she would photograph.

Lange selected this area wisely. Possibly known to her, the residents of National and Consumers were staunch supporters of the New Deal. They had already benefitted from the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1932, and in show of their support for Roosevelt and his presidency, Consumers would give the incumbent president just under 90% of its votes in the 1936 election.³⁰ Lange could, therefore, expect that the people of

²⁹This uncanny ability is probably illustrated most clearly in the moments preceding Lange's most famous moment as a RA / FSA photographer: the capturing of the *Migrant Mother*. In her own words she describes how she was directed to the pea picking camp in Nipomo California, "I was on my way and barely saw a crude sign with pointing arrow which flashed by at the side of the road, saying PEA-PICKERS CAMP. But out of the corner of my eye I did see it. I didn't want to stop, and didn't. I didn't want to remember that I had seen it, so I drove on and ignored the summons. There, 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 is not necessary. Haven't you plenty of negatives already on this subject? . . . Having well convinced myself for miles that I could continue on, I did the opposite. Almost without realizing what I was doing, I made a U-turn on the empty highway. I went back those 20 miles and turned off the highway at that sign, PEA PICKERS CAMP." Dorothea Lange, "The Assignment I'll Never Forget: Migrant Mother," *Popular Photography* vol. 46 no. 2 (February 1960) : 42.

³⁰Powell, *Next Time We Strike*, 13-14. The National Industrial Recovery Act guaranteed the right to collective bargaining through representatives of their own choosing. Under its protection union membership jumped by almost three hundred percent. It also gave organized labor a legitimacy that it had previously lacked. Powell, *Next Time We Strike*, 196.

the area would be sympathetic and obliging to her needs. She became a representative of the New Deal to the people she encountered. From the photographs, it seems that the people were cooperative. It seems that they were not suspicious of her activities nor did they question her objectives.³¹ This, however, was not the only reason that National and Consumers were well suited for her photographic assignment. The snowy area, the miserable homes, and worn mining families presented the ideal setting for her look into the plight of America's poor mining towns.

When Lange traveled up the North Fork of Gordon Creek, the sloping hillsides and the narrow valleys were still covered with a thick blanket of snow. One of the first images Lange shot was a view of the small town of National.³² In her photograph of the town (figure 5), Lange shows the typical signs of coal field camps. The familiar “coal diggers’ shacks” are similar to many other coal camps nested into hillsides across the nation.³³ Her photograph sharply contrasts the white snow with the black homes – darkened by the coal dust that covered everything.³⁴ Make-shift fences, telephone wires, and tin chimneys dot

³¹Lange and her colleagues were used to skepticism from uninformed subjects. “Why are you running around the country taking pictures?” was a typical question from America’s rural population. This was especially true following the infamous Cow Skull Controversy of 1936. See Dorothea Lange, *Dorothea Lange: The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, interview by Suzanne Reiss (Berkeley: University of California, Regional Oral History Office, Bankroft Library, 1968), 171.

³²In her field notes Lange makes the distinction between National Coal Mine and Consumers Coal Mine, but this distinction is not made in the captions of her photographs. Each photograph of this series is simply labeled as “Consumers near Price.”

³³Polakov, 10.

³⁴Sherwood Anderson, *Puzzled America*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935), 16.

her composition. The high and steep mud embankment of the Gordon creek runs right down the center of her photograph, separating the small house in the foreground left from the rest of the town. In her caption for this photograph, and many others, she labels this area “the dumping ground of the west.”³⁵ For Lange this was an area where people were trapped in deplorable conditions.

For Lange this was indeed a “dumping ground.” In traveling from Salt Lake City, she undoubtedly would have traveled through many small, well-organized villages and towns from Provo to Helper. She was now seeing their antithesis. The organization of the farming communities was replaced by a chaotic jumbling of houses placed wherever possible on the snowy hillside. Lange’s ‘dumping ground of the west’ was in the forgotten west, tucked deeply into the mountains of Utah. To this point in her brief work as a field photographer, she had already seen many dismal situations such as the pea-pickers camp, broken down migrants, and others. It is doubtful that this was the worst she had seen, but for Lange the phrase “Dumping Ground of the West” was possibly the only term that adequately summed up her experience in the poor coal camps.

As she continued up the road toward Consumers, Dorothea Lange captured a cross section of the land and town (figure 6). This carefully crafted photograph describes the difficulties of living in the small and narrow valley. The frozen earth, icy stream, and

³⁵This dubious title was also recorded in her field notes. Where the term originated is debated. Unlike the numerous other quotes in her notes, the term is not surrounded by parentheses suggesting that it was given to the area by Lange and not by one of the residents. Dr. Dorman, the camp doctor stationed in Consumers from July, 1937, to the fall of 1939, also believes that the term “dumping ground of the west” was created by Lange to describe the situation.

the still houses compose three dark bands that divide the white snow. A small wooden pathway bridges the creek as it carves through the large snow-banks. The sharp embankment completely isolates the houses on the other side. All the elements seem to trap them in place. Through her caption, Lange makes sure that the viewer knows that these homes are “Company-owned houses.” This is what the company provided for those who slaved in their mines. Visible through close inspection are gigantic icicles that nearly cover the entire back wall of the small cabin in the left of the photograph. The icicles reveal the poor construction and draftiness of the home. The cabins seem like ruins that sag on their rickety foundations.³⁶ It is apparent that Lange felt that the company was providing as little as possible for the survival of these miners.

Throughout her visit to Consumers, Lange would continue to photograph these homes. In an untitled photograph, the viewer is lead to the miserable miner’s home by a small dirt path that cuts through the piled snow (figure 7). The house is dark and distant. A large pile of wood is randomly stacked away from the front door; its abundance suggests that spring is still a long time in coming. The house appears to be constructed in a random fashion. A variety of wooden slats and logs suggest that the poor miner used anything he could get his hands on for the construction of his home. By the time Lange trekked up to Consumers, however, the wooden houses in National looked extremely livable in comparison to the tar paper shacks she would find on the outskirts of the town.

When Lange arrived in Consumers, one of the most telling images she captured was a view up the main street of the area just beyond the mine (figure 8). The photograph

³⁶Anderson, 16.

includes the caption: "Consumers, near Price, Utah, March 1936. A Settlement of workers in the Blue Blaze coal mine which is controlled by absentee capital. Main Street."³⁷ To get to this vantage point she had passed the opening of the mine, the service station, a three-story apartment house, and the post office (figure 9).³⁸ The area of the town she selected to photograph was visibly poorer than the more polished area of the community. Instead of concrete edifices, she photographed the dilapidated wooden homes of the miners. The view up main street reveals the two rows of blackened houses between which Main Street is nothing but a river of mud, slush, and snow. The rows of houses appear typical of any other coal settlement at the time:

"Crowded, unsanitary houses with leaky roofs, with floors and windows barring no cold, with privies far away, with wells still farther - these conditions have their effect on peoples' nerves."³⁹

Other RA/FSA photographers would find similar situations: Ben Shahn in Kentucky, Rothstein in Birmingham, Alabama, Post-Wolcott in West Virginia.⁴⁰ These homes were

³⁷Caption LC-USF-34-9037-E

³⁸For an understanding of the make up of Consumers see Eldon J. Dorman, *Confessions of a Camp Doctor and Other Stories*. Stephan Carr provides a good description of what was left in ruins when the town was abandoned in the 1950's. See Carr, 81. Today absolutely nothing of the original structures remain. The foundation of National's school and municipal building is about all that is left. The rest was plowed under in order to create a larger road for a lumber company further up the valley, and a newly opened mine that stands on the sight where the town of Consumers once stood. Today all that remains is a back-roads industrial area that gives no clear clues as to what the area used to contain.

³⁹Polakov, 7.

⁴⁰See Shahn's *Jenkins, Kentucky, 1935* (LC-USF-33-006137-M5), Rothstein's *Coal Miner's Housing, 1937* (LC-USF-34-025461-D), and Post-Wolcott's *Main street, Chaplin, West Virginia, Sept 1938* (LC-USF-33-030204-M3).

the property of the mine and were rented to their miners for eight dollars a month.⁴¹ In September, 1933, the average daily salary was \$4.00, but, due to the erratic nature of the mine, the employees only worked an average of 14 days a month.⁴²

In their prime, National and Consumers had a population of nearly 500 people, but in this image of Main Street a lone figure appears.⁴³ Making his way up through the mud and snow, the figure glances back at Lange, his face is blurred by his sudden action. Overall, very few people are seen in Lange's images. The men are assumed to be underground and their families were no where to be seen. As she would later do in Widtsoe and Escalante, Lange made the town appear like a ghost town. The figures she photographed were important to her greater vision, but the overall support for her aims was manifest in the mining towns crumbling architecture. As is apparent in this image, the destitution of the town was equally important in creating a scene of poverty.

The idea of the home was a sacred notion for Americans. It was a place of refuge and comfort. In the public psyche the notion of an ideal home was a pursuit and a dream.⁴⁴

⁴¹Caption for Lange's photograph LC-USF-34-009043-E. According to the September, 1933, Payroll for the Blue Blaze Coal Mine, the average rent was around \$6.50 per month (the cost ranging from 65 cents to \$20.00).

⁴²Figures from the Blue Blaze Coal Mine Payroll - September, 1933. The cited numbers are averages, as wages and days varied greatly. Dave Parmley, the mine foreman, for example, worked 30 days in September at \$7.50 a day. In comparison, hoist-man Edgar Johnson worked only 22 days at \$3.40 per day. Although the numbers may be skewed due to the 1933 Strike, the figures are quite similar to other months, namely August and October, 1933.

⁴³Carr, 81.

⁴⁴Decades earlier Jacob Riis used the notion of the home in a similar way. Like Lange's images of migrant families on their way to California, or even shanty miner's homes in

For these reasons, Lange's images of the homeless, migrant "Okies" and "Arkies" resonated powerfully in the minds of her audience (See figure 2). The migrants' battered trucks packed with mattresses and anything else they could fit on the frame were emphatic images to the public. The presentation of a people stripped of the possibility of a home was extremely effective in garnering support, for Americans believed that everyone deserved a home. The situation Lange faced in Consumers was different yet similar to what she found on Route 40 towards California. She had to show that these homes were, in essence, no better than the trucks of the migrant.

Unlike the migrants, the miners had homes. These, however, were not the homes of the American ideal. A closer view of two miner's homes reveals the harsh housing conditions of Consumers (figure 10). The first displays a small home with a pitched roof from which two blackened metal chimneys, the home's only protection against the cold, rise. The roof is only a few feet taller than the front door and the rest of the home only rises up to the top of the door's top frame. In fact, from Lange's photograph it is impossible to understand how anyone could live in such a home. The sharp angle of the shot makes it seem smaller and more uninhabitable than it really was. For a middle class viewer, this home would appear like nothing more than a beat up shack.

The other home, also a company house, resembles, in its form, a more adequate home than the previous example (figure 11). A multi-paned window with curtains opens up to the snowy street. In its size, it appears adequate. Yet, this too is anything but a

Consumers, Riis used the sweatshops of New York City's tenements to strike a response in his viewers. See Peter B. Hales, *Silver Cities: The Photography of American Urbanization, 1839-1915*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), chapter 4.

normal home. Its construction is not of painted wood or even brick, like the contrasting company shop in the background, but is constructed of wood and tar paper. In fact, most of the homes in this part of Consumers were nothing but “tar paper shacks”. The tar paper was a cheap way of finishing the exterior of the home, but when winter winds came, they became drafty and extremely cold. Public sentiment regarding these conditions can be summed up in the words of Sherwood Anderson who wrote the following after visiting a similar coal field in 1935. He exclaimed, “The thought’s in me: that in America - here in this place of infinite wealth - men, women, and children should live like this.”⁴⁵ Lange’s photographs of the houses seem to contain the same message. She also seems to question how anyone in America could live like this.

In order to focus on the poverty of the run-down coal mining community Lange only used the exteriors of the homes to construct her vision. Lange rarely worked indoors, but if she had gone in one of the homes she would have found a situation that did not fit into her overall portrait of Consumers and National.⁴⁶ While the exteriors of the company houses were dilapidated and bleak looking, the interiors were typically quite pleasant. Dr. Eldon Dorman, the doctor of the Gordon Creek area from 1937 to 1939, remembers coal miners wives taking pride in the cleanliness and order of their small homes.⁴⁷ Walter

⁴⁵Anderson, 16.

⁴⁶Lange rarely worked indoors on her RA assignments. For the most part her work for the RA/FSA was done completely out of doors. The use of flash photography, however, allowed the more technically minded FSA photographers, Arthur Rothstein and Russell Lee, to frequently work indoors.

⁴⁷Dr. Eldon J. Dorman interview.

Donaldson lived in Consumer's company housing with his parents and four siblings. For him it was "one of the happiest periods of our lives. Even in winter, we were as snug as a bug in a rug."⁴⁸ In many ways, the home's comfortable interiors provided a striking contrast to the austere exteriors.

Lange's objective in Consumers, however, was not to stress the positive aspects of mining life; her given assignment was to focus on the negative details that plagued mining life in Utah and around the nation. As historian Brian Cannon points out, her vision of Consumers was skewed to emphasize the poverty and injustice facing the miners.⁴⁹ For these reasons, Lange did not photograph the positive aspects of the town that included a three story apartment house, a post office, and a model medical clinic featuring an x-ray machine, a five bed hospital, and a well stocked drug-room.⁵⁰ Rather, she created a vision which centered on the desperate aspects of this small Utah community.

That is not to say that she ignored all complimentary aspects of the town. In contrast to the ramshackle aspect of the miners' company housing, the Blue Blaze Coal Company store is prim and prosperous (figure 12).⁵¹ Its walls are cleanly whitewashed, and seem to glow in comparison to the black tar paper shacks. It is the only image that

⁴⁸Dorman, *Confessions*, 62.

⁴⁹Cannon, *Life and Land*, 4.

⁵⁰Cannon, *Life and Land*, 4; Eldon J. Dorman, "Reminiscences of a Coal Camp Doctor," in *Carbon County: Eastern Utah's Industrial Island*, ed. Phillip Notarianni, (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1981), 98.

⁵¹Cannon, *Life and Land*, 4. For more information on Consumers' company store see Dorman, *Confessions*, 63-64.

makes the town look clean, pleasant, and comfortable. For Lange, the company store represented the power which bound the residents to their poor homes. The Blue Blaze Coal Company, like many other mining companies, controlled how their miners lived. The ‘scrip,’ or company money, which acted as the only currency for goods in the company store was issued by the mine. The miners payed for their safety lamps, materials, and even use of the bath house.⁵² The company owned everything: the mine, the houses, the store, and even the miners. In her captions, Lange frequently emphasized that Consumers was run with ‘absentee capital’ from the east. In Lange’s photographs, it is clear that the coal-money for which these poor miners suffer does not go to Consumers or its workers, but it unjustly goes to those, states away, who own the mine itself.

In all of Lange’s photographs taken in Consumers, only one other building, the mine tippler, appears besides the houses and the store (figure 13). Like Charles Burchfield’s painting *Black Iron* from 1935 (figure 14), the dark and ominous mine in Lange’s photograph looms dark and foreboding. Both works emphasize that in the shadows of these structures nothing lives. They are both dark monuments to the grandeur of modern industry’s success, futility, and folly.⁵³ In Lange’s image the name of the company is barely noticeable on its blackened corrugated steel walls. Below its black lines,

⁵²The costs tallied by the miners sound unusual to us today, but were standard for the day. My point in bringing up these extra costs is that the miners were already paid so little, and these additional costs really put them in a financial bind. On the Blue Blaze Company Payroll the costs of the miners are laid out. Tony Fratto, an oiler, was paid a total of \$55 for the month of September, 1933. From this sum came the additional costs of medical care (\$1), housing (\$11), board (\$.50), and the bath house (\$1.50).

⁵³Nannette Maciejunes and Micheal Hall, *The Painting of Charles Burchfield: North by Midwest*, (New York: Harry Abrams Inc., 1997), 119-120.

the name of the city is just perceptible. This large structure is the gateway to the city, and it appears as such in Lange's work. Like a medieval city gate it represents the power and control of those in command of the town.

In 1935, the author Sherwood Anderson was also experiencing the hardships of mining life. Although he was in a mining community all the way across the nation, the situation was similar. His account provides a literary parallel to what Lange photographed in Consumers. He wrote,

I am writing from the coal-mining country. There is too much to tell. On every side of me there are stories. The stories look at me out of the eyes of men and women. They shout at me. I should not be writing in this way. I should stay here in one of these shacks in this coal mining town.⁵⁴

His comment illustrates his sympathy towards America's miners. It also reveals his guilt in knowing that these conditions have persisted for years. Like Anderson, Lange would express her emotions concerning the mines through her own medium of photography. Likewise, for her, the people of the mines – the men, women, and children – were the ones who would tell the complete story. By photographing the people of Consumers, Lange provided a voice for those who were voiceless.⁵⁵ No one, even in the immediate region, let alone in Washington D.C., would ever hear the desperate pleas from a small mining town in eastern Utah. Therefore, Lange's images of the people struggling to survive were particularly significant.

The men of the coal camps are represented by one stark image of an older miner

⁵⁴Anderson, 5.

⁵⁵*Dorothea Lange: The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 174.

standing in front of a railway car (figure 15). The miners Lange found in National and Consumers were beaten and battered by conditions of the Depression. Like other miners in Utah, they were typically shunned, and were seen by their Mormon peers as “strange and alien.”⁵⁶ Yet, Lange portrays this man with dignity and pride despite his surroundings. According to Anderson, the men of the mining towns exhibit a unique pride despite their poverty. He writes that the miners possess a “Pride in brotherhood, in the buried wealth of the land, local pride, town pride struggling to live - even in the poor little mining towns.”⁵⁷ He continues,

There is something pathetic and at the same time magnificent in these men, the coal miners of America, in a certain something very hard to express but very real in them. . . I think there is in them something of the American pioneer. There is something distinct and real separating them now from the defeated factory hands of the cities. They are not defeated men.⁵⁸

On one level, the miner that Lange photographed was typical of any miner found in any mining field in the nation. He, like the miners in Anderson’s writing, exhibits an inner strength that helped him through his difficult circumstances. On another level, he is an individual whose unique traits come through in Lange’s telling photograph.⁵⁹ This is an

⁵⁶J. Russell Smith, *North America*, 622; Floyd O’Neal, “Victims of Demand, the Vagaries of the Carbon County Coal Industry,” in *Carbon County: Eastern Utah’s Industrial Island*, ed. Phillip Notarianni, (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1981), 37.

⁵⁷Anderson, 17.

⁵⁸Anderson, 17.

⁵⁹According to William Stott, documentary photography functions on two levels. It works on a general or “in tow” level and one that is personal and individual. This second level “looks at the world and its people as though seeing them for the first time - that is, it sees each thing and person as individual.” William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties*

individual beset, but not overcome, by his problems. Rather, with his strong tightly set jaw, he faces his trials with determination and courage. In the American mind, he is not to be blamed for his poverty because he is still struggling to make a better life.⁶⁰

Lange was particularly good at making her subjects appear dignified no matter what their circumstance. The miner's strength shines through despite the difficulties of the scene. He is an example of pride in spite of his humble situation. In photographing similar subjects Lange said,

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.⁶¹

Lange shows a man of sturdy build. He is strong and proud and not beleaguered by his strenuous environment. Yet, everything around this man reveals the difficulty of his situation. The rail car is black from its constant loads. The ladder directly behind him is well used and scuffed by continual climbing. The most noticeable element of poverty is his clothing. His pants are threadbare and torn at the knees. To stay warm above and below the earth he has layered three coats that are stretched and torn. The car and his clothing

America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 48.

⁶⁰John E. Tropman, *American Values & Social Welfare: Cultural Contradictions in the Welfare State*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 54, 58-59.

⁶¹Daniel Dixon, "Dorothea Lange," *Modern Photography* (December 1952) : 138.

contrast sharply with his shiny lunch pail that glitters brightly against the darkness of the scene.

For earlier photographers concerned with socially conscious issues, the way to gain respect and sympathy for the poor and underprivileged was to show them in the action of work. Many of Jacob Riis's images show the poor of New York busily working in their own tenement homes.⁶² This was to show his middle-class audience that his subjects were not lazy foreigners loafing on the public dole, but that they were engaged in improving their situation. Lewis Hine's depiction of fearless workers on the Empire State Building had a similar objective. These images attempted to convince middle and upper class viewers that laborers deserved respect. Similarly, Lange emphasizes the dignity of the man's labor. The implements of his work are present including the miner's tool resting on his shoulder, his cap, and the box car behind him. She does not, however, show the miner actually engaged in his labors as Riis and Hine had done. Rather she shows him apart from the action of work. Instead of using the actual depiction of work to garner respect, Lange used her photographic technique to capture his inner strength and the power of his presence. Through her camera she shows a man who deserves respect because he appears to be working hard. He is shown to be "still fighting, still struggling, [and] still working" and not idle.⁶³

To create an image of dignity, Lange used two devices that heighten the sense of

⁶²Riis's 1890 photograph *Bohemian Cigar Makers at work in their Tenement* is a good example.

⁶³Tropman, 54.

pride in this beleaguered coal miner. The first is through a low camera angle. This was a technique which she would commonly use to simplify her compositions and to give emphasis to an element of importance in the photograph.⁶⁴ The low angle gives her subjects an air of strength and presence despite their current social status.⁶⁵ It signifies a higher status and esteem and, ultimately, monumentalizes the figure.⁶⁶ The viewer is forced to confront her subject as he dominates every other element in the photograph.

The second way in which Lange creates an air of dignity is through direct eye contact between the subject and the viewer. Pare Lorentz noted this ability in Lange, “Her people stand straight and look you in the eye. They have the simple dignity of people who have leaned against the wind. . .”⁶⁷ In the stare of this man’s eyes one may see the pride and dignity the miners of Consumers exhibited in the strike of 1933.⁶⁸ From under his mining cap he stares the viewer directly in the eye. Like other photographers before her,

⁶⁴Van Deren Coke, “Dorothea Lange: Compassionate Recorder,” *Modern Photography* (May 1973) : 90.

⁶⁵Robert J. Doherty, introduction to *Dorothea Lange: Farm Security Administration Photographs, 1935-1939*, ed. Howard M. Levin and Katherine Northup, (Glencoe, Ill: The Text-Fiche Press, 1980), 40.

⁶⁶Maurice Berger, “FSA: The Illiterate Eye (1985),” in *How Art Becomes History: Essays on Art, Society, and Culture in Post-New Deal America*, (New York: Icon Editions, 1992), 7.

⁶⁷Lorentz, 96.

⁶⁸In the strike of 1933 Consumers and National were the primary battlegrounds in the conflict. The Gordon Creek miners from both unions went on strike on August 20, 1933, nearly two weeks before the general strike took place, September 4, 1933. In all, Consumers was considered the “most urgent problem” as the miners blockaded the public road forcing the authorities to send armed deputies up the canyon to dispose of the problem. See Powell, *Next Time We Strike*, 171-180.

Lange uses this device masterfully in this photograph.⁶⁹ The direct eye contact forces an equality between the viewer and the subject. The glance equalizes not by being threatening, but by creating a human link between the photograph and its viewer. Upon reviewing an exhibition of Stryker's photographers, *Life* photographer, Robert Disraeli noted, "Strength in the eyes and in the bearing of the men bespeaks hope and a grim determination to overcome their difficulties."⁷⁰

Besides the miner discussed above, the only other men that Lange photographed were a group of blackened miners leaving the mine (figure 16).⁷¹ In the background the other side of the tippler, the miners' cars, and a few of the nicer buildings in Consumers are all visible. After a long day's work they are heading up the hill to their tar paper shacks. They do not even take the time to go to the bath house, but return home still covered by the residue of their work.⁷²

The miners, however were not the only figures selected by Lange from the destitute mining community. To illustrate the plight of the town, Lange drew upon her

⁶⁹Jacob Riis used eye contact to maximize the power of his photographs. His *Minding the Baby, Cherry Hill*, 1890, is an excellent example. See Hales, 196.

⁷⁰Robert Disraeli, "The Farm Security Administration," A review of FSA photography, *Photo Notes* (May 1940), in *New Deal Network* at <http://www.newdeal.feri.org>. Accessed in August 1999.

⁷¹Lange took two photographs of the miners returning home: LC-USF-34-9045-C and a closer view that reveals the blackened faces of the miners, LC-USF-34-009049-E.

⁷²It may be that they did not want to pay the \$1.50 for the monthly use of the bath house. Their alternative would probably be similar to the situation Russell Lee photographed in West Virginia while working for the Survey of Mine Health and Safety, in 1946. Lee's photograph is of a large coal miner using a small wash basin in the middle of his home. See Jack Hurley, *Russell Lee: Photographer*, (New York: Morgan and Morgan, 1978).

experience and success in photographing the more sympathetic members of the families the women and children. While their husbands were away in the mines, it was the women who maintained their homes and their families. Therefore, it is not only the mining men who exhibits strength, courage, and hope in the face of their trials, it is also the women and children who suffer with dignity and pride. Lange paid particular attention to the women and children of Consumers. Her photographs of them outnumber those of the men by nearly three to one. Through their portraits, Lange expounded on the victims of the desperate mining conditions.

Only a month earlier, on a cold and miserable late February day, Lange photographed a poor family huddled under a make-shift tent on the outskirts of a pea picking camp, near Nipomo, California. The father of the destitute family was visibly absent. That day she took six photographs of the family from different vantage points and angles. The final one would become her most famous photograph, known as the *Migrant Mother* or the *Migrant Madonna* (figure 2).⁷³ For Stryker it became the photograph of the RA/FSA, the epitome of the Historical Section's work.⁷⁴ After photographing the migrant family, Lange quickly rushed to her home in Berkeley and produced a print, which she rushed to the San Francisco *News* with the notice that the pea pickers were starving. The story, with Lange's photograph, went to press on March 6, 1936.⁷⁵ On March 10, in

⁷³Curtis, 55.

⁷⁴Roy Stryker and Nancy Wood, *In this Proud Land: America 1935-1943 as Seen in the FSA Photographs*, (New York: Graphic Society, 1973), 19.

⁷⁵Therese Thau Heyman, *Celebrating the Collection: The Work of Dorothea Lange*, (Oakland, Calif.: Oakland Museum, 1978), 60.

response to the article, 20,000 pounds of food were gathered and sent to feed the hungry migrants in the pea-pickers camp.⁷⁶

From this experience, it is obvious that Lange realized a sense of the power her photographs wielded. She continued the same process of producing a series of photographs of families. By doing so, she increased the chance that one of the photographs taken would be a similarly moving image.⁷⁷ The photographs produced a reaction in the minds and hearts of her audience that compelled them to act. The trip to the pea-pickers camp convinced Lange that women and children were essential ingredients in securing support and aid. Women and children could be more readily portrayed as the “faultless poor” – those who are victims of their circumstances, than could men.⁷⁸ The faultless poor, as opposed to the lazy beggars, are the ones who could effectively produce pity and incite desired action.

In recalling the experience with the pea-pickers years later, Lange remembered that very few words were exchanged with the mother, but Lange recalled that the mother “seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort

⁷⁶Meltzer, 132-133.

⁷⁷This was also important because she did not always develop her own negatives. Against her will, she was required to send her undeveloped film to the office in Washington. This was to be a constant source of contention between her and Stryker. Working in a series insured that at least one of her photographs would turn out well. This was important for Lange because she was not the finest technician and often produced poor prints. See Heyman, 65-67.

⁷⁸John Tropman believes that American society categorizes the poor into two groups: the faultless poor, those who suffer due to external factors, and are, therefore, excusable; and the sturdy beggar, those who are thought to be lazy and intemperant. Tropman, 54.

of equality about it.”⁷⁹ Lange had always had a sensitive eye in photographing women and children as a portrait photographer.⁸⁰ Now as a government photographer she would use that sensitivity to capture the most heart-wrenching victims of the Great Depression: the women and children.

Lange used the same techniques employed in Nipomo to capture the plight of the poor families in Consumers. As she had done in Nipomo, she found one small family to epitomize the situation of the families in the town. She photographed the same family six different times, as she had done in the *Migrant Mother* series.⁸¹

Lange found the family in front of their small home just off of the main street (figure 17). A narrow wooden plank over the snow draws the eye to the young woman and her little girl and boy. The mother looks at Lange curiously as her children play cautiously around her. The house is similar to its neighbors, small in size and pieced together with wooden boards and tar paper. In this image, Lange shows us the relationship between the family and these houses. Unlike most of her views of the tar paper shacks, this small house has a human counterpart. She shows the public an actual family and the conditions in which they were forced to live. The homes themselves, no matter their

⁷⁹Lange, “The Assignment I’ll Never Forget,” 126.

⁸⁰Sandra Phillips and others, *Dorothea Lange; American Photographs*, (San Francisco: Chronicle books and the San Francisco Museum of Art, 1994), 32.

⁸¹Five of the six photographs are in the collection of the Library of Congress (LC-USF-34-9005, 9009, 9020, 9026, and 9027). The sixth photograph, which shows the miner’s family starting down Main Street, is in Lange’s private collection of negatives in the Oakland Museum (Dorothea Lange Collection. File No. 35190 -*Coal - Utah Mining Town.*)

condition, could be ignored. Once, however, the human element is placed in context, it is much more difficult to disregard.

The house shows signs of life: a light inside seen through screen door, a shovel, a wash basin. The photograph also shows the transient nature of the homes, such as the wooden gate that is ready to fall off its hinges. In her notes Lange recorded the frustration of raising a family in such an environment, “‘deteriorating influence on families’ these mining camps.”⁸² Coal mining camps were difficult places to live. In addition to the prostitution, disease, and drunken melees that plagued the town, the miners and their families had to fear the constant threat of disaster, such as the mine explosions of Winter Quarters in 1900, and Castle Gate in 1924.⁸³

A moment later, Lange photographed the family crossing the boards over the snow and mud towards her (figure 18). In a few steps the family will be standing on Consumers’ Main Street. Having captured the family in their domestic circumstances, Lange would now show the family in regards to their community environment.

Like the pea-picking family, the father of the Consumers’ family was clearly absent, obviously working in the mine. His absence is important and conspicuous.⁸⁴ The presence of a man would be counter to the aim of Lange because the situation would not be as urgent in the minds of her middle-class audience if the father was shown. If the

⁸²Dorothea Lange Field Notes, 24.

⁸³Cannon, *Life and Land*, 4. See Powell, *Next Time We Strike*, chapters two and eight.

⁸⁴James Curtis, *Mind’s Eye, Mind’s Truth: FSA Photography Reconsidered*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 50-51.

husband or father was shown, the public would be more reticent to help. Instead of taking responsibility for the family, they would mentally transfer the responsibility of the family's welfare to the man.

In the next photograph, the family stands on slushy Main Street (Figure 19). They have stopped and are staring directly into the camera. Lange now captures the family in their overall environment. In contrast to the miserable homes lining the street, the family looks composed and neat. The mother's patterned dress contrasts sharply to the worn garments Lange photographed in the intimate portrait of the sole miner. Together, they do not seem to fit in with their environment. This, however, is not the image Lange wanted. The little family seems too content. The mother seems happy and her little daughter smiles affectionately at the camera. For Lange, this image was not equal to the desperation of the tar paper shack, the grime of Main Street, or the misery in the miner's eyes.

To capture their real situation, or, rather, the situation she wanted to portray, Lange had to create an image that showed the difficulties of the family's circumstance. The next photograph depicts the small family struggling through the snow and mud as they work their way toward the photographer (figure 20). This image captures everything Lange needed.⁸⁵ As they make their way up through the automobile ruts, one senses the real struggle of living in America's coal fields. Lange makes it seem as if they suffer from

⁸⁵This photograph could be a clear example of Lange's "Help me - help you" approach. In looking at the entire series (especially the negative in Lange's private collection) and knowing the layout of the town itself, it is fairly clear that Lange instructed the family to walk toward her. Whether this violates her strict "Hands Off" policy or not is a matter for another chapter. For conflicting views see Daniel Dixon, "Dorothea Lange", 68, and James Curtis, *Mind's Eye Mind's Truth*, chapter three: "*The Contemplation of Things As They Are*," *Dorothea Lange and Migrant Mother*.

need as their inadequate shoes sink into the snow and mud. Despite the snow and cold, they are out of doors without coats. The pleasant faces and smiles of the earlier photograph have turned into grimaces and misery. Only the little boy in his mother's arms remains fixed on Lange and her camera. His frowning straight-forward gaze, like that of the miner, connects directly with the viewer. Obviously the intent was to evoke sympathy in the tax-paying public to whom the image was directed.

In this photograph Lange has captured the essence of how she wanted to portray Consumers. In her vision, this family has become an archetype for any poor coal mining family anywhere.⁸⁶ Sherwood Anderson observed a similar situation when he stated,

There is grim poverty here. It is a cold bleak day but, in the field here, at the edge of the mining town, there are bare-legged miners' children running around. Their lips are blue with cold. They are ragged. They look underfed. . . Miners' wives go in and out of little shacks. These miners' wives lose their beauty early. There has been hard-bitten life going on for years in this country.⁸⁷

While Anderson found the faces of the miners and their families brutalized by their difficult circumstances, *Life* photographer Robert Disraeli found the faces of hardship beautiful,

It is noticeable that in many the faces are haggard and their expressions are those of a harried people. But these faces and bodies still show beauty and strength.

⁸⁶In her quest to find complete images, Lange created prototypes, or even archetypes, that summed up an experience, an entire situation, or a general emotion. The *Migrant Mother* is the most obvious example. In that photograph Lange used the cradling mother and her three children to epitomize the plight of an entire migrant people. It is a general portrayal as opposed to a specific one; an archetype as opposed to a stereotype. See Margaret G. Weiss, "Recording Life - in -Process," *Saturday Review* (March 5, 1966), found in Dorothea Lange, *Dorothea Lange: The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, An interview by Suzanne Reiss, (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, 1968), 257.

⁸⁷Anderson, 8.

Beauty in the delicate lines of a woman's face or a child's body that even the greatest depression has not been able to conquer.⁸⁸

Both views may be seen in the faces and bodies of the small Consumers family. Though they are deep in the struggles that plagued miners across the country, they have the determination and will to overcome their lot.

Despite their hardships and their obvious poverty, the families of the miners preserved their dignity and pride. These virtues may be seen in the last image, a close portrait, of the Consumers family (figure 21). In this, the closest examination of the family, the serious expressions are still present. The mother's face, in particular, reveals the stress of the situation, and, at the same time, the strength it takes to survive.⁸⁹ It is the central figure of the mother which keeps this family together. Her embrace unites the family even when her husband is in the mine below. Like Lange's intimate portrait of the miner, the mining wife exhibits a profound strength, dignity, and pride. In physically holding her little family, she symbolizes the woman who supplies the courage, and strength needed to create the bonds that keeps the family together.⁹⁰

The woman Lange selected exhibited a strength that was common in the wives of Consumers. Together they demonstrated that they were strongly united in improving their situation. In the strike of 1933, the women of Consumers were particularly defiant. When their men were arrested, the fight against the deputies was carried on by the women. They

⁸⁸Disraeli, 2.

⁸⁹For a brief description of the anxiety and stress of the mining camps during the turbulent 1930's see Polakov, 7.

⁹⁰Paul S. Taylor, "From the Ground Up," *Survey Graphic* (September 1963) : 526.

believed that they had to fight “side by side” with their husbands in order to gain the rights they felt they deserved.⁹¹ They threw pepper in the deputies’ eyes, defied the martial law edict, cooked for their men in prison, and in one instance, the women of Consumers even disarmed the director of the mine and assaulted him.⁹² Despite their difficult circumstances, the will of the women in Carbon County was not broken. In Lange’s intimate portrait, she informs the nation that these American women are courageous and worthy of respect.

The Strike of 1933 not only affected the adults, but also the younger generations of Consumers. The children did not forget the humiliation of the strike, and they still harbored the pain and embarrassment in their hearts.⁹³ Yet, in Lange’s photographs of the children of Consumers, this serious aspect is not shown. Instead she portrays typical children doing typical child things in spite of their awful conditions.

As she would do throughout her photographic career, Lange used the images of children to strike a sympathetic chord with her audience. She understood the power of showing children in trying circumstances. For Lange, the child was a universal symbol of

⁹¹Powell, 169.

⁹²Powell, 180; Dr. Dorman Interview; Helen Z. Papanikolas, “Women in the Mining Communities of Carbon County,” in *Carbon County: Eastern Utah’s Industrial Island*, ed. Phillip Notarianni, (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1981), 99. See also Papanikolas, “Unionism,” 284.

⁹³Papanikolas records the embarrassment of the children, a fact that was confirmed in speaking with Ms. Jordon who was raised in Consumers and other Carbon County towns. Papanikolas, “Unionism,” 295; Virginia Reavely Jordon, interview by the author, November, 1999.

innocence that in her photographs, suffers from forces beyond its control.⁹⁴ In her photography it is always the children who are portrayed as the true victims.⁹⁵ Like Riis and Hine, Lange used the images of children as a call to action. It is one thing for a middle-class audience to see a adult man suffer, but when that audience sees a woman or, especially, a child suffering it produces a different response. When a child suffers it is a impetus for quick action.

Throughout the operations of the RA and FSA, photographing the children in America's coal mining towns was done continually. In 1935 Ben Shahn photographed a thin coal miner's son from Omar, West Virginia. Later, Arthur Rothstein, John Vachon, and Marian Post-Wolcott also photographed the children of the coal miners throughout the nation.⁹⁶ Each of the photographers, including Lange, used the children to frame the scenes of poverty within America's coal fields. Their images show these innocent victims of the mines.

Lange's children are typical of other children in coal mining communities throughout the nation. While their parents worked to make ends met, the children engaged in playful activities against the poverty of the town. In 1938, Marion Post-Wolcott depicted the children of Chaplin and Pursglove, West Virginia, playing on their flimsy

⁹⁴Margery Mann, "Dorothea Lange," *Popular Photography* (March 1970) : 100.

⁹⁵Two of Lange's photographs illustrate this point perfectly: *Damaged Girl, Texas, 1936*, and *Child and Her Mother, Wapato, Yakima Valley, Washington, 1939*.

⁹⁶Rothstein photographed coal mines in Kentucky, Illinois, and Alabama. Both, Post-Wolcott and Vachon, worked in West Virginian coal towns such as Chaplin, Jere, Kempton, and Pursglove.

front porches, on the rail tracks, or their “favorite playground”, the mine tippie (figure 22).⁹⁷ The photographs of children in Consumers also reveal a similar frivolity. One photograph shows a pack of children heading down main street (figure 23).⁹⁸ Unlike the young children with their mother, these children are dressed for the cold being bundled up in coats, hats, and mittens. A one-time resident of Consumers, Virginia Reavely Jordon, remembers that she and the other children would “make their own fun.”⁹⁹ She remembers sledding down the slushy street and fishing in the stream. Despite their hardships, the children of the town retained a childlike spirit.

It seems that despite their visible poverty, the children of Consumers were still children.¹⁰⁰ In another series Lange shows the viewer these children and their contrasting environment. As Lange approached a typical Consumers house, she photographed it twice (figure 24, 25). The first, a shot from the road, shows the ramshackle conditions of the house and its muddy surroundings. Yet, despite the obvious poverty a car sits in a make-

⁹⁷See Marion Post-Wolcott’s photographs LC-USF-33-030141-M1, 030203-M1, 030232-M4, and the “Favorite Playground” 030307-M3.

⁹⁸The caption of this photograph recorded on the Library of Congress web site, <http://memory.loc.gov>, states that these children are “Future coal miners.” This label, however, does not appear on the caption of the original file photograph (which is frankly more reliable). It would be interesting to wonder what Lange meant by this statement but, unfortunately, it can not be submitted as an actual quotation.

⁹⁹Virginia Reavely Jordon Interview.

¹⁰⁰No matter how poor the situation was, the poverty of Consumers did not compare to the utter poverty that other photographers encountered. John Vachon’s image of coal miner George Blizzard’s children’s feet, worn and in rags, shows that, in comparison Consumers was much better off. Vachon’s image (LC-USF-33-001381-M1) was taken in Kempton, West Virginia, May 1939.

shift garage attached to the home. In the next photograph she carefully eliminated the car. Gaining sympathy with such a luxury item as a car, no matter its condition, would be difficult. In addition, this closer view reveals the worn wooden boards and the tattered strips of tar paper nailed desperately onto the outer walls and door. In the next moment three young children would emerge from the battered door. Hesitant at first they soon sit on their rough porch and play with sticks and a simple wash basin. In spite of their well documented conditions and the absence of toys, Lange shows us that the children of Consumers have remained curious and playful.

In the end, Lange was possibly photographing a mining population before they migrated elsewhere. Her photographs of Consumers and National represented the conditions that forced America's miners to look elsewhere for a better life. During its tenure, the Historical Section photographed abandoned mines across the country, as well as the casualties of these closed mines – the miners and their families who were scattered across the nation looking for work.¹⁰¹ In California's numerous RA migrant camps, Lange encountered miners' families from all over the country. In one of the most famous, Lange photographed one of the seven children of a migrant Tennessee coal miner living in the American River Camp near Sacramento, California. Lange highlights the sorrow in her face, which tells of the family's hardships and their uncertain future (figure 26). The tent in which they now live is no better than the company housing of the mines (figure 27). Lange

¹⁰¹In January, 1939, Rothstein photographed the shut down Consolidated Coal Company Lake Creek Mine (LC-USF-34-026984). He records that it had once produced eleven million tons of coal a year but now the "whistles have stopped blowing." Post-Wolcott also produced classic examples of abandoned mines in West Virginia- see LC-USF33-030064-M4.

recorded their reason for coming, "Our neighbors were coming. We only got one or two days work a week (relief). Thought we could make it better here."¹⁰² Instead of working in the mines, the families were forced into the erratic nature of California's seasonal picking camps. Since arriving from Tennessee the family had already worked in walnuts, tomatoes, peaches, and in a fruit cannery.¹⁰³

Like many mines across the nation, the work in the mines at Consumers and National was 'seasonal', sometimes running only once a week.¹⁰⁴ This instability came precariously close to the area when the neighboring mine of Sweets closed in 1937.¹⁰⁵ The people in Lange's photographs were foreigners in their own land. If the mines closed down, most of them would not be readily absorbed into the infrastructure of outlying Mormon communities. Rather, they would probably be forced to go elsewhere for work. Everything she had seen and photographed suggested that it was just a matter of time before these poor miners were on the road. Despite the ominous signs that the National and Consumers mines might close, they were able to hold on. Coal mining's twenty year depression was finally ended with the production demands of World War II, during which

¹⁰²Caption to photograph LC-USF34- 009904-E.

¹⁰³Caption to photograph LC-USF34- 009904-E.

¹⁰⁴Dorothea Lange Field Notes, 25. Papanikolas, "Women," 99. For a good example of the temperamental nature of the mine see Dorman, *Confessions*, 66-68.

¹⁰⁵Carr, 81. This closure was only temporary. The mine re-opened with the growing needs of the late 1930's and 1940's.

time the mines reached their peak production.¹⁰⁶ The mines finally closed in 1950 when home gas furnaces and gas powered rail engines put many mines out of business.¹⁰⁷

Lange's work in Consumers and National would be unique among her Utah assignments. Unlike the other problem areas that she would visit, the mining towns were not Mormon, nor were they agriculturally based. Rather, her images of Consumers represented a different world in the heart of Mormon Utah.¹⁰⁸

Lange's photographs of the small Utah mining areas were meticulously designed to draw sympathy for the miners and their families. Often maximizing their plight, she constructed a vision of the towns that would attempt to help these families. Her images called attention to their poverty in a hope that they could arouse attention. The careful visual editing of buildings and other elements that did not fit into her overall vision of the area continued into her other assignments in Widtsoe and Escalante.¹⁰⁹ However, no

¹⁰⁶In 1942, Carbon County's mines produced around seven million tons of coal, by far its highest production level (in 1920, before the mining crash, the mines reached their second highest level: around 5.2 million tons). In comparison, in 1935 the mines only produced about three million tons. See O'Neal, 27.

¹⁰⁷Carr, 81. Utah's coal mines were extremely dependant on the state's need for coal. In 1935, one-half of the total production (2,139,022 tons of coal of a total of 4,352,811 tons) went to Utah. When local homes began to use oil and gas stoves and furnaces the local coal market suffered greatly. Utah State Planning Board, 210.

¹⁰⁸In Consumers Lange photographed one of the only areas in which the people were not automatically Mormon. From this time forward in her photographs almost everyone and everything would bear the label Mormon. Every farmer, barn, and house would be labeled Mormon.

¹⁰⁹There is a difference between what I call 'visual editing' and the manipulation of the photograph previously mentioned. Visual editing is the process of blocking out elements that are objectionable to the photographer during the photographing process itself. In other words, it is the view selected by the photographer when the photograph is made.

matter how extensive the visual editing may have been, one virtue of her photography was to remain constant. Lange would always be sympathetic to those she photographed and her subjects would remain strong despite the desperate conditions of the Great Depression.

The manipulation to which Stryker objected was that done after the photograph was made and involves touch up work done in the developing of the photograph. In 1941 when Lange sold her *Migrant Mother* to the MOMA, she edited out the thumb of the mother in the dark room (the thumb of the mother was an element which she felt was a distraction - so she removed it - older copies of *Migrant Mother* will have the thumb intact). Stryker felt that this was unnecessary and that it violated the concept of true documentary photography. See Curtis 67.

CHAPTER 3
WIDTSOE
RESETTLEMENT AND REMOVAL

When Lange arrived at her next assignment, the documentation of the Widtsoe Resettlement Project, she found a city already on the edge of decay. Today that decay is complete. Wandering through the quiet streets it is difficult to believe that this ghost town was once a thriving community. The hotels, stores, and church are now nothing but piles of weathered lumber lying on primitive cement foundations. The few buildings that remain stand precariously. They are the hollow reminders of the city's prosperity and its turn towards ruin.

The town of Widtsoe is located in the highlands of Johns Valley just north of Bryce Canyon. It is a valley colored grey with juniper and sage. Unlike the rich fertile valleys of the Wasatch Front, the soil in this high valley is weak and susceptible to erosion. The first Mormon settlers began coming to the area in 1876. When Garfield County opened for homesteading in 1910 the area became increasingly populated.¹ By 1910 the land for the town-site was donated. Shortly thereafter a post office was constructed. Finally in 1917 the growing town became officially known as Widtsoe in honor of John A.

¹Stephan Carr, *Historical Guide to Utah's Ghost Towns*, (Salt Lake City : Western Epics, 1972), 122.

Widtsoe, a member of the twelve apostles, of the Mormon Church.²

The desire to settle the rather hostile environment of Widtsoe was not based solely on physical needs of the land but was also driven by a spiritual destiny. The settlers of Widtsoe desired to build up the “waste places of Zion” into a new corner of the kingdom even though official calls to colonize regions had ceased.³ Buoyed up by their pioneer spirit they believed that they could make any desert bloom. This zeal was warranted, for together with their fellow saints they had previously turned barren landscapes of Utah into profitable land through irrigation and wise farming techniques. Commenting on this pioneer trait of Mormonism, Wallace Stegner wrote of lands like the barren Johns Valley, “It was a sanctuary, it was a refuge. Nobody else wanted it, nobody but a determined and God-supported people could live in it.” He continues, “Settle it then, in God’s name, and build the kingdom . . .”⁴ This was the attitude of promise that the people of Widtsoe possessed. They believed that they could settle this area, and through God’s help could turn it into their own corner of Zion.

This was a gamble the people were willing to take. They had seen and experienced the success in other communities and now it was their turn to make the desert bloom. This, however, was to be a formidable task. Johns Valley would prove hostile to the promise of Zion. The initial success had eventually soured by the 1920's, as changing

²Carr, 122.

³ Brian Cannon, *Remaking the Agrarian Dream: the New Deal's Rural Resettlement Program in Utah*, (Masters Thesis Utah State University, 1986), 20.

⁴Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country*, (New York: Bonanza Books, 1942), 51.

climate cycles and soil limitations proved too much to bear. Widtsoe's high elevation, between seven and eight thousand feet above sea level, only allowed for a short growing season between harsh winters. Adding to the difficulties were year round frosts that plagued the harvests. After many taxing years of farming, the once ample soil quickly became depleted of its precious nutrients.

Despite the inherent difficulties, the settlers of Widtsoe continued to endure. Fostered by their isolation – the nearest railroad being over 100 miles away – they became united in their cause to create a successful Mormon community.⁵ They were one in purpose and situation; their collective survival depended on a community strongly bonded together. These forged ties between neighbors were essential, for as one Widtsoen remembers, “We had no outside help at all.”⁶ This community spirit would not only help them survive the difficulties that they would face in the tumultuous 1920's and 1930's, but would increase the difficulty of abandoning the city itself.

By 1920, Widtsoe had become a thriving community with a population of over 1100.⁷ The city boasted two hotels, four stores, a post office, a Mormon Church, a social

⁵Cannon, *Remaking*, 141. This spirit of community and unity was not only fostered by their difficult circumstances but also through familial relationships. Seventy percent of Widtsoe was linked together either by family ties or through marriage. Cannon, *Remaking* 140. See also Paul S. Taylor, “From the Ground Up,” *Survey Graphic* (September 1936), 527.

⁶Cannon, *Remaking*, 141.

⁷Carr, 122.

hall, and many houses.⁸ There was even talk of moving the county seat to the town.⁹ Widtsoe had been designed as a dry farming and grazing community, and until the early 20's the farms prospered.¹⁰ At its peak, Widtsoe's grain crop was greater than that grown in the rest of Garfield county combined.¹¹ One resident remembered that the "whole of Johns Valley [was] a waving field of grain."¹² Another Widtsoen, Mr. Quincy Kimball, remembered plentiful farms that produced peas, beans, strawberries, lettuce, and "turnips weighing seven and eight pounds."¹³

This prosperity, however, was to change. Extensive erosion caused by over-grazing and exhaustive farming sapped the once fertile soil of its already meager nutrients. The fragile soil had allowed for around ten years of good yields, but this was followed by a reversal of the cycle. While the 1910's had been prosperous, the 1920's produced weak harvest gains and growing anxiety within the community. The cycle was reaping its casualties. During his visit in Widtsoe with Lange, Paul Taylor recorded the recollections

⁸Carr, 122.

⁹Carr, 122.

¹⁰The name of the city had been changed from Winder to Widtsoe in honor of John A. Widtsoe an apostle of the L.D.S. Church and arid land scientist. Widtsoe specialized in the techniques of dry farming and was personally involved in the development of dry farming in communities throughout Utah, including areas with climate and altitude problems similar to Widtsoe.

¹¹Linda King Newell and Vivian Linford Talbot, *The History of Garfield County*, (Salt Lake City: Utah Historical Society, 1998), 278.

¹²Newell, 277-278.

¹³*Salt Lake Tribune*, "Widtsoe Land Price Row Reaches Court," May 3, 1938, 1.

of one farmer, “This land used to raise forty bushels of wheat to the acre, but it won’t now.”¹⁴ The worsening circumstances impelled many citizens of Widtsoe to move out. The city that had once had so much promise was slowly becoming a ghost town.

By 1930 the population of Widtsoe had fallen to 210. This number continued to shrink and by 1935 only 17 hardy families remained. For those who remained, the situation was becoming critical. One ‘stalwart young man’ told Taylor and Lange, “My father came here with \$7000, worked hard, and lost it all.”¹⁵ The land had become so unprofitable that 85% of the families were on relief. For the survival of the residents and their livestock, hay and grain had to be transported into Widtsoe.¹⁶ The plight of Widtsoe was considered by the *Garfield County News*, “perhaps the most destitute of any [town]. . . in the state.”¹⁷ This was a dubious honor when considering that the entire state of Utah was still reeling from the effects of the Great Depression.

In 1934, the townspeople presented a petition to the government for federal aid.¹⁸ After visiting Widtsoe, A.F. Bracken, Utah’s land planning consultant for the National

¹⁴Taylor, “Ground Up,” 527.

¹⁵Taylor, “Ground Up,” 527.

¹⁶*Salt Lake Tribune*, May 3, 1938.

¹⁷Quoted by Cannon in *Remaking*, 144.

¹⁸Cannon, *Remaking*, 144. This petition was started by townsman Chris Hoffman and was eventually signed by over forty residents. The petition for aid would become the center of debate in 1938 when former Widtsoe residents, in challenging the Resettlement project’s payment of land, would say they were coerced into signing. See the *Salt Lake Tribune* May 3, 1938, and *Salt Lake Tribune* “Jury Upholds Widtsoe Land Project,” May 4, 1938, for court proceedings.

Resources Board, recommended that the now submarginal land be purchased by the Federal Government and that the current residents of Widtsoe be moved to other more prosperous areas of the state.¹⁹ In other words, Bracken recommended that the town be turned over to Tugwell's Resettlement Administration. The RA, as previously mentioned, directed certain rather radical programs of Roosevelt's New Deal, such as farm loans, resettlement, the rehabilitation of lands, and Greenbelt communities. According to Tugwell, the RA conducted a "simultaneous attack on the wastage of people and the inefficient use of resources." Its aim, he continued, was to "assist the families in the worst situations to find new and more economic farms. . . and to return the land itself to uses it would tolerate."²⁰ In its dire situation, Widtsoe became a perfect case for the RA's resettlement program. The land was now utterly destitute, and, more importantly, the people were requesting the agency's direct aid.²¹

¹⁹Under Bracken's recommendation the project was originally turned over to the Agriculture Adjustment Administration (AAA), Land Policy Section. The AAA investigated the area and proposed resettlement. On July 1, 1935 the AAA - Land Policy Section was absorbed into the RA. See Cannon, *Remaking*, 144-146. The land was also placed under the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act. See Newell, 308.

²⁰Quoted by Brian Cannon in *Remaking*, 77.

²¹Aaron Bracken estimated that 75.07% of Garfield County's land area was showing severe land erosion, *State Report on Land Use - Study for Utah*, May 20, 1935, 54. In February, 1935, Lloyd W. Tuttle, director of the Utah Rural Rehabilitation Cooperation program for Garfield and Piute counties, stated of Widtsoe's townspeople's readiness to move, "The Widtsoe people are cooperating in every way and are anxious to make an early move from the drouth (sic) stricken farming district . . . The people of Widtsoe and others who are in possession of unproductive lands are fortunate in being able, through the help of the new corporation to rid themselves of their drouth (sic) ridden lands, and no doubt many of them will take advantage of the chance to make a new start on productive lands." *Garfield County News* vol. 15 no. 4 (February 8, 1935).

On July 1, 1935, the Widtsoe project was turned over to the RA.²² The RA's agenda was first the resettlement of the townspeople and second the rehabilitation of the land. Their primary concern was the resettlement of the residents to farms where they could "gain a greater amount of independence, happiness, and achievement than any other manner they had ever been able to obtain."²³ Widtsoe and the surrounding lands were purchased and farms throughout the state secured for the relocation of the farmers.²⁴ Technically the land was to be "taken out of cultivation and returned to a more economic use."²⁵ A majority of the buildings were to be razed and the land was returned to the public domain and left alone.

When Dorothea Lange arrived in Widtsoe in early April, 1936, Omer Mills, the regional officer of the RA, labeled the town a "Great Worry" as agents were scrambling to find land for the clients.²⁶ The situation was growing progressively worse. Lange's purpose in coming to Widtsoe was to document the actions of her agency, and to make

²²Cannon, *Remaking*, 146.

²³Resettlement Administration, *Land Policy Circular*. (Washington D.C.: April 1936), 7.

²⁴From Widtsoe the families would be moved to counties throughout Utah: Salt Lake, Utah, Sevier, and Piute. For their Widtsoe land the Government paid the farmers 75 cents to \$2 an acre. For their new farms, the resettled farmers would pay the government over forty years at 3%. Brian Cannon, *Life and Land: The Farm Security Administration Photographers in Utah, 1936-1941* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1988), 5; *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 3, 1938. For the case of one resident, Reed Beebe, see Newell, 307-308.

²⁵*Utah: a Guide to the State*, Writers' Program, W.P.A., Utah (New York: Hastings House, 1941), 30-31.

²⁶Cannon, *Remaking*, 148.

the controversial program look as necessary as possible. It was the first large scale resettlement she had been asked to document.²⁷ However, despite her brief experience with the agency, having only been a member of the Historical Section for a few months, she knew exactly the type of images the RA wanted. She not only photographed the action of the RA, but also captured the human experience and emotions of resettlement. To catch such expressions she used her exceptional skills and acute sympathetic perception, already demonstrated in Consumers, to document the anxiety, hope, and sorrow of the people of Widtsoe.

In her photographs of the cold barren landscape and the weather beaten homes, Lange seems to give no reason for the people to stay (figure 28). To maximize the bleakness of the area she visually edits out homes and buildings that look too prosperous with her viewfinder. One of those homes ignored by Lange due to its good condition was the home of D.W. Woodard.²⁸ As she had done in Consumers, and as she would do in Escalante, Lange ignored those particulars that did not concur with the vision she wanted to present to the nation. The vision she wanted to portray was that of an old town that, although it had failed as a community, still had a hope in the future. Her photographs of Widtsoe confirm that the town was a perfect candidate for resettlement. Her vision of

²⁷Previous to her work in Utah, Lange had covered other Resettlement Projects, in California (Kern County and Marysville), but none of them were as extensive as the Widtsoe project. Her assignments in Marysville (October 1935) and Kern County (February 1936) covered the resettlement camps that housed the incoming migrants that were flowing into California.

²⁸It was in such good condition that it is one of the few homes that still stands today. Carr, 123.

weatherbeaten barns and barren landscapes support the recommendation that no one belonged on this land. In all, the photographs show a town that had already become a ghost town.

One year before Lange arrived in Utah, A.F. Bracken made the following statement regarding the critical situation of areas like Widtsoe,

[The] overexpansion into areas of questionable opportunity . . . has brought suffering and tragedy to a great number of misguided hungry people. Some have deserted their holdings by being starved out, others are still holding on hoping that 'good times' will again return. Since the resettlement program is designed to relieve this maladjustment it must be planned wisely so that the same mistakes are not repeated. In this rush to make amends for failures of the past, it must be remembered that we are experimenting with human individuals.²⁹

These words found a pictorial parallel in the work of Lange. Although the resettlement of Widtsoe was a true case study, Lange's work demonstrates that it came at a human cost. She knew that the resettlement of a town represented more than numbers in the RA's *Monthly Circular*, but that it affected human beings. She understood that resettlement was not a clinical process, but one that tore at the emotions and pride of those involved. Lange's photographs of the scene are sympathetic to those whose livelihood was being inevitably altered. In Widtsoe, the effect of her photography resembled a removal rather than a resettlement.³⁰

²⁹A.F. Bracken, *State Report on Land Use - Study for Utah*, (Salt Lake City? : s.n., 1935), 145.

³⁰Although similar in meaning, the terms removal and resettlement had different connotations. Resettlement, a policy word used by the government, was a kinder way of summing up the relocation of the people of Widtsoe. Yet for many this relocation was a harsh removal from their lands. Milton Meltzer, *Dorothea Lange: a Photographer's Life*, (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1978), 139.

On her way into the Widtsoe, Lange took several distant photographs of the town and its landscape. Circling the village, she took approximately ten panorama photographs with each shot emphasizing the desolation of this “bleak” valley (figures 28, 29).³¹ In taking such photographs, Lange documented the land purchased by the government. The Federal Government, through the RA, had, according to Taylor, “taken options on practically the entire valley, including the town.”³² Everything included within the photographs: the hotel, homes, fences, and even the valley itself now belonged to the government. Even from within the town, the bleakness and barren expanse seemed to engulf everything (figure 30).³³ In these images Lange seems to acknowledge the fact that 83.6% of the state was worthless desert.³⁴

When Lange arrived in Widtsoe, the ground was still blanketed with snow. As she had done in Consumers, she took advantage of the harsh elements to emphasize and even exaggerate the hostile conditions of the town. One of the first photographs taken was of a frozen trough covered with ice and snow (figure 31). It’s caption reads, “Widtsoe, Utah. March 1936. One of the reasons why this region has proven itself unsuited to crop production is the short growing season.”³⁵ Clearly not aesthetically driven, this image was

³¹Taylor, “Ground Up,” 528. For Taylor the decision to move from the valley was obvious. For him the land was too “bleak” to create any sort of long lasting community.

³²Taylor, Ground Up, 257.

³³*The farm lands purchased lie on the floor of the valley* LC-USF-34-1360-E

³⁴Utah State Planning Board, *A state plan for Utah; progress report, April 15, 1935*, (Salt Lake City, 1935), 70.

³⁵Caption LC-USF-34-00319

to create an impact in support of removal. April should be a time to plant, but in Widtsoe the ground had not even thawed. This image adds to Lange's theme of Widtsoe's destitution.

Continuing on this theme Lange photographed *Farm Home, in the FSA land use project purchase area* (figure 32). In the foreground of her image, she emphasizes the barren furrows filled not with crops but snow. The dilapidated home in the background appears no less productive, and almost seems abandoned. The lone white sheet that blows in the wind is the only indication that this land is still in use. Through such images, it is obvious that she had already convinced herself that removal was necessary. Such photographs emphatically insist that carrying on in this highland valley was futile.

As she moved throughout the town, she photographed the numerous homes and farms that had already been abandoned. They stand empty and weather beaten as if they had been abandoned for decades. Even the houses that were still occupied looked abandoned. *Typical home, still occupied* (figure 33) appears no different than those homes that had been vacated. It sits alone surrounded by frozen fields. Not even the landscape reveals any signs of life. There are no farmers in the fields and no children playing on the grounds. Instead the image is completely silent and still. The images of the troughs, house, fields accentuate the plight of the people in Widtsoe. Through this image Lange states that these families should be on their new farms and not trapped in this frozen landscape.

With one of the occupied homes, Lange studiously moved in for a closer inspection. Among the weather beaten wooden boards she found a window boarded up with cardboard (figure 34). This close up image of the house resembles Walker Evans

artful photographs of stark buildings taken in their extreme frontality.³⁶ The quality could be even further enhanced by the decaying wooden boards, which, according to photo-historian Beaumont Newhall, have a delightful and picturesque quality.³⁷ In this photograph, however, the pursuit of the artistic quality was not Lange's intent. She was not interested in the artistic elements of the scene, rather she sought to create an image that captured the conditions of those in need. In this sense, her art was photography that had an honorable moral purpose.³⁸

As members of the RA, Lange and the rest of the Historical Section were responsible for the validation of their agency. They were required, through their photography, to make its actions look as necessary as possible among rural and urban populations. For America's farmers the RA had, in essence, to prove that its methods, although controversial, were designed to help them – that it had the programs and loans that could pull them out of their economic slumps.

For those in the city, the RA had to justify its expenditures. It had to visually document that their taxes went to saving rural America. In order to do this, the

³⁶A classic example is Evans work *Tin Building, Moundville vicinity, Alabama*. Both Lange and Evans are credited with the overall styles of FSA photography, and yet it seems as if Lange was more influenced by Evans than Evans by Lange. See Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*. 174.

³⁷Beaumont Newhall, "Documentary Approach to Photography," *Parnassus* (March 1938) : 4.

³⁸Theresa Thau Heyman, *Celebrating a Collection: the Work of Dorothea Lange*, (Oakland, Calif: The Oakland Museum, 1978), 46. It was not until much later in her life that Lange would consider herself an artist. Rather she saw herself as a 'tradesman' and a photographer with a good eye and a social conscience. Heyman, *Celebrating a Collection*, 10.

photographers of the RA had to confront the notion of the “Agrarian Myth”; the mystical idea of the farm as the ideal existence and the farmer as wholesome and hard working.³⁹ While maintaining the myth’s notion of the farmer as virtuous and hard-working, Lange had to unmask the thought that real poverty, like that found in the urban slum, not only existed, but that it was worse than the destitution of the city.⁴⁰

In showing the poverty of this family farm, the backbone of ideal agrarian life, Lange shows that America’s farm families were in desperate need of aid.⁴¹ She dispels the myth that poverty does not exist on the farm. In spite of desperate circumstances Lange shows a family farm that has remained strong. Yet, one would have to wonder just how long the family could endure.

Even the more intimate image of the home adds to the idea that this was a community that had already been abandoned. If there was life still in this house, an image as close as this would normally reveal some activity, but in this case it does the opposite. The home is both occupied and empty. The home had already begun to look abandoned, confirming the fact that these people were not planning on staying. Despite the cold, there was no reason to spend money on a home that you would be leaving in the near future; it was a home that would be torn down in a matter of weeks or months. The residents are only temporally attached to their home. It has become the opposite of a real home; it is

³⁹Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 19.

⁴⁰Baldwin, 22-25.

⁴¹Baldwin, 29.

confining and trapping, not warm and comfortable.

A photograph of the front door of the general store, the Widtsoe Mercantile, reveals a similar view (figure 35). For a building usually conscious of its appearance, the front of the store is battered and run down. Lange's carefully crafted photograph reveals two broken windows, one of which is the one on the front door. For Lange, the sight of broken glass, along with sage and stone, would become "symbols and signs" that typified Utah.⁴² Rather than replace the glass, the owner had instead settled for a temporary fix. In fact, one wonders if the store, the center of the city, was still in business. Indeed, Lange captured a town and a people in a very difficult state. It was a situation that would, in theory, be getting better, but no one knew exactly when. Not even the government knew when the project would be completed.

When Lange arrived in Widtsoe the anxiety of resettlement was at an all time high. She recorded the frustrations of one unidentified resident in her trip field book, "People jist been settin' here waitin' and hopin'(sic)."⁴³ Another anxious resident, Ida Steed, noted her frustrations in a song,

Once Widtsoe was happy but now we're forlorn
 Just like an old coat that is tattered and torn
 We're left in this valley to cry and mourn
 And wait for the government men.
 They said two week we will move you all out,

⁴²Dorothea Lange files, vol. 40, Oakland Museum, Number 53106 and 53110. See also Dorothea Lange, Daniel Dixon, and Ansel Adams, "Three Mormon Towns," *Life* (6 September 1954) : 42.

⁴³Dorothea Lange Field Notes, 27A. Lange always tried to record as exactly as possible the verbal expressions of her subjects. Consequently they take on a 'folk speak' quality. See Heyman, *Celebrating a Collection*, 98.

Two weeks is a lingering spell-
 And we are still wondering what it's about,
 But the government men will not tell.⁴⁴

Lange's photographs captured a town in this state of transition. Because of the bureaucratic delay, the people of Widtsoe were being forced to make do on farms that they would have to abandon instantly when the time for their move came. Emotionally they were torn between looking to the future and, at the same time, letting Widtsoe decay into the past.

One of the buildings that Lange singled out was the rustic Mormon church that sat just around the corner from the Mercantile. Throughout the town's history, the church had been a source of strength and unity. Widtsoe began as a Mormon community and was still characteristically Mormon in 1936. Unlike her work at Consumers, Lange was now photographing a predominantly Mormon community. She noted this in her travel log by labeling the town - "100% Mormon".⁴⁵ Actually she was not far off. In 1930, 210 of the 270 residents, who remained, were Mormon.⁴⁶ The caption of the photograph simply reads, "The church. This is a Mormon Community, as are all the settlements of the Great Basin (figure 36)."⁴⁷ Previously, in her travels, she had been in many Mormon settlements

⁴⁴Mabel Nielson and Audrie C. Ford, *Johns Valley: The way we saw it*, (Springville, Utah: Art City Publishing Co., 1971), 227.

⁴⁵Dorothea Lange Field Notes, 27A.

⁴⁶Cannon, *Remaking*, 140.

⁴⁷Caption - LC-USF-34-1326. During her 1936 assignments in Utah, Lange photographed four religious buildings. She photographed the ward houses in Widtsoe and Escalante, and two buildings which are only found in her personal files: the old Price Tabernacle and a

that were similar to Widtsoe. In 1933, with her first husband, the painter Maynard Dixon, she spent two months in southern Utah traveling through small towns like Toquerville, Orderville, and Springdale.⁴⁸ These towns exhibited an independence and strength that impressed Lange and Dixon.⁴⁹ For Lange the virtues of the Mormon town, resiliency and self-sufficiency, were what the country needed to survive the Depression.⁵⁰

In Widtsoe, Lange saw a true test of the self-sufficiency and fierce independence of the Mormon community. In 1933, one Mormon told Lange, “We get pretty ragged but you can’t starve us out.”⁵¹ Lange was now finding out that there was indeed a breaking point. She was witnessing a community that was literally being starved out.

Uncharacteristically, the townspeople were not looking to the Mormon Church or other similar Mormon communities for aid, but to the Federal Government. The Widtsoe Ward House stands as a resilient symbol of Widtsoe’s faith. In Lange’s image the church sits symbolically in the center of the image, just as its place was centered in the inhabitants’ lives. Details in Lange’s photograph reveal that the church was still in use, such as the bell, the glass windows, and a car parked close to the front doors. Even a small dog waits

small, unidentified Christian church (adorned with a cross on its steeple). This building is Lange’s proof that not all churches in the Great Basin are Mormon. Oakland Museum – Lange file nos. 35188 and 35189.

⁴⁸Donald Hagerty, *Desert Dreams: The Art and Life of Maynard Dixon*, (Layton, Utah: Perrigrine Smith Gibbs, 1994), 192; Meltzer, 78-79.

⁴⁹Hagerty, 192.

⁵⁰Sandra Phillips and others, *Dorothea Lange; American Photographs*, (San Francisco: Chronicle books and the San Francisco Museum of Art, 1994), 32.

⁵¹Meltzer, 78.

curiously on the front porch for its master.

Despite signs of life, however, the church resembles many of the other buildings in the dwindling town. Snow completely surrounds the humble church. It seems distant and cold. Despite its actual close proximity to the other buildings, Lange completely isolates the church from the town and its few remaining residents. Unlike the sandstone church Lange would photograph at Escalante, the church at Widtsoe reflects the transient nature of the town (figure 56). It is not of stone or brick, but is made out of the same weathered lumber as the rest of the city. Despite its age, it appears to be temporary and transitory. The town's survival is no longer in question, and the church is left to decay like the rest of Widtsoe.

The majority of Lange's photographs from Widtsoe avoid the few residents that remained. Rather than focus on the human aspect of resettlement, most of her images concentrate on the landscape and architecture of the town. Throughout the entire assignment, only six residents appear. Furthermore, Lange only took two intimate photographs of the townspeople.⁵² Though few in number, the two photographs perfectly sum up the two conflicting emotions of resettlement: hope and agony.

One photograph stands in sharp contrast to the others. While most of the photographs mourn the resettlement of the town, one photograph radiates hope and optimism in the uncertain future. The photograph is of a young mother and daughter

⁵² There are others who appear in her photographs but they are not intimate portraits. Instead, those who appear, the post mistress, Madge Young Nielson, and an unidentified couple, (who appear only in her personal negatives stored in the Oakland Museum), are only a part of the general landscape of the city itself. They are not close ups rather distant images of a people tied to the land of Widtsoe.

standing in the weathered doorway of their house (figure 37).⁵³ The family occupies a plane that is intimate to the viewer. The photograph makes a good comparison to Arthur Rothstein's famous image *Sharecropper's Wife and Child, Washington County, Arkansas* (figure 38). Despite the fact that the homes of the two families appear to be similar Lange's image is much more positive. The extreme worry on the face of the Arkansas mother hints at the troubles that they are experiencing, as she worries not only for the children before her but the one she is carrying as well. In contrast, Lange's mother smiles down at her daughter. Likewise her child seems quite content. She is inviting rather than confronting or threatened. Lange captures a moment when they appear happy and content rather than anxious and afraid. Rothstein's family appears tattered and destitute. Lange's subjects are clean and well dressed. The mother stands in her apron and the daughter in her bib, suggesting that the interiors are clean and ordered and are a strong contrast to the exterior. Unlike Rothstein's mother, her countenance does not reflect her difficult situation. Rothstein's image reflects the worry and misery of the present while Lange's represents the hopeful future.

The long caption of the photograph reads: *Resettlement clients to be moved from the area to a farm in another county. Site not yet determined where they will have better*

⁵³Capturing women and their children in the doorways of their homes was a device commonly used by the photographers in the RA and later in the FSA. In October 1935, both Theodore Jung and Ben Shahn captured images of women and children on their thresholds. Jung's photograph *Family of a prospective client, Brown County, Indiana* (LC-USF-33-4038-M1) is one of his most well known works. Shahn's *Wife and children of a sharecropper, Muskgrove, Arkansas* (LC-USF-33-6068) is a wonderful image capturing the utter poverty of the south. Probably the most well known of this type is Arthur Rothstein's image taken in August 1935: *Sharecropper's Wife and Child, Washington County, Arkansas* (LC-USF33- 002022-M4).

*land and a hopeful future. These people have been in distress throughout the valley.*⁵⁴

Unlike the few others Lange photographed in Widtsoe, the mother and daughter represent the future that could be obtained elsewhere. As she had done in Consumers, Lange uses images of women and children to emphasize the suffering of all. For Lange, this mother and child represent a glimmer of hope for the people of Widtsoe.

This photograph is not only about the future of this family, but is also about the precarious future of the resettlement program. The image is carefully constructed propaganda that casts a positive light on the actions of the RA. Their smiling faces represent a trust in the government and its programs. They are optimistic about the future because the government was to rescue them out of their dire straits. The mother and child are sympathetic candidates for government aid, in that they are not the “marginal farmers” that the middle class could label lazy or ignorant.⁵⁵ Instead they appear honest, clean, happy, and hardworking. They seem to echo the words of FDR’s 1932 inauguration speech that “The people of the United States have not failed.”⁵⁶ This is a family that is simply down on its luck. To potential taxpayers, this family is worthy of Federal money.

For the second human portrait Lange photographed an elderly woman walking down one of Widtsoe’s dirt roads. She captioned the photograph: *Mormon Woman, a*

⁵⁴Caption LC-USF-34-1323 C.

⁵⁵In his article “Have You Seen Their Faces?” Hartley E. Howe redirects a lot of the blame for crop failure on the farmers and not the land. For Howe it is the farmers who were “marginal” and not the land. Hartley E. Howe, “Have You Seen Their Faces?” *Survey Graphic* 29:4 (April 1940) : 236.

⁵⁶Franklin Delano Roosevelt quoted in Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 205.

native of Denmark receiving her first old age pay check (figure 4). The woman, centered in the foreground, stands helplessly before Lange's camera. Lange's images often convey the sense of an unnoticed "eye", invisible to her subjects. "I just disappear and don't even look anybody in the eye," she remembered.⁵⁷ Yet, in this photograph she has anything but disappeared. To take the picture she stood directly in front of her subject stopping the woman in her path. The image is not a random snapping of the shutter but appears to be a captured moment in their conversation. The closeness of the photograph creates a forceful impact on and an intimacy with the viewer.⁵⁸ Her photograph, taken quickly with her smaller camera, a 2 1/4 X 2 1/4 Rollicflex and not her more cumbersome 4 X 5 inch Graflex, reveals a woman whose face and hands are worn and wrinkled and whose hair is white.⁵⁹ The quick snap of the lense captured the decisive moment when she appeared the saddest. In her, one may sense, as Brian Cannon stated, the agony "generated during the aftermath of resettlement, disrupted traditional values such as home, community, faith in God's promises, and self reliance for economic security."⁶⁰

The photograph of the Danish woman does not exude the unbridled hope and optimism for the future. Rather, it reveals the sadness and loss involved in the removal. If

⁵⁷Heyman, *Celebrating a Collection*, 63; Van Dyke, 464.

⁵⁸Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*. 52.

⁵⁹For technical details on Lange's use of cameras and film see Karin Becker Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition*, (Baton Rouge Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 72; Daniel Dixon, "Dorothea Lange," *Modern Photography* (December 1952) : 77. See also Van Dyke, 462.

⁶⁰Cannon, *Life and Land*, 5.

the first Widtsoe portrait, the family in the doorway, symbolized the hope of the town, the second reveals the agony of the town's failure. While the woman standing in the doorway is young, happy, and full of life, the second is old and sad. If the portrait of the young family idealistically represents the glowing future, the image of the second woman signifies the despair of the past. These two images both fulfilled the propagandistic needs of the RA. One evoked the despair of these victims and garnered support for their plight, the other offered the viewer hope for these "good" people through government intervention.

The impact of the photograph of the old woman arises not only through its juxtaposition with the portrait of the young family but also through Lange's use of disparity. The aged woman, in her coat with a fur collar, tightly bundled around her and her purse in hand, is a sharp contrast to the barren empty expanse behind her. Lange made her seem as if she is completely out of place. Even her caption removes the woman from Widtsoe. She is not a native of the barren highlands of Utah, but an immigrant from Denmark.

The woman in Lange's photograph is Christine Marie Hansen Snyder, a native of Copenhagen who traveled to Utah at the age of 14.⁶¹ Married in 1878, she and her family moved throughout south central Utah until settling in Johns Valley in 1905.⁶² Her life had been filled with trials. Besides the difficulties of living in the primitive west, she was widowed in 1913 with a large family to care for. Yet, despite her trying circumstances, she continually helped anyone in need by delivering babies, quilting, and caring for the sick.

⁶¹Nielson and Ford, 217-218.

⁶²Nielson and Ford, 219.

She, like the women and children of Consumers, is an example of the faultless poor suffering not because she is lazy but from forces beyond her control.

When Lange photographed Christine Snyder in 1936, she was seventy-seven years old. Her hair is white and her face careworn. The paper clenched tightly in her hands is her first old-age assistance check. Old age benefits were passed by Congress in August, 1935, for anyone age sixty-five and older.⁶³ Initiated in 1936, this scene could possibly be the first experience Snyder had with the new benefits of the Social Security Act of Roosevelt's New Deal. Similar to a photograph of an elderly couple visibly feeble and weak taken in 1941 by Jack Delano, the Widtsoe recipient of this check accepts it only out of necessity (figure 39).⁶⁴ Her down cast eyes and frowned expression illustrate a woman whose dignity and pride seem damaged by the difficult circumstances. However, now she has no choice. Unlike Delano's couple, she appears ashamed by the "stigma and dependance that cash relief carried in her small-town Mormon culture."⁶⁵ It would not be easy for a pioneer woman to accept such help. In Utah the attached stigma was state-wide. When the Social

⁶³The assistance began with the 1936 fiscal year. Utah was the first in the Union to receive all the benefits of the Social Security Act. Wayne Hinton, "The Economic of Ambivalence: Utah's Depression," *Utah Historical Quarterly* vol. 54 no.3, (September 1986): 282-285. See *Statutes at Large of the United States of America*, Vol. XLIX part 1 (January 1935-June 1936), 620-623, 620. Chapter 513, in particular, discusses the details involved with the act.

⁶⁴The two recipients in Delano's photograph, *Greene County Georgia. Old Couple who receive old age pension assistance, Fall 1941* (LC-USF-33-021252), are clearly in need of assistance. They are older and more feeble in appearance than Snyder. The photograph does not seem to exhibit the same solemn dignity or agony as Lange's photograph does.

⁶⁵Cannon, *Life and Land*, 6. See also Lowry Nelson, *The Mormon Village: a Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952), 124.

Security Act was initiated in Utah, only 504 of 1000 people eligible actually accepted their checks.⁶⁶

As she had done in many of her photographs, Lange focused her attention on the expressive face of her subject. The troubled emotions on the face of Christine Snyder expose the fact that the pioneer spirit of self sufficiency and independence had failed.⁶⁷ She does not seem to be waiting for good times to return.⁶⁸ Her body language reveals the frustration of a corner of Zion that has failed. For her entire life she had worked hard and been able to survive. Her once strong hands that helped everyone else in her community could no longer sustain her. For Christine Snyder, this reluctantly accepted check was absolutely necessary. It represented her only means of survival and the loss of her independent pioneer spirit.

Throughout her travels in Utah, Lange photographed similar surviving Mormon pioneer women. In 1933 she photographed an old Mormon handcart pioneer Maryann Savage of Toquerville (figure 3). Like Christine Snyder, Savage “helped build [a] Mormon village in the wilderness.”⁶⁹ Like Snyder she is shown possessing dignity, courage, and

⁶⁶Richard D. Poll, ed. *Utah's History*, (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1989), 483.

⁶⁷Taylor and Lange believed that it was the pioneer qualities that would enable the people of the RA projects to overcome discouragement and hardship. See Taylor, *Ground Up*, 526; George P. Elliott quoted in Meltzer, 135.

⁶⁸Bracken, 145.

⁶⁹*Dorothea Lange Looks at the American Country Woman*, a photographic essay by Dorothea Lange with a commentary by Beaumont Newhall, (Fort Worth: Fort Worth Museum, 1967), 37.

conviction.⁷⁰ These “Daughters of Zion”, as Lange referred to them, exhibited a strength that she admired, and which she too possessed. The relationship between Lange and these women was that of “equal to equal.”⁷¹ Pare Lorentz noted that she was in truth one of them.⁷² Of women like Snyder and Savage, Lange wrote,

These are the women of the American soil. They are a hardy stock. They are of the roots of our country. They inhabit our plains, our prairies, our deserts, our mountains, our valleys, and our country towns. They are not our well-advertised women of beauty and fashion, nor are they a part of the well advertised American style of living. These women represent a different mode of life. They are of *themselves* a very great American Style. They live with courage and purpose, a part of our tradition.⁷³

As she had done on the cold muddy streets of Consumers, Lange used images of women as symbols of strength in trying circumstances. Her women are not passive or weak, rather they are shown possessing dignity and courage. They possess a psychological

⁷⁰Richard G. Oman and Robert O. Davis, *Images of Faith: Art of the Latter Day Saints*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1995), 108-109. For her 1953 assignment for *Life*, Lange would again capture the strength and dignity of the Mormon woman. In *Dorothea Lange Looks at the American Country Woman*, a product of the *Life* assignment, 8 of the 27 images featured Mormon women and their environment. One of these was the gravestone of Maryann Savage (page 37).

⁷¹The same attributes that Lange admired in others were also admired in her. In a 1966 tribute to Lange, W. Eugene Smith wrote, “[Lange was] a woman of incredible will. . . she is a sensitive woman: a ‘tough’ idealist of courage, tenderness, and beauty.” W. Eugene Smith, “One Whom I Admire, Dorothea Lange (1895-1965),” *Popular Photography* (February 1966) : 86-87; William Stott quoted in James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream*, (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 120.

⁷²Pare Lorentz, “Dorothea Lange: Camera with a Purpose,” *US Camera* vol.1 (1941) : 93-116, 96.

⁷³*Dorothea Lange looks at the American country woman*, 13.

complexity and a profound simplicity.⁷⁴ They are, as Lange called them, “second lookers”; photographs that require an extra glance to fully read the image’s significance.⁷⁵ Yet, in her pursuit to create one of these “second lookers” she did not over-sentimentalize. For as Pare Lorentz stated, “She records people as they are; and not as they should be.”⁷⁶

Ironically, Lange and Taylor believed that the pioneer spirit exemplified in the aging Snyder and Savage, was the same spirit necessary for the RA projects to succeed. Taylor writes, “The qualities of the pioneers are needed, for methods are new, and there are hardships and discouragements even on publicly financed projects.”⁷⁷ The virtues of the original pioneers of the American west – self-sufficiency, courage, and resiliency – were the attributes needed in these new pioneers. Lange’s women are the visual embodiment of these virtues that others are to follow.

As Lange had learned with the instant success of *Migrant Mother*, the images of these women were highly effective in garnering public support. They spoke to their viewers, not only because they conveyed destitution, but because they empathized with people who had problems not of their own making. The women of Lange’s photographs needed help, not because they were lazy or undeserving, but because they were trapped in

⁷⁴Nat Herz, “Dorothea Lange in Perspective. A Reappraisal of the FSA and an Interview,” *Infinity* (April 1963) : 8; John Rogers Puckett, *Five Photo-Textual Documentaries from the Great Depression*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984), 98-99.

⁷⁵Puckett, 98-99; Stott, 229.

⁷⁶Lorentz, 98.

⁷⁷Taylor, “Ground Up,” 526. See also Paul S. Taylor, “Again the Covered Wagon,” *Survey Graphic* (July 1935) : 348-351,368.

circumstances that were out of their control. Lange believed that poverty was distressing but not embarrassing.⁷⁸ To potential taxpayers Lange's women were worthy of Federal money. The RA knew that to acquire aid the circumstances can be changed from the farms to the mines to the open road, but the aptitude of the subject can not. The subjects of the photographs had to be presented in a manner that would harbor sympathy and gain respect and support. If this was not accomplished, the subjects could easily be ignored or passed off as lazy and unworthy of aid.

Three years after Snyder's photograph was taken, she passed away on July 13, 1939.⁷⁹ She was buried in the Widtsoe cemetery, the one register for that year. Unlike the young woman and her child Lange had photographed earlier, there was no future hope for Snyder. She was tied to the declining Widtsoe and not to new farms far from the home she had known for more than thirty years. Her lot was with Widtsoe and nowhere else.

By 1937, the exodus from Widtsoe was complete. In all, the Federal Government purchased 30,000 acres in Johns Valley at a cost of \$69,000.⁸⁰ At the time of its completion, a total of 28 families had been moved. The last to move was Grant Nelson, the post-master, who closed the office March 31, 1937.⁸¹ Most of the buildings, commercial and residential, were torn down, and the fields returned to wilderness.

⁷⁸Curtis, 56.

⁷⁹Nielson and Ford, 217.

⁸⁰Cannon, *Remaking*, 146. Adding in other development costs the total capitol sum for the entire Widtsoe Resettlement Project was \$89,849. See the *Report of the Administrator of the Farm Security Administration*, (Washington D.C.: 1941), 27.

⁸¹Cannon, *Remaking*, 150.

In the opinion of the RA, Widtsoe was a tremendous success. It was exactly what the RA wanted – a combination of townspeople in dire need of aid and land that was utterly desolate. In Widtsoe, the government successfully accomplished its goals, it removed the poor farmers to better agricultural areas, provided the loans to help them pay for better farms, and let the land recover from years of use. L.H. Hauter, of the RA regional office in Berkeley, considered Widtsoe a “showcase project” and a model for future programs.⁸² In fact, the RA was so proud of the project’s final success that they calendared tours of the site. During the tours, local townspeople and RA and State officials, including Governor Blood, would travel by caravan to Widtsoe where they would receive an “explanation of all costs and advantages” of the RA’s work.⁸³ Despite the interest, however, the tours were postponed and later canceled.⁸⁴

Widtsoe was not only a showcase within the RA, but it also became a showcase for the nation. In April 1937, only one month after the town’s complete abandonment, an article appeared in the progressive magazine *Nation’s Business*. The article, written by Khyber Forrester, was entitled “Mercy Death for Towns: Widtsoe Utah taken off the

⁸²Cannon, *Remaking*, 146.

⁸³*Garfield County News* vol.16 no. 21 (May 28, 1937). Widtsoe was not the only site to be visited on the tours originally scheduled for June 11 and 12, 1937. Caravans also were to go to the Tropic Dam located eight miles south of Red Canyon and just outside of Tropic, Utah. See note 91.

⁸⁴Cannon, *Remaking*, 130; *Garfield County News*, June 4, 1937.

map.”⁸⁵ In essence, it was a justification of the project, and a public disclosure of one of the RA’s most controversial programs.

An examination of the article provides an example of how the RA’s reserve of photographs were used, even if that use was contrary to the vision of the photographer. This was important, for as Newhall insists, the documentary photograph is meaningless unless presented with text.⁸⁶ Lange agreed that documentary photography is “buttressed by written material and by all manner of things which keep it unified and solid.”⁸⁷ Yet, as is the case with her Widtsoe photographs, the power of Lange’s photography parts with this notion. Her photography is not particularly dependant on Forrester’s article to complete her vision of the Widtsoe Project. Quite the contrary is true. Lange’s images and her vision are almost completely independent from any outside forces.

The article includes three of Lange’s photographs from Widtsoe: the old post office, an old decaying barn, the road sign from State 12 between Widtsoe and Panquitch, Utah (figures 40, 41, 42). In conjunction with the opening sentence: “If a town isn’t a going concern and can’t be made a profitable business institution for the benefit of its citizens – wipe it off the map,” Forrester included the road sign with the caption “This sign has been replaced. Widtsoe is no more.”⁸⁸ For Forrester the sign had become a symbol of

⁸⁵Khyber Forrester, “‘Mercy Death’ for Towns: Widtsoe Utah taken off the map,” *Nation’s Business*, 25 (April 1, 1937) : 64.

⁸⁶Newhall, 6.

⁸⁷Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, 155.

⁸⁸Forrester, 64.

the city. Its removal seemed to be as easy and surgical as the removal and resettlement of the town itself.

Forrester continues, "That's the latest technique in Utah where the town of Widtsoe, in Garfield County, has been put out of its misery much as a kindly owner might chloroform an ailing dog."⁸⁹ For the nation, the Widtsoe Project was an experiment hermetically performed in the deserts of Utah. The only real consequence to the average American would be through their tax dollars. Forrester insists, however, that there is no need to worry because, "[The farmers] proved to be good risks and, on their new lands, are repaying the money (their low interest loans) when due."⁹⁰

For the reader of this article, the images of the old buildings, the barn and the post office, and the removed sign make it easier to approve of such projects. Absent from the article are the pictures of the human consequences. The only person presented in the article is the post mistress who stands at a distance in the door of the post office. Lange's intimate portraits of the hopeful young mother or the sorrowful older woman do not appear. Such photographs were carefully edited. To support the positive stance on resettlement, Forrester chose photographs that removed the possibility of sympathy. By not selecting Lange's intimate portraits, the author was able to show a ghost town instead of a radical experiment dealing with human beings.

This was the nature of the RA's photographs. The photographers provided Stryker with their visions of the poor or the administration's projects, but it was the vision and

⁸⁹Forrester, 64.

⁹⁰Forrester, 64.

need of the clients, whether they were in Congress or photo-editors for *Nation's Business*, that mattered most. The original vision of the photographer was subservient to the wills of whomever Stryker lent images. In the case of Widtsoe, the nation was never to see the situation Lange observed. The hope, anxiety, and misery she observed and documented never made it to the public. Rather, the photographs the nation saw were carefully selected to achieve the goals and objectives of Tugwell's administration. In essence, they were used to insure the agency's future.

It should be noted that the Widtsoe Project was not the only extensive Resettlement project Lange covered in Utah. In May, after photographing the construction of the Tropic Dam just west of Bryce Canyon (figure 43), she traveled to an area forty miles south of Tooele to photograph the progress of the Central Utah Project, or Central Utah Dry Land Adjustment Project.⁹¹ The project covered the hard luck Rush Valley in the southern part of Tooele County. Like the Widtsoe Land Use Adjustment Project, its aim was to take "land out of cultivation and [restore] it to more economical use."⁹²

Nationally, Tooele county was regarded as a "Problem Area" county.⁹³ Originally

⁹¹The Tropic Reservoir was of major importance to the volatily dry area. It was to provide the area with much needed water for irrigation and for storage. Behind the Widtsoe Project, it was the RA's second largest job in Garfield County. Consequently, Lange visited the site in May 1936, prior to traveling to Tooele. In two photographs of the dam's construction, she captured the construction crews laboring to build the new spillway by horse and stone boat. See Lange's photographs LC-USF34-009075-E and LC-USF34- 009077-E. For more information see the *Garfield County News* vol.16 no.6 (June 12, 1936).

⁹²*Utah: Guide to the State*, 31.

⁹³Resettlement Administration, *Land Policy Circular :Division of Land Utilization- Land use planning section*, (Washington D.C.: 1936), 12-13.

the land was settled by Scandinavian settlers, who believed, like the settlers of Widtsoe, that “God had a work for them to do by turning the wastelands into paradise.”⁹⁴ The land they inhabited once resembled a “beautiful meadow,” but through insufficient rain fall, jack rabbits, and excessive sheep grazing, the land had become desolate and dry.⁹⁵ When A.F. Bracken visited the site in 1935 he noted that the area was already “in an acute stage of blowing away.”⁹⁶ The beautiful little meadow was now becoming a miniature dust bowl. Like Widtsoe, the Rush valley had become another example of what Stegner saw as the “furthest flung colonies” biting “off more than they could chew.”⁹⁷

By 1919, the residents of the Rush Valley were already leaving for greener pastures. The small Mormon branch discontinued services in 1920, leaving the community without its traditional life blood.⁹⁸ In 1936, when Taylor and Lange arrived in Tooele, the situation had become acutely critical. Taylor recorded his impressions in the September 1936 issue of *Survey Graphic*,

In Utah the range was once good near Tooele. But a procession of flocks tended by men in covered sheep wagons have overgrazed it badly. What the sheepmen have not ruined, the farmers have. Their abandoned houses, their binders and

⁹⁴Cannon, *Remaking*, 176.

⁹⁵Cannon, *Remaking*, 180. It seems that overgrazing on public and private lands was a state-wide problem. Utah State Planning Board, 66.

⁹⁶Bracken, 134.

⁹⁷Stegner, 34.

⁹⁸Cannon, *Remaking*, 180.

harrows half buried in dust drifts tell the familiar story. Their vacant fields, covered with tumbleweeds, feed dust storms that still blow down the central valley.⁹⁹

According to Taylor, this valley should never have been settled. The unchecked idealism of Mormon Utopianism had blindly gone into areas that were entirely unfit for habitation. The Central Utah Project, like the Widtsoe Project, was now undoing the mistakes made decades before.

The Central Utah Land Adjustment Project was a very similar project to the one in Widtsoe. “The only logical solution to the problem” was a complete resettlement of those who remained on their land (an offer that was enthusiastically accepted).¹⁰⁰ The project began under the aegis of the AAA in 1935 and was transferred to the RA on July 1, 1936.¹⁰¹ In total, the government purchased over 40,000 acres of submarginal land.¹⁰² Grazing would now be strictly controlled and cultivation prohibited. The remaining area would be used for “experiments in methods of replanting and restoring native grass.”¹⁰³ Like Widtsoe, the area would be turned back to nature.

Despite similarities to the Widtsoe Project, however, the Central Utah Project would be fundamentally different. The entire project only affected six families; a considerably smaller number than those removed in Widtsoe. The focus of the Central

⁹⁹Taylor, “Ground Up,” 527.

¹⁰⁰Bracken, 134; Cannon, *Remaking*, 182.

¹⁰¹Cannon, *Remaking*, 182.

¹⁰²Cannon, *Remaking*, 182.

¹⁰³Taylor, “Ground Up,” 257.

Utah Project was not the people, as it had been in the Widtsoe Project, but the land itself.¹⁰⁴ According to Taylor, “There are no people to resettle, for they had long since departed. The range was gone, and with poetic justice the farmers who destroyed it were themselves in turn destroyed.”¹⁰⁵ Unlike the special attention paid to those who were removed from their homes in Johns Valley, the people of Rush Valley were left to fend for themselves. They were not aided in finding new farms, but had to procure new land by themselves. Finally, they were offered less for their land despite a similar level of destitution to Widtsoe.

Lange’s few photographs reveal the basic nature of the project. Unlike Widtsoe, she did not focus on the human casualty of removal. Rather, she showed images completely void of humanity: abandoned houses, the dust filled binders and harrows, sheep wagons, vacant fields covered with tumbleweeds.¹⁰⁶ There was no one to represent the hope or sorrow of the circumstance.

Of the few photographs taken for this assignment, the only photograph of interest is an image of a pile of cedar fence posts (figure 44). The photograph, which appeared in the *Survey Graphic* article, simply depicts a pile of posts ready to be used in the miles of

¹⁰⁴Cannon, *Remaking*, 175.

¹⁰⁵Taylor, “Ground Up,” 257.

¹⁰⁶Meltzer, 139. It is obvious that Meltzer’s list is borrowed straight out of Taylor’s account in *Survey Graphic*. The photograph of the sheepwagons (LC-USF-34-009083-E) is the only one of these that I have been able to find in the archives of the Library of Congress and the Oakland Museum.

fences needed to delineate the new grazing areas of the project.¹⁰⁷ In keeping with the dehumanized nature of the project, the photograph is lifeless and cold, and seems to be more of an exploration of forms than an insight into the details of the project.¹⁰⁸

From Widtsoe, Lange headed east to the small Mormon hamlet of Escalante. Her purpose for traveling to the village was to see how a small and isolated Mormon town was enduring the prolonged trials of the Great Depression. In Widtsoe she had seen one of these towns already crumble. She had to be curious as to whether Escalante would fall to a similar fate.

¹⁰⁷See Taylor, "Ground Up," 527, 529.

¹⁰⁸While human subjects were Lange's forte, she was also a student of form and composition. She was, in truth, a very skilled artistic photographer. Thus, when human subjects did not avail themselves, as was the case in Tooele, she still photographed.

CHAPTER 4
ESCALANTE
THE TYPICAL MORMON SETTLEMENT

From Widtsoe, Lange headed due east over a tortuous dirt road, State 23, reaching elevations above 9,000 feet, before she came to the small Mormon hamlet of Escalante.¹ In leaving Widtsoe, Lange left behind a Mormon community that was in its final decay. In contrast, Escalante was a thriving little town that was enduring the lingering effects of the Great Depression. This little community provided Lange an opportunity to view how small Mormon towns scattered throughout her region were surviving the tumultuous 1930's.²

There was, however, another reason for Lange to visit the isolated town. On November 11, 1934, Lange's young friend, the artist and wanderer Everett Ruess left Escalante for the primitive wilderness of southwestern Utah. He was never seen again.³ While living in San Francisco, Ruess became good friends with both Maynard Dixon and

¹Brian Q. Cannon, *Life and Land: The Farm Security Administration Photographers in Utah, 1936-1941*, (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1988), 6.

²Lange was solely responsible for Region IX, covering California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. Therefore, she was responsible for a large portion of the Mormon communities in the West.

³See W.L. Rusho, *Everett Ruess: A Vagabond for Beauty*, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith Publisher, 1983).

Dorothea Lange and was included in their bohemian circle of friends.⁴ Lange, it seems, even became a motherly figure to the drifting young man, providing companionship or his “first cooked meal in over a week.”⁵ Ruess might have been another reason for Lange to visit Escalante. Arriving less than a year and a half after the boy’s mysterious disappearance, it is quite possible that Lange had Ruess on her mind while traveling through the streets where her friend was last seen.

Everett Ruess’ romantic notions of the west were, to an extent, shared by Lange. Like Ruess, there was something that drew her to the southwestern United States. Long before she began to photograph professionally in California, Lange had always been attracted to distant lands. At age 23, she headed out from her home in Hoboken, New Jersey, on a world-wide trip with her friend Florence Ahlstrom. With \$140 and a camera, she set out, as Lange recalled, “to go away as far as I could go.”⁶ They made it as far as San Francisco where their money was stolen. From that point on, Lange made the west her home.

⁴Lange, Dixon, and their circle of friends, including Ansel Adams, were frequently mentioned in Ruess’ letters written to his family during his seven month sojourn in San Francisco (October 1933-March 1934). Ruess had a great admiration for both Lange and Dixon, both professionally and privately. It seems that Ruess found in the Dixons a couple who could teach him and provide some semblance of home. He allowed Dixon to teach him, sat for portrait studies for Lange, and traveled with her to photograph Kahn Alan. Rusho, 113-115, 118, 136, 182. See also Donald Hagerty, *Desert Dreams: The Art and Life of Maynard Dixon*, (Layton, Utah: Perrigrine Smith Gibbs, 1994), 194-195.

⁵Rusho, 113-114, 128.

⁶Milton Meltzer, *Dorothea Lange: A Photographer’s Life*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1978), 33-34.

On at least nine different occasions Lange photographed Utah.⁷ She was attracted to the state's spectacular scenery and small Mormon villages. Lange saw the Mormons in these towns as a "people of a heroic mold living against a demonic landscape."⁸ She praised the towns for their virtues and self-sufficiency, and seemed to relish the fact that there were no "neon signs."⁹ In Escalante, Lange drew upon these romantic notions of the west – instilling her portrait of the town with a sense of resiliency, and ruggedness. In other words, she highlighted the distinct characteristics of its pioneer heritage that helped form the town sixty years earlier.

Escalante was a perfect site for analysis because, first of all, it was a true Mormon settlement. In 1875, Mormon pioneers began settling the area around Escalante. They had found the area nestled in the fertile Potato Valley and surrounded by desert mountains. Like Widtsoe, the area was settled after the official call to colonize had ceased. The original settlers came from the nearby communities of Beaver and Panguitch. Their reason

⁷Lange visited Utah in 1933, March-April 1936, May 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1941, 1951, 1953. See *Dorothea Lange : Photographs of a Lifetime*, with an essay by Robert Coles; afterword by Therese Heyman, (Millerton, N.Y. : Aperture, c1995); Meltzer; Dorothea Lange files in the Oakland Museum.

⁸Meltzer, 289.

⁹Meltzer, 78; Sandra Phillips and others, *Dorothea Lange; American Photographs*, (San Francisco: Chronicle books and the San Francisco Museum of Art, 1994), 32; *The Thunderbird Remembered : Maynard Dixon, the Man and the Artist / Sketched from Memory by his wife, Dorothea Lange, his last wife Edith Hamlin, and his two sons Daniel & John*, (Los Angeles : University of Washington Press, c1994), 56-58. See also *Dorothea Lange Look at the American Country Woman*, a photographic essay by Dorothea Lange with a commentary by Beaumont Newhall, (Fort Worth: Fort Worth Museum, 1967).

for coming was to find a more pleasant climate and one more suited to agriculture.¹⁰ In the arid Potato Valley, they found what they desired, a mild climate for their farms and an abundance of grazing land. The town was built following the pattern of other Mormon settlements throughout the west. It became an outpost on the edge of the Mormon frontier.¹¹ When Lange arrived, she found a typical Mormon community relatively untouched by the outside world. A contemporary tourist guide termed Escalante an “Old fashioned Mormon community.”¹² It was still considered a “horse town” where even the paperboy delivered his papers on horseback.¹³

As mentioned earlier, Lange was already quite familiar with Mormon settlements by the time she returned for the RA in 1936. More specifically, she was particularly familiar with the small communities of southern Utah.¹⁴ Through her travels she knew the arid terrain, the towns, and the people of these Mormon communities. Like other travelers, she had seen the characteristic signs of Mormon town life. She knew the

¹⁰Lowry Nelson, *The Mormon Village*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1952), 86.

¹¹Escalante was the drop off point for Mormon pioneers heading toward southeastern Utah. It was the last stop before Hole in the Rock and the Colorado River. Marilyn Jackson, “Escalante,” Utah Encyclopedia at <http://cddy.media.utah.edu>. Accessed June 1999.

¹²*Utah: a Guide to the State*, Writers’ Program, W.P.A., Utah, (New York: Hastings House, 1941), 340.

¹³*Utah: a Guide to the State*, 340.

¹⁴In 1933, Lange and her husband, Maynard Dixon, spent two months traveling through southern Utah. They lived with Mormons, traveled through their towns, and even left their boys with a Mormon family in Toquerville. Although I mentioned this earlier, I submit that her vision of Utah in 1936 was directly shaped by this earlier visit to the state.

economic and social resiliency of these settlements.¹⁵ Interestingly in Widtsoe she had seen one of these Mormon communities die. She came to Escalante to see if another similar community could survive.

Escalante had another feature that made it ideal for such an investigation – its isolation. In 1936, Escalante was still a frontier town even in the 1930's when the west was assumed to be completely tamed. As Lange painstakingly learned, State 23 was the only way of getting to the city. In her field notes, Lange commented, in either shock or frustration, that Escalante had only “1 road” in or out and it was “83 miles to nearest R.R.”¹⁶ This isolation made Escalante an ideal subject for her photographic probe of a Mormon community. It was isolated from the outside world by both distance and topography, making it a perfect case study.¹⁷ Escalante was a pristine setting unadulterated by outside influences. Like Lowry Nelson, a sociologist who used Escalante as one of his case studies for his 1952 book - *The Mormon Village*, Lange would use the town to explore how small Mormon villages were surviving the Great Depression.¹⁸

Despite its apparent strengths, Escalante suffered during the Great Depression. For

¹⁵Wallace Stegner noted similar attributes in people who settled land no one else wanted. See Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country*, (New York: Bonanza Books, 1942), chapter 4; Sandra Phillips and others, *Dorothea Lange: American Photographs*, (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 32.

¹⁶Dorothea Lange Field Notes, 26.

¹⁷Nelson, 83.

¹⁸Nelson's research was a time study with his initial work in Escalante done in 1923. He returned in 1950 to report how the town had changed through the Depression, WWII, etc.

one resident, Escalante, it seemed, suffered from “One depression after another.”¹⁹ When Lange arrived in April 1936, the community was still struggling from the effects of the 1934 drought when only 7.38 inches of rain fell.²⁰ Water, always a problem for the city, was in dire demand. Low years had hurt the area’s farmers. The lack of water was so pressing that Escalante was a potential resettlement irrigation area.²¹ Comments recorded in Lange’s field notes contain a sense of need and urgency. Twice in her notes she recorded the need for a local dam to help with the fluctuations in yearly rainfalls. In addition to the problems with water, Escalante also had a serious problem with its other primary industry, livestock. In general, the town was heavily indebted to livestock with the average owner owning 108 head of cattle and 611 head of sheep.²² All of this grazing eventually took its toll on the town’s environs. Like Widtsoe, and especially the Rush Valley, drastic overgrazing on public lands forced the government to step in and rehabilitate the severely depleted lands.

With both of the city’s main industries – farming and ranching – suffering, the

¹⁹Dorothea Lange Field Notes, 27.

²⁰Escalante’s normal precipitation was 11.21" a year. Utah State Planning Board, *A State Plan for Utah; Progress Report, April 15, 1935*, (Salt Lake City, 1935), 13. However, in 1934, Utah averaged 9" of rainfall -- four inches below normal. Nationwide rainfall was only 35% of normal in that same year. Utah faired slightly better at 51% of normal, but combined with record breaking heat the drought of 1934 was particularly devastating. Leonard Arrington, “Utah’s Great Drought of 1934,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* vol. 54 no.3 (Summer 1986): 245-264; Nelson, 110.

²¹A point that Lange made sure to include in her list of captions sent to Stryker. Lange-Stryker, Fall 1936, Stryker Collection, UL.

²²Nelson, 87.

people needed some way of enduring the ups and downs. One resident noted that the town needed a “cannin’ factory” or, in other words, an industry that was stable and consistent.²³ No other industries were coming and the people of Escalante were forced to hold on to what they knew best: grazing and farming. The area where residents had once claimed, “It is easy to make a living in this community” and where “everybody lived wonderfully” was now becoming increasingly depressed in terms of economy.²⁴

Despite its problems, the town survived. Like other struggling communities, Escalante possessed a defiant spirit of self-sufficiency and a sense of community. By working together the residents were able to overcome their hardships. If the members of the community were lacking, others came to their aid. Della Christiansen, a long time resident of Escalante, remembers that if they did not have food, their neighbors shared what they had. In this way she “always knew where [the] next mouth full came from.”²⁵ When Lange arrived, the hardships were not over, and yet, her photographs do not show its difficulties. Rather the photographs show a people who have already conquered the uncertain future by means of their unity and strength.

Wanting to know how small isolated villages were able to survive, the Federal Government – including the RA and, therefore, Lange – looked to places like Escalante. The RA’s *Land Policy Circular* tried to understand these towns,

²³Dorothea Lange Field notes, 26.

²⁴Nelson, 97; Della Christiansen, interview by the author, August 1999, Escalante, Utah, notes in possession of the author.

²⁵Della Christiansen interview.

Utah, unlike most other States in the Union, has had a planned background. The early Mormon pioneers envisaged future towns and farms on the desert wastes, so they set to work to plan and followed the plan. This forethought probably accounts in large measure for the present advanced stage of its farm living standards.²⁶

The government hoped that by understanding the Mormon village they could help other small communities by applying some of the same principles.²⁷

In comparison to the two communities she had photographed earlier, Consumers and Widtsoe, Escalante possessed a permanence that was not visible in Lange's earlier assignments.²⁸ In her entire assignment in Escalante, Lange only photographed a small number of its residents. In one of these photographs an elderly gentleman, aged 94, stands before his weather-beaten house (figure 45). Lange noted that he was a Mormon convert who came from Denmark as a boy.²⁹ The house looks like those that Lange photographed in Widtsoe. The boards of the walls are extremely old and dilapidated, and the window seems pieced together. Unlike the Widtsoe photographs, however, this one conveys a different mood. It does not exhibit the hope of the young Widtsoe family, nor the sorrow

²⁶A review of Ray M. Hill article "Planning in Utah" in Resettlement Administration, *Land Policy Circular*: Division of Land Utilization, Land planning Section, (Washington D.C.: December 1936), 20.

²⁷The creators of the New Deal were extremely interested in utopian communities, perhaps even basing certain aspects of the New Deal after communities such as the Mormons, the Rappites, and the Amana Colonies. See Ohrn, 48, 246. See also Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968) 92, 62-63.

²⁸Cannon, *Life and Land*, 6.

²⁹Caption for LC-USF-34-1346-C. I have been told that this could be Bishop Schow, who served as Bishop and leader of the community for thirty-five years, but this is not a positive identification.

of Christine Snyder. Instead, the man exhibits a stubborn strength. Despite his circumstances, it seems there is nothing which would tear him out of his familiar surroundings. Dressed for Sunday church, he shows the strong determination and spiritual reliance that helped him survive living on the frontier of Utah.

In all, Lange did not focus on the subtle poverty in Escalante. The old home of the Danish man is probably the only hint of the town's problems. Even the small houses Lange photographed, such as *Village Dwelling* (figure 46), do not have the same destitute feeling that the occupied homes in Widtsoe had. Overall, it is apparent that Lange wanted to show a town on the verge of overcoming the trials of the Great Depression.

The only other people Lange photographed in Escalante are an aging couple. Along with their age, both eighty-five years old, Lange notes that they were converts to the Mormon church from South Africa.³⁰ Like the other elderly man, they are dressed in their Sunday clothes (figure 47). Together they reveal the strength of the community. Through Lange's photograph they become living examples of Escalante's trials, longevity, and endurance. It must have been odd for outsiders like Lange to encounter people from Denmark and South Africa. They must have wondered why such people would travel all the way across the world to live in a desert community like Escalante. All of these virtues are explored in the portraits of this couple. They are posed sitting together in front of a brick building. The various sizes and colors of the brick demonstrate that they were locally made. Together they are united, composing one identity instead of two separate figures.

³⁰All of the information about this couple is from Lange's caption from photograph LC-USF-34-001343-C.

Their aged faces reveal the hardship and happiness of their lives in Escalante as they either smile or wince. Their well-kept church clothing demonstrates their dedication, and diligence to their religion.

The next portrait Lange captured is that of the elderly woman alone in front of a door (figure 48). Lange notes that she was the first school teacher in Escalante. Like the portraits of Christine Snyder in Widtsoe and Maryann Savage in Toquerville, the old school teacher is an example of a strong courageous woman whose sacrifice helped make her surroundings better. This photograph reveals Lange's use of device and technique to bring out the dignity of her subject. Like the Consumers Coal miner, this woman stands tall, fills the scene, and stares directly into the camera. She is shown as strong, courageous, and dignified. Simply, she reflects the enduring spirit of Escalante.

In another joint portrait, the same South African couple stands before the same framed door (figure 49). Again Lange, through her photography, demonstrates the qualities of the couple – their strength, hope, age, and vitality. It is possible that she included more of the brick building to highlight the permanence of the town itself. The solid brick wall creates a drastic contrast to the extremely worn wooden buildings of Widtsoe. Escalante, like Widtsoe, was a frontier town, and yet, in photographing such a permanent structure and permanent stalwart residents, Lange seems to be suggesting that, unlike Widtsoe, this small Mormon town will survive.

This message is solidified in Lange's photographs of the central block in Escalante (figure 50). In focusing on the Star Hall, the store, and the elementary school, all stacked

next to one another, Escalante adopts a sense of stability and security.³¹ In comparison, Lange's photographs of Widtsoe did not have the same sense of permanence (see figure 35). In Widtsoe, each building was photographed by itself and never as part of a whole unit, thus the structures each seemed detached and vulnerable. Widtsoe appeared to be a town that was perishable and fleeting.

The purpose Lange had in traveling to Escalante must have been more than to simply photograph the permanence and endurance of the town. There has to be another reason to explain the remaining photographs of the town itself. From these photographs and their captions, it is very apparent that Lange wanted to also create a portrait of an unadulterated Mormon community. In order to create a portrait of rural America, Stryker undoubtedly needed to procure descriptive photographs of the west, and more specifically the Mormon west.³²

In photographing the particulars of Escalante, Lange not only showed that the town was surviving the Depression, but she also showed the details of a traditional

³¹Della Christiansen interview.

³²Although the photographs of Escalante would be made a couple of years before his famous 'shooting scripts', Stryker understood that he needed to collect as many details about the United States as he could. The entire nature of the RA/FSA photographic unit depended on collecting a varied and complete portrait of rural America. He needed to have an ample supply and quantity of photographs to comply with the wide variety of requests his agency received. In writing to Russell Lee in 1937, Stryker remarked, "Our file is a surprising reservoir of material. You have no idea how many people come in here for pictures. Material which seems to have outlived its usefulness is just now coming into wide circulation. The thing we must learn is that there are strata of demand for pictures . ." Quoted in Jack F. Hurley, "The Farm Security Administration File, In and Out of Focus," *History of Photography* vol.17, (Autumn 1993) : 250. According to Howe, 175 newspapers and magazines used the photographs between 1938 and 1940 alone. Howe, 238.

Mormon settlement. In her list of captions that she sent to Stryker in the fall of 1936, Lange entitled her work in Escalante, “A study of the Mormon village of Escalante, Utah. – Farm village community.”³³ In typical FSA fashion, Lange’s assignment was to document more than the effects of the Depression. It was to document the area itself. The Escalante collection reveals that Lange was systematically photographing the unique and readable aspects of the Mormon landscape.

Like the communities from which they came, the pioneer settlers of Escalante built the city according to the traditional Mormon landscape.³⁴ Like a majority of early Mormon settlements, Escalante was built according to the plat of the City of Zion. This design’s origin was spiritual and theological with practical underpinnings.³⁵ Spiritually, it derived from Joseph Smith and the idea of basing the earthly kingdom of the church upon its heavenly counterpart. The theological basis of the Mormon plat arose from an in-depth study of scripture to try to decipher the physical make up of heavenly cities, such as old Jerusalem.³⁶ The plan proved to be practically effective for a number of reasons such as for social, economical, and defensive purposes. Most importantly, it created a spirit of unity

³³Lange to Stryker, Fall 1936, Roy Stryker Collection, UL.

³⁴For an definition of the Mormon landscape see Richard Francaviglia, “The Mormon Landscape: Definitions of an Image in the American West,” in *Association of American Geographers: Proceedings* vol. 2, 1970 : 59-61.

³⁵For a more complete account of the City of Zion and its origins consult Nelson, 35-40.

³⁶Parley Pratt used the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Revelations, and Ether (Book of Mormon) to try to reconstruct the nature of the City of Zion. See Nelson, 36.

under which the common objective of the United Order could be fostered.³⁷

Kirtland, Ohio, was the first town to be plotted according to the design. From there it followed the Mormons from Missouri to Nauvoo to Salt Lake City. From Salt Lake City the plan spread to each area colonized by Mormon settlers. Consequently each town, even those hundreds of miles from the church headquarters, contained similar elements. For those traveling through the Mormon corridor, like Lange or Wallace Stegner, these distinctive elements became symbols for the church and its people.³⁸

Lange emphasized these aspects in her work in Escalante. Many of the photographs in Lange's Escalante portfolio document the particular elements of the Mormon City of Zion. Richard Francaviglia, in his lecture "The Mormon Landscape: Definitions of an Image in the American West," outlined ten elements common to the Mormon Landscape: wide streets, roadside irrigation ditches, barns inside of the town, unpainted farm buildings, open field landscape around the town, the hay derrick, the "Mormon fence" – a fence made of crude unpainted components, a distinctive domestic architecture style, dominant use of brick, and the Mormon ward chapel.³⁹ Lange photographed nine of the ten elements in Escalante alone.⁴⁰ From the layout of the city to

³⁷Lowry Nelson, "The Mormon Village: Retrospect and Prospect," *Improvement Era* (1936).

³⁸Wallace Stegner's *Mormon Country*, 1942, is a good example of how an "outsider," such as Stegner, understood the details of Mormon towns.

³⁹Francaviglia, 59-61.

⁴⁰The only indicator of the Mormon Landscape she does not photograph is the hay derrick. Russell Lee would photograph a derrick or "Mormon hay Stacker" for the FSA four years later in Box Elder County (LC-USF-34-37288-D).

its wide streets and irrigation ditches, her photographs read like visual descriptors of a typical Mormon Community.

Easily noticed by travelers, the extra wide streets were, and still are, an obvious sign of an early Mormon settlement. Based on the notion that the City of Heaven had streets 132 feet across, many Mormon towns constructed streets from 75 to 100 feet across.⁴¹ After driving through Utah, or what he called “Mormon Country,” Wallace Stegner joked of the streets, “eight rods wide [is] enough, just in case there are traffic problems in Heaven, to allow for ten lanes of automobiles plus parallel parking on both sides.”⁴² These unique features may be seen in Lange’s photographs. One caption reads, “The streets of Escalante (farm village), Utah. Note width of the street, according to patterns laid down by Mormon Church.”⁴³ In images, such as *The Approach to the Church* (figure 51), or the scene immediately down Center street, *Main Street and Town Center* (figure 52), the width of the street is made to appear as large as possible. The streets appear so large that they do not even seem to fit into the scheme of the city itself. To achieve such an open area, as she showed in *Main Street and Town Center*, Lange would have needed to have her back to the corner of the building on Center and Main.⁴⁴ The size of the streets is emphasized to such an extent that they appear to be open fields and not

⁴¹Francaviglia, 59.

⁴²Stegner, 25.

⁴³Caption LC-USF-34-001357-C

⁴⁴The building from which this photograph was taken was the old Lyman house, or what is today the Padre Hotel.

city streets. The gravel pavement of the streets is also important as another characteristic of the Mormon towns.⁴⁵

Early Mormon settlements, like Escalante, were laid out according to a standard and strict grid plan aligned with the cardinal directions. A typical Mormon settlement was divided up into 18 five acre blocks. These blocks were further divided up in to 1.25 acre lots per family.⁴⁶ Unlike other American settlements, the homes in a Mormon settlement were clustered together in a centralized community.⁴⁷ Their barns were located on their home plots within the city itself, while their fields remained outside of the city's boundaries. The close proximity of the town's residents created a greater sense of community, unity, and protection among the people.⁴⁸ For Stegner, this unity was one of the reasons these communities had remained so strong. According to him, the Mormon village was "a social, economic, educational, and religious unit." This multi-faceted unity, he continues, was the "unit that best met conditions on the frontier and after the frontier almost passed."⁴⁹

Lange's photographs captured these Mormon elements within the town. She photographed Mormon homes built "after the Utah Pattern."⁵⁰ In *Mormon Village Home*,

⁴⁵Francaviglia, 59.

⁴⁶Nelson, 87.

⁴⁷See Nelson, 4-10.

⁴⁸Nelson, 26.

⁴⁹Stegner, 31.

⁵⁰Caption LC-USF034001358-C

the patterns of domestic Mormon architecture are illustrated. The home is a substantial two-story building in an I-style architecture – a style that is uniquely Mormon (figure 53).⁵¹ Just visible behind the house is the unpainted barn, which, in a very typical manner, shares the city lot with the residence. In all, this home could be found in any settlement across Utah. These homes were the center of important family life. In her notes Lange recorded, “If you could have all the people’s been raised in this house you’d have a plenty. They’re all here.”⁵² In Escalante, the two strongest ties that united the community were family and church.⁵³ In this image the old traditional Mormon dwelling becomes a symbol of the strength of the family.

A photograph entitled *From the village to the Field* shows another important aspect of the Mormon village (figure 54). In photographing a simple “Mormon” fence, Lange captured the dividing line between the town and the fields. According to Lange, this fence was the gateway from the village to the field. In Escalante, the farmers’ fields were an average of 2.3 miles away from their homes.⁵⁴ The separation of the farm and the field had its setbacks and inconveniences, but these were offset by the social and economic advantages of village life.⁵⁵

Even something as mundane as irrigation ditches on the side of the main road are a

⁵¹Francaviglia, 60.

⁵²Dorothea Lange Field notes, 26.

⁵³Nelson, 101.

⁵⁴Nelson, 94.

⁵⁵Nelson, 93-94.

trait of the Mormon village. These functional ditches arose out of Brigham Young's awareness of the need for dependable village irrigation. With time they became common in Mormon settlements.⁵⁶ Lange unceremoniously photographed the irrigation ditch running down the side of Main Street (figure 55). By photographing it, she identifies another distinct element particular to the Mormon settlement.

The most distinguishing feature of any early Mormon community is the presence and activities of the Mormon Church. One of its primary symbols is the presence of a lay-clergy. Escalante was, according to the WPA tourist guide, "one of the few remaining Utah places where ecclesiastical officials arbitrate civil problems."⁵⁷ Lange photographed one of these leaders, Bishop Harvey C. Bailey three times.⁵⁸ In all three photographs, Bishop Bailey stands in front of his home with his hat in hand, and dressed for Sunday church. Bishop Bailey stands tall and proud. His eyes reveal a flash of suspicion towards this outsider photographing his town.⁵⁹ He is much younger than the elderly members

⁵⁶Francaviglia, 59.

⁵⁷*Utah: a Guide to the State*, 340.

⁵⁸Lange's photographs of Bishop Bailey are among her personal negatives she kept from the agency. They may be found in the collection of the Oakland Museum (Dorothea Lange Collection, Contact Sheet, File No. 35184). His name is recorded in Lange's Field Notes, 27. It was common for Lange to meet the local bishops and record their names. For her 1953 *Life* assignment she met and photographed Bishop Hunt of Gunlock and Bishop Fish of Toquerville. Dorothea Lange Collection, vol. 40 # 53147 and vol. 41 # 53222 respectively.

⁵⁹Lange sometimes encountered a great deal of suspicion and distrust when entering particular Mormon communities. When returning to photograph for *Life* in 1953, Lange's group (including: Taylor, Ansel Adams, and her son Daniel Dixon) ran into problems with the local Mormon leadership in communities such as St. George, Gunlock, and Toquerville. For more information on their difficulties see Paul S. Taylor, *Paul Schuster*

Lange photographed. He reflects the leadership of the community that has passed from the older pioneers to Bailey's generation.

Besides the wide streets, the most obvious sign of a Mormon community is the Mormon meeting house, or ward chapel.⁶⁰ In her photograph *Approach to the Church*, Lange carefully emphasizes the progression towards the church in a sea of gravel and dirt. It is a wonderfully crafted image where the two preceding buildings: the store on the corner of Main Street and Center Street, and the Tithing House, which at the time was acting as the high school (figure 56), lead the eye to the white sandstone chapel sitting on the hillside. In the next image, Lange shows nothing but the two story chapel sitting high on "meeting house hill." Like Bishop Baily it stands tall and proud. Its elevated place is further accentuated by the way the steeple pierces the sky (figure 57). As this image shows, Lange could not only dignify human beings, but she could dignify a lifeless building as well. Unlike the wooden chapel in Widtsoe, the Escalante chapel has a sense of permanence to it (see figure 36). Its solid stone walls seem stable and eternal. In her caption of the photograph, she noted that the chapel, in a typical Mormon fashion, is in the center of the town.⁶¹ Symbolically this building represents the central place the church had

Taylor: California Social Scientist. vol. I, An interview by Suzanne Reiss (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, 1973), 242-244; Meltzer, 289-291.

⁶⁰Francaviglia, 60.

⁶¹Francaviglia, 60.

in their lives. It represents their defiant pride, their craftsmanship, and strength.⁶²

The *Approach to the church* reveals another important aspect of Lange's work in Escalante. Overall, Lange's photographs of the city make it appear to be empty and abandoned. In this image in particular, the streets are completely bare, and the buildings completely silent. On a normal day, teenagers would be heading to the school, and even a Sunday would see patrons heading toward the church. In all, it is a lifeless image. In fact, each of her photographs of the town are still. Main Street and its stores appear more like a ghost town than a city that was weathering the Depression fairly well. Ironically, at the time, the city was anything but empty. In 1940 the city reached its highest population ever with a total of 1161 residents.⁶³ When the residents saw the images it made them very displeased. Della Christiansen remembers being angry about how Lange portrayed her town.⁶⁴ Of Lange's Escalante portfolio she said, "She made us look like the poorest town in the world." She remembers, "The town was damn mad. If you starved to death it was your own fault."⁶⁵

What is interesting about Lange's work in Escalante is that she focused only on the older pioneer generation of the town. The three people she photographed for the RA/FSA

⁶²The chapel was built in 1886 and was eventually torn down and replaced with a larger, more modern meeting house.

⁶³Nelson, 95.

⁶⁴The people of Escalante saw Lange's images in an unknown publication that I have yet to find. What is interesting is that townspeople like Christiansen knew exactly what I was talking about when I mentioned the 'Depression photographs.' With Mrs. Christiansen I barely mentioned the photographs before she told me all about them.

⁶⁵Della Christiansen interview.

files were all age eighty five or older. In the photographs she sent to Washington, she completely ignored the city's younger generation.⁶⁶ Ironically, at the time, 73.3% of the town was age thirty-four or younger.⁶⁷ Another Lange photograph, taken in 1951, shows the same chapel she photographed during her earlier visit to the town (figure 58).⁶⁸ Unlike her earlier photograph, the 1951 image is teeming with life and activity as scores of children parade down the gravel sidewalks toward Main Street. In Lange's earlier photograph all of this activity is completely removed. Instead of a young town, Escalante looks old and deserted.⁶⁹

In her 1953 assignment for *Life*, "Three Mormon Towns," Lange would again repeat this pattern of making a city appear to be something that it was not. As she had done in Escalante, she made Toquerville's townspeople appear to be old and wilting. The headline introducing the town read, "Toquerville is old and quiet but its children have gone

⁶⁶The photographs of Bishop Bailey, the only younger member of the town Lange photographed, remained buried in her private collection and were not sent to Washington D.C. During his brief stay in Escalante, Everett Ruess noted the many residents his own age. He had many young companions and even noted that if he was to stay much longer he might have "fallen in love with a Mormon girl." See Rusho, 176-180.

⁶⁷Nelson, 116.

⁶⁸This photograph could have been taken when Lange returned to do preliminary work for her Guggenheim Award. For this award, she looked at utopian religious communities such as the Mormon settlements, Amana colonies, and the Hutterites. See Sandra Phillips, *Dorothea Lange: American Photographs*, 79.

⁶⁹It is possible that the ghost town effect was completely unintended. Any early Mormon community would look abandoned on a Sunday morning. Yet, if Lange made all that effort to reach the extremely isolated village I do not see her spending only an hour in a town that took her hours to reach.

away.”⁷⁰ Yet, in analyzing her other photographs of Toquerville found in her private collection, it is obvious that the town was not in decay, but was young and vibrant.⁷¹ Like in Escalante, Lange would characterize the town by only highlighting its pioneer generation.

Lange’s selection of homes to photograph may also be called into question. At the time, and even now, Escalante had a number of nice red brick homes bordering its wide streets. These homes, most of which were built before 1910, were finely crafted with ornate carpentry and walls often several bricks thick.⁷² In photographing the church on the hill, Lange would have had two elegant homes directly at her back.⁷³ Yet, Lange ignored these homes and, instead, photographed the older log homes that were some of the first homes to be built in the area.⁷⁴ Instead of showing the best the town had to offer, Lange showed the town the way she pictured it, as an old pioneer town.

Unlike Consumers and Widtsoe, where nothing remains, it is possible in Escalante

⁷⁰Dorothea Lange, Daniel Dixon, and Ansel Adams, “Three Mormon Towns,” *Life* (6 September 1954) : 92. Interestingly, one of the other towns highlighted in the article, Gunlock, was portrayed as the antithesis of Toquerville. It was shown as a young vivacious little hamlet tucked away in Utah’s dixie. Ironically, it was in Gunlock that Lange realized that she was getting old. See Meltzer, 289-291.

⁷¹See the Dorothea Lange Collection Vol. 40-42, Oakland Museum.

⁷²Della Christiansen interview.

⁷³The two red-brick homes that faced the church were built by Don Carlos Shrutz and Josiah Shrutz in 1900 and 1910. See Sheila Woolley, *Walking Tours of Pioneer Homes and Barns*, Advertisement Brochure. Daughters of Utah Pioneers and the City of Escalante.

⁷⁴See images *Village Dwelling* - figure 46 and *Home after the Utah Pattern* -figure 59

to see the extent to which Lange's work is an interpretation of the town and not a mirror of its reality. Today, the town is similar to the way it was when Lange visited in 1936. Many of the original stores, buildings, homes, and barns remain.⁷⁵ In that sense, Escalante allows one to see the extent of Lange's visual editing. The town itself is evidence that Lange's photography did alter the physical characteristics of the village in order to construct her own vision. Through this vision, Escalante was not shown as a young, busy, and industrious town. Rather, Lange emphasized elements such as the town's permanence and its Mormon pioneer heritage. These two virtues were not wrongly assigned to the city; they were definitely a part of the town's identity. Yet, in Lange's photography these two virtues came to dominate all other aspects. In doing this, Lange's portrait of Escalante becomes decidedly slanted and incomplete.

In the end, Lange's photographs of Escalante captured a town before it was to change forever. While Lange photographed the emblems of Escalante's pioneer past, other New Deal "Alphabet agencies" were dismantling some of the city's traditions.⁷⁶ A CCC camp, located just outside of the city, was constructing a new highway from Escalante to Boulder. This road was to create new ties between the city and the state. Escalante's celebrated isolation was to be threatened as "foreigners" began to travel more frequently to and through the town.⁷⁷ A WPA project, which began at around the same time as Lange's visit, was constructing a domestic water system that piped water from the Pine

⁷⁵See Woolley, *Walking Tours of Pioneer Homes and Barns*.

⁷⁶Cannon, *Life and Land*, 6.

⁷⁷Nelson, 110.

Creek seven miles away.⁷⁸ No longer would the city need the wells or irrigation ditch which Lange photographed.⁷⁹ Even the old power station Lange photographed, which only gave power for light from dusk to 11 p.m., was to be replaced by a more consistent source.⁸⁰

These changes, although relatively small, were to have a growing impact on the town.⁸¹ Escalante evolved, and is still evolving, from a small pioneer town to a growing agriculture city with tourism as one of its main industries.⁸² When Lowry Nelson returned in 1950 to complete the work he had begun in 1923, he noticed the changes the city had undergone. One of the most noticeable was the change in the community. In 1923 he had noticed a sense of “We,” a pioneer sense of community, unity and togetherness. By 1950, this attitude had changed into a “Me” community where people cared more for themselves than they did for the community as a whole.⁸³ In comparison to the rest of America,

⁷⁸Nelson, 111; Cannon, *Life and Land*, 6.

⁷⁹See her photograph of one of the city’s 100 wells - *Water supply in Escalante, Utah*, LC-USF34-001333-E

⁸⁰LC-USF34-001349-E. Its caption: “Power station. This power station services the town from dark until 11 p.m. only. One day a week during daylight hours it is saved for special purposes.”Special purposes such as washing machines. This system owned by the Shrutz family changed in the late 1930’s when Garkane Power took over. Nelson, 109, 120; Woolley.

⁸¹For an in-depth description Escalante’s changes see Nelson chapter VI.

⁸²Nelson, 128. Today, Escalante is undergoing another major change. With the recent creation of the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument, the once isolated town continues to grow in national exposure and popularity.

⁸³Nelson, 122-123.

Escalante is still a close-knit community with its pioneer heritage still firmly intact. Many of the early pioneer families, such as the Griffins, Woolseys, Porters, Alveys, Roundys, and others, still make Escalante their home. The distinctive Mormon pioneer spirit that Lange tried to capture, although different, is still present and alive. Escalante is, after all, the only town from Lange's 1936 assignments that still exists.

In conclusion, the Escalante Lange photographed was a personal vision that encapsulated her own notions of the pioneer heritage of Mormon Utah and its distinct elements. Through visual editing her portrait was not indicative of the reality of the town. Rather, it highlighted the characteristics that Lange felt were vital to the RA/FSA's collection.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In September, 1937, Roy Stryker's team underwent a major transition when the Resettlement Administration was assimilated by the United States Department of Agriculture. Pursuant to the change, Rexford Tugwell, the symbol of the RA, resigned.¹ With the change, Stryker and his small group became a subdivision of the Department's Farm Security Administration. The change, however, did not effect the nature of their job. The Historical Section was to continue photographing America's rural population. Although the basic organization did not change, one fundamental aspect of the photography section did – the subject matter. With time, the amount of attention given to the poor that Lange and her co-workers photographed diminished.

In the Spring of 1936 Roy Stryker visited with Robert Lynd, co-author of *Middletown*.² *Middletown* was an in depth investigation of a typical small town. Lynd had found that the values and traditions of the small town were deteriorating. The conversation produced a barrage of new ideas for Stryker. In order to create an

¹Jack F. Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 55, 95-96. See also Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 121-122, 231-233.

²Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 96-98.

exploration like that of Middletown, Stryker would change the focus of his agency to documenting the small town of rural America. Like Lynd, Stryker hoped to capture every essence of small town life before it changed forever.³ He also hoped to show that the small towns of America were fiercely preserving their time honored values. According to Hartley Howe, this new direction hoped to produce a “visual account of how America’s farmers live, work, play, eat, and sleep.”⁴

To accomplish this task, Stryker instituted his famous shooting scripts that outlined what his photographers were to look for. Selective scripts had been issued before, and Stryker was always assertive of exactly what the agency wanted to photograph, yet, the new scripts were much more detailed than any other scripts issued previously. They did not specifically outline exactly how the photographers were to tackle their assignments, but gave them suggestions, which, according to Stryker, “the photographers then elaborated in their own way.”⁵ These scripts permanently changed the way the FSA photographers chose and photographed their subjects.

The move toward shooting scripts and the documentation of small town America was not, however, the biggest transition Stryker’s agency would undergo in the last years of the 1930's. By the Summer of 1938 Stryker began to question the policy of

³Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 98.

⁴Hartley E. Howe, “Have You Seen Their Faces?” *Survey Graphic* 29:4 (April 1940) : 236.

⁵*Just Before the War*, introduction by Thomas Garver, (Balboa, Calif: Newport Art Museum, 1968), n.p. This is also a good source to see a selection of Stryker’s shooting scripts.

emphasizing only the poorest third of America's rural population.⁶ This change challenged Roosevelt's notion of "working from the bottom up, not top down."⁷ Through the thousands of images of the utter poverty his staff had collected, America's urban population was convinced that all farmers "lived like animals."⁸ Viewer comments from an FSA exhibition in the International Photographic Salon held in Grand Central Palace, New York, in the spring of 1938, reveal the effective artifice of the photographs. One viewer noted that the exhibit "touched me to the point where I would like to quit everything in order to help these stricken people."⁹ Another visitor remarked that the pictures "speak a thousand words to especially enlighten people who have never seen much farm life - and do not believe such conditions exist."¹⁰ The conditions illustrated in the photographs did exist but they were not indicative of the way a vast majority of America's rural community lived.

Stryker was rightfully concerned that the photographs were giving a false impression of farm life. At the same exhibition, another viewer wrote, "As pictures O.K. but a false impression is given of American farm conditions." Another wrote, "There are plenty of farmers in the USA who don't look like that." To genuinely reflect the average U.S. farmer, Stryker consciously moved the focus of the Historical Section away from the

⁶Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 110.

⁷Baldwin, 48.

⁸Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 112.

⁹The following comments may be found in Edward Steichen, "The FSA Photographers." *U.S. Camera* vol.1 (1939) : 46, 47, 46,60.

¹⁰Steichen, 47.

poverty of the poorest third of America's farm population, to the glowingly positive aspects of rural life.¹¹ He hoped that such a change would augment the scores of destitute farmers, already in the collection, balancing them with the optimistic aspects of the upper two-thirds of the rural population.¹² Rather than photograph destitution and poverty, Stryker's photographers were to show the other two-thirds of the nation's farmers as a prosperous people climbing out of the pit of the Great Depression.

Lange's last image of Utah, made during her tenure as a government photographer, is in keeping with this new focus. The photograph was taken on her return to California from photographing in Mississippi in August, 1938. Taken in the vicinity of the small southern Utah town of Springdale (figure 60), Lange's caption read, "Utah farm family in the orchard at the peach harvest." The image shows a family surrounded by their harvest escaping the August heat by sitting in the shade. They appear clean, prosperous, and content – if not happy. Their prosperity is accentuated by the ample baskets of peaches that fill the foreground of the photograph. In all, the photograph is a far cry from her earlier RA work done in 1936. The Springdale family is a stunning contrast to the small family in Consumers, or even the family of the *Migrant Mother*. The barren landscapes of Widtsoe were replaced with an image of harvest. Her image is indeed closer to how the majority of Utah farmers lived during the Great Depression. They had hard times, but like Della Christiansen in Escalante, they always knew that no

¹¹Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 112. See Howe, 237.

¹²Jack F. Hurley, *Russell Lee: Photographer*, (New York: Morgan and Morgan, 1978), 19.

matter what their condition they would not starve.¹³

At the time the photograph was taken, the frequency of Lange's work for the FSA was irregular and unsteady. An ever-increasing tension with Stryker, complications with correspondence between coasts, and problems with the Historical Section's budget made Lange more and more expendable.¹⁴ Between 1936 and 1940, Lange worked sparingly for the agency and was twice terminated and later rehired.¹⁵ She was used sporadically, being assigned to cover specific assignments for Stryker, and was sometimes loaned to other government agencies to photograph their projects.¹⁶ In one instance, in May 1937, Lange was loaned to the Department of Agriculture, at the request of its head, Secretary Henry Wallace, to cover a devastating cricket scourge in parts of Utah, Wyoming, and Nevada.¹⁷ Lange continued to work intermittently for the agency until 1939 when she was terminated for the last time. By 1940 she had been completely taken off the payroll.¹⁸ This separation from Stryker's group would be difficult for Lange, who lamented, "Once

¹³Della Christiansen interview; G. Melvin Foxely, interview by the author, March 1998, Salt Lake City, Utah, transcript in possession of the author.

¹⁴Budget cuts became so extensive that at one point Stryker could only afford to have Rothstein and Lee working full time. See Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 142-143.

¹⁵Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 94.

¹⁶Karin Becker Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition*, (Baton Rouge Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 109.

¹⁷*Dorothea Lange : Photographs of a Lifetime*, with an essay by Robert Coles ; afterword by Therese Heyman, (Millerton, N.Y. : Aperture, c1995), 178.

¹⁸Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 143.

an FSA guy, always an FSA guy. You don't easily get over it."¹⁹

The investigation of Utah by the FSA would be continued by other photographers. In March, 1940, Arthur Rothstein photographed various scenes in northern Utah while on his way to California to document the conditions of FSA migratory labor camps.²⁰ It was not until the summer of 1940, more than four years after Lange's initial visit, that Russell Lee produced an extensive investigation of Utah. Intermittently between July and November, 1940, Lee traveled from the Utah-Idaho border to the southern tip of Washington County. His work in Utah would be the most comprehensive investigation the state produced by the RA and FSA.²¹ In general, his portrait would look at a Utah that was much better off than Lange had found it four years earlier.²²

As Lange had done in 1936, Lee continued the investigation of Utah's small Mormon communities. In a style similar to Lange's, Lee's Mormon subjects became examples of strength, industry, and self-sufficiency.²³ However, unlike Lange, Lee

¹⁹Quoted by Ohrn, 114.

²⁰See *Documenting America, 1935-1943*, ed. Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly W. Brannan, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 188; Stryker - Rothstein, March 28, 1940, Stryker Collection, UL.

²¹Overall, Lee was much more prolific than his co-workers. In Utah, it was not only the quantity of Lee's photographs that made it the most extensive investigation, but it was also the amount of area he covered that made it the most comprehensive portfolio of the state. In all, Lee covered three counties (Box Elder, Cache, Washington) and many other areas in the state. His total output in Utah was around two hundred photographs, in comparison to Lange's 80 photographs and Rothstein's 10 (both are rough estimates).

²²See Leonard Arrington, *Utah, the New Deal and the Depression of the 1930's*, (Ogden, Utah: Weber State College Press, 1983), 24-25.

²³Though both artists came to their own personal styles independently, it is often noted that the style Lee developed was similar to Lange's, namely in the way they portrayed

focused on the most prosperous areas of the state. Instead of photographing the extremely impoverished regions, as Lange had done in Widtsoe and Tooele, Lee photographed the abundant fields of Box Elder and Cache County. In fact, the areas Lee photographed were some of the most well off during the Depression.²⁴ In July, 1940, Lee photographed three Mormon farmers posing with their FSA cooperative tractor behind them (figure 61).²⁵ The farmers appear strong and happy as all three smile unashamedly for Lee's camera. The scene, like Lange's photograph of Springdale, exhibits plentitude and prosperity. Wheat grows abundantly all around the farmers and their tractor. The bounty stretches to the fields, which extend in the background for what could be many miles. In a typical new FSA manner, this is a scene suggesting that the Great Depression is over; it shows

their human subjects. Both photographers possessed a very sympathetic eye and genuine concern for the people they photographed. See Ohrn, 69. Like Lange, Lee wanted to show people across the nation the virtues of the "migrant in California, baker in Texas, steel worker in Pennsylvania, and Mormon farmer in Utah." He wanted to show the nation how they lived. Russell Lee, "Pie Town, N.M." *US Camera* (October 1941) : 40.

²⁴Even seven years earlier in the heart of the Depression, the areas Lee photographed, specifically Box Elder County, were much better off than Consumers, Widtsoe, and the rest of the state. In 1933 the per capita relief expenditures, for example, were lowest in Box Elder County (\$2.31) and highest in Tooele (\$16.38), with the state average at \$8.27. Richard D. Poll, ed. *Utah's History*, (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1989), 486-487.

²⁵LC-USF33- 012862-M1 - caption: "FSA (Farm Security Administration) cooperative tractor and Mormon farmer members, Box Elder County, Utah." The photograph also represents a change in the operations from the RA to the FSA. Where the RA was concerned with larger projects, such as the resettlement of Widtsoe, the FSA, especially in Box Elder County, dealt with smaller scale projects, such as FSA cooperative tractors, cooperative bulls, and cooperative binders. The aim of these cooperatives was to "help farmers help themselves." See United States Department of Agriculture, "Farm Security Administration," (Washington D.C.: May 1, 1941) : 20.

that American perseverance has won out over poverty.²⁶ It suggests that Roosevelt's New Deal did what it promised; it restored prosperity and good times. Lee's photographs affirm Governor Blood's 1933 prediction that "Utah will come back."²⁷

Lee also continued where Lange left off in examining the Mormon church. In Escalante, Lange had investigated the outward symbols of the Mormon community. Lee took this one step further by going into their chapels and even photographing Mormons at worship.²⁸ In the Cache County town of Mendon, Lee photographed many aspects of a small Mormon community. In direct fulfillment of one of Stryker's shooting scripts, he photographed the patrons as they left church in their Sunday best (figure 62).²⁹ He captured the members of the local ward during Sunday School, and Priesthood Meeting as well (figure 63). While Lange focused on the past of the Mormon church in looking at the pioneer heritage of Escalante, Lee showed its present state. His photographs showed what Mormons looked like and how they worshiped in his day, 1940.³⁰

²⁶Maurice Berger, "FSA: The Illiterate Eye (1985)," in *How Art Becomes History: Essays on Art, Society, and Culture in Post-New Deal America*, (New York: Icon Editions, 1992), 18.

²⁷Quoted in Thomas Quinn, "Out of the Depression's Depths: Henry H. Blood's First Year as Governor," *Utah Historical Quarterly* vol. 54 no.3 (Summer 1986) : 218.

²⁸Lange would eventually do the same as part of her assignment for *Life* in 1953. Like Lee, she photographed the worship of the Mormons in Toquerville. During a Sacrament meeting, she photographed the speakers, and even the sacrament being blessed and passed. Oakland Museum Collection vol. 41 #53203-5.

²⁹Stryker asked specifically for "Church: People going to church; People coming out of church; People visiting after church." Shooting Script (no date) found in Arthur Rothstein, *Documentary Photography*, (Boston: Focal Press, 1986), 167.

³⁰Lee's photographs satisfied the general curiosity about the Mormon church. Reflecting this curiosity is the WPA guide's statement that "Many still journey to Utah to see a

Despite the work Rothstein, Lee, and others did in Utah, it is Lange's work that has come to typify the Great Depression in Utah.³¹ Yet, Lange's work in this context is not complete, nor did it aim to be. The photographs she made were not indicative of the state's largest problems. Her work, on the other hand, dealt primarily with the fringe of Utah's real situation. Lange's photographs did not focus on cities along the Wasatch Front or even the fruitful plains of northern Utah, as Lee did.³² Rather, she photographed the forgotten coal miner, the disappearance of Widsote, and the isolated frontier town of Escalante. In essence, the crisis of Utah's rural community was never completely covered by the RA or FSA. In fact, although Utah was ninth in total relief received per capita, it only received about 1% of the Historical Section's attention.³³

Yet, it is Lange's images which have become the state's representation of how it

Mormon." See also Lee's letter to Stryker, August 16, 1940, Stryker Collection, UL.

³¹The only other FSA photographer to visit Utah was John Vachon. His visit in April, 1942, was very brief, but it reflects two important changes to Stryker's unit. First, during his visit he experimented with color photographs while shooting Utah's fields and deserts (see *Landscape, Northeastern Utah* LC-USF35-625 A). Second, by this time the emphasis of the FSA had again completely shifted to document the nation's preparations for war. Vachon was to record "the day-by-day impact of defense on the people and towns and farms." The photographer Andreas Feininger came to Utah under Stryker's last government post, the photography director for the Office of War Information (OWI). Unlike Vachon, Lee, and the others, Feininger's vision and style was developed completely separate from Stryker's sphere of influence. For more information on these new trends in the FSA see Sally Stein, "FSA Color: The Forgotten Document," *Modern Photography* vol.43 no.1, (January 1979), 90-98; "The Home Front: US Mobilizes the First Line of Defense," *US Camera*, (September 1941), 34-37. See Andreas Feininger, *Changing America: The Land as it was and how Man has changed it*, (New York: Crown Publisher Inc., 1953).

³²Cannon, *Life and Land*, 3.

³³*Documenting America*, 337. In comparison, California received around 4% and Colorado 1% of the total lots.

survived the Depression. Textbooks of Utah history now contain the images of Christine Snyder, the poor old woman of Widtsoe, the mining family from Consumers drudging through mud and snow, and the Springdale family (figure 64).³⁴ Stryker knew that this would happen. In 1937, he noted to Lee that the long term demand would be for textbooks.³⁵ To the Washington Post in 1938, he stated that the photographs of the FSA would “become the text for future historians of America.”³⁶ Although these images do not reflect a complete portrait of the Depression in Utah and were taken by an “outsider”, Lange’s photographs have become symbols of the Great Depression for every generation that did not live through the 1930’s. This is in keeping with Lange’s notion that her work “mirrors the present and documents for the future.”³⁷ Her images have transcended the moment in which they were photographed and have become a carefully composed vision of Utah’s struggle through the Great Depression.³⁸ They represent the strength, courage,

³⁴S. George Ellsworth, *Utah’s Heritage*, (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1992), 308, 310, 311. In 1938 Beaumont Newhall predicted that the documentary approach would be the foundation of the textbooks of the future. *Utah’s Heritage* is a good example that proves him correct. Beaumont Newhall, “Documentary Approach to Photography,” *Parnassus* (March 1938): 6.

³⁵Stryker to Lee, quoted in Hurley, *In and Out*, 250.

³⁶Stryker to the Washington Post, November 37, 1938. Found in *Dorothea Lange: Farm Security Administration Photographs, 1935-1939*, ed. Howard M. Levin and Katherine Northup, introduction by Robert J. Doherty, (Glencoe, Ill: The Text-Fiche Press, 1980), 33.

³⁷Paul S. Taylor, *Paul Schuster Taylor: California Social Scientist*. vol. I. An interview by Suzanne Reiss, (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, 1973), 238a.

³⁸Robert Disraeli, “The Farm Security Administration,” A review of FSA photography, *Photo Notes* (May 1940), in *New Deal Network* at <http://www.newdeal.feri.org>, Accessed in August 1999.

misery, and hardship the people of the state endured. These precious views from the past are Lange's legacy to Utah's future.

In conclusion, this thesis has investigated the historical context of Lange's work in Utah during the Great Depression. It has done so through an examination of Lange's photographs and captions, local and state histories, FSA scholarship, scholarship on Lange, and the site itself. Through this multifaceted examination, Lange's use of visual editing has been explored. In each of her primary assignments in Utah, Consumers, Widtsoe, Escalante, Lange constructed a personal vision that supported her own notions, ideology, and altruistic sensibilities. Lange's photographs, therefore, not only supported her own beliefs, but her work in Utah also supported the propaganda needs of the New Deal's Resettlement Administration and its activities.

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Payroll for the Blue Blaze Coal Mine, Consumers, Utah, 1933.
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Interviews:

Della Christiansen, interview by the author, August 1999, Escalante, Utah, notes in
possession of the author.
Dr. J. Eldon Dorman, interview by the author, August 1999, Price Utah, tape recording in
possession of the author.
G. Melvin Foxely, interview by the author, March 1998, Salt Lake City, Utah, transcript in
possession of the author.
Virginia Reavely Jordon, interview by the author, November, 1999, notes in possession of
the author.

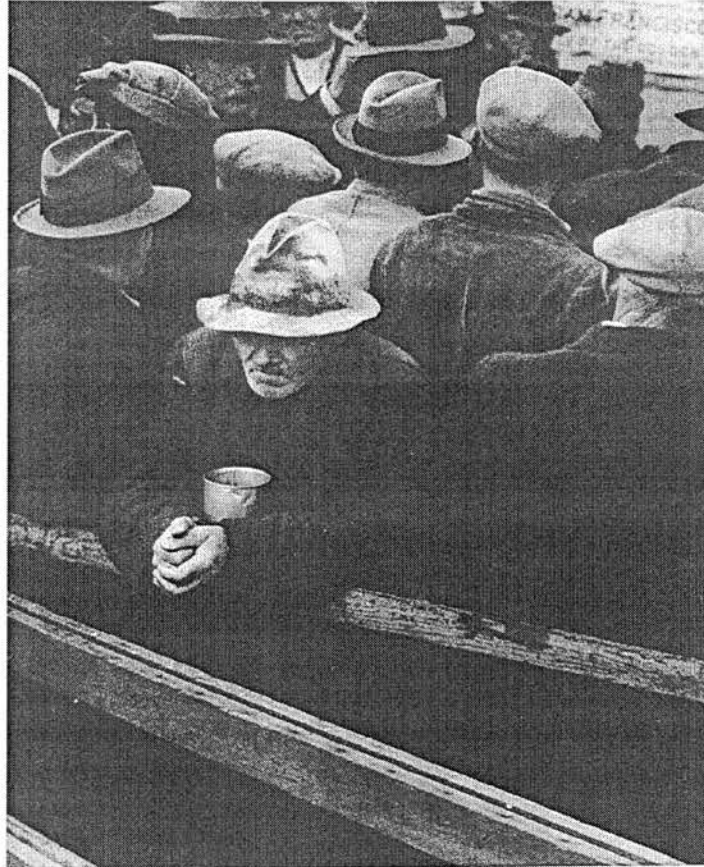


Figure 1 - Dorothea Lange, *White Angel Breadline*, 1933. Oakland Museum

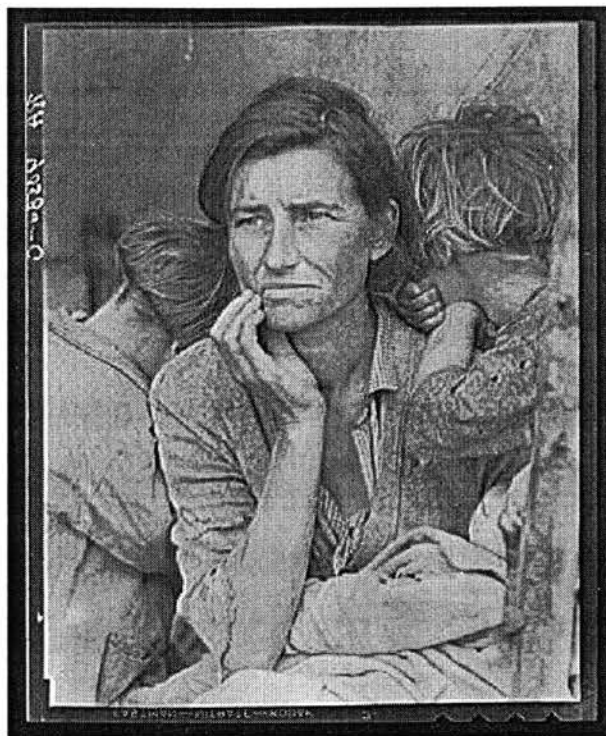


Figure 2 - Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*, February, 1936. (LC-USF-34- 009058-C)



Figure 3 - Dorothea Lange, *Maryann Savage, Handcart Pioneer, Toquerville, Utah, 1933.*



Figure 4 - Dorothea Lange, Widtsoe, Utah, Mar. 1936. Mormon woman, a native of Denmark Receiving her old age assistance check. (LC-USF-34-0018750-E)

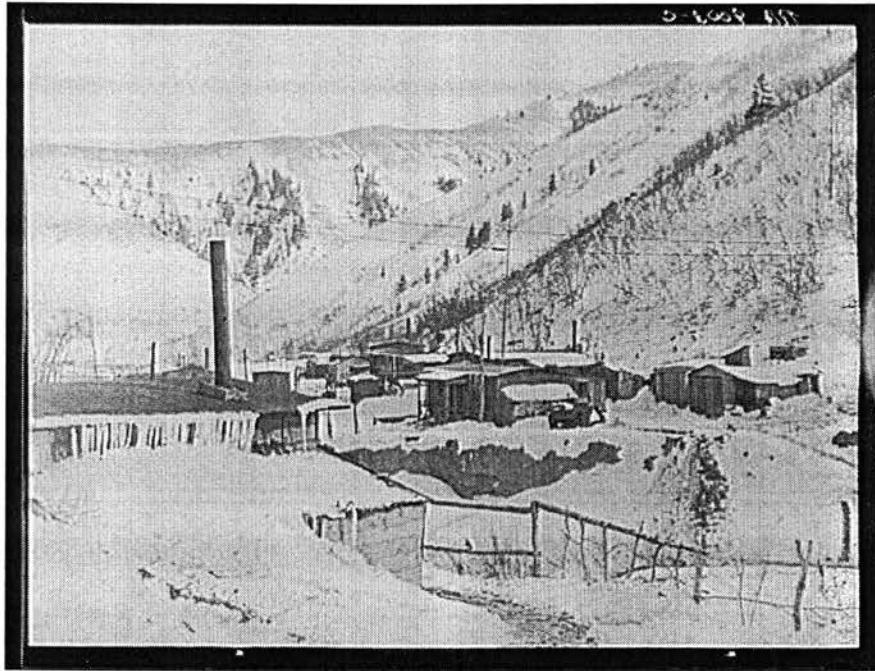


Figure 5 - Dorothea Lange, *Consumers, near Price, Utah. Mar. 1936. A settlement of workers in the Blue Blaze coal mine, which is controlled by absentee capital. Has been called the "dumping ground of the west."* (LC-USF-34-009003-C)

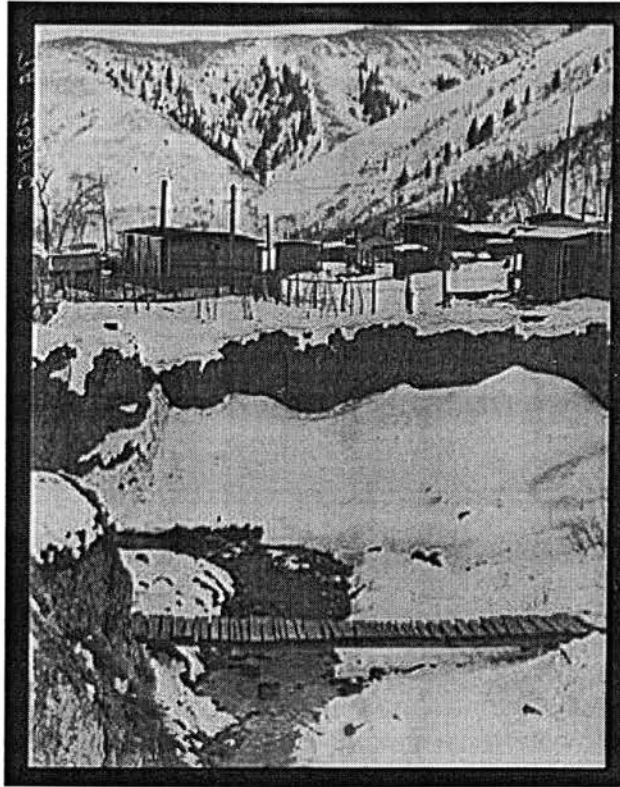


Figure 6 - Dorothea Lange, *Consumers, near Price, Utah, Mar. 1936*. A settlement of workers in the Blue Blaze coal mine, which is controlled by absentee capital. Company owned houses. (LC-USF-34-009031-C)

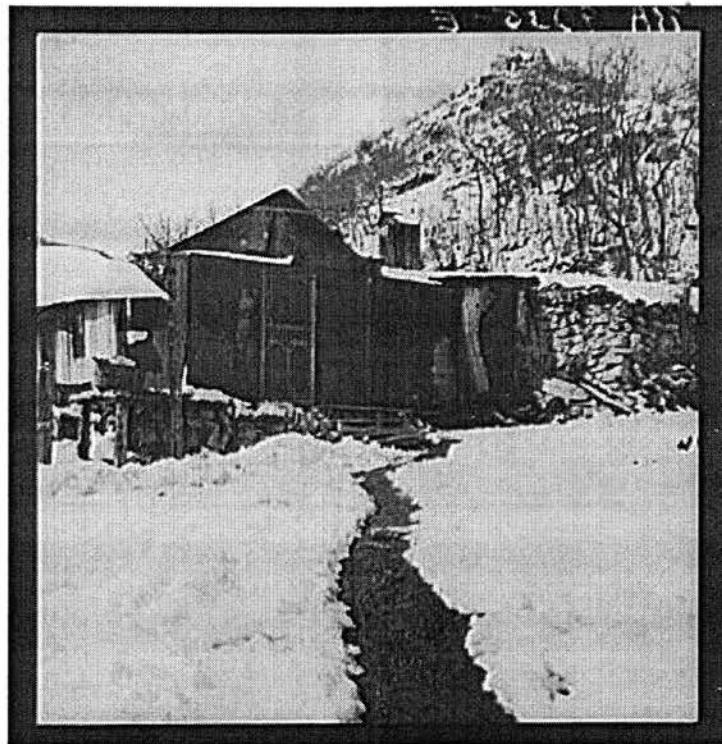


Figure 7 - Dorothea Lange, *Untitled*, March 1936. (LC-USF-34-009035-E)

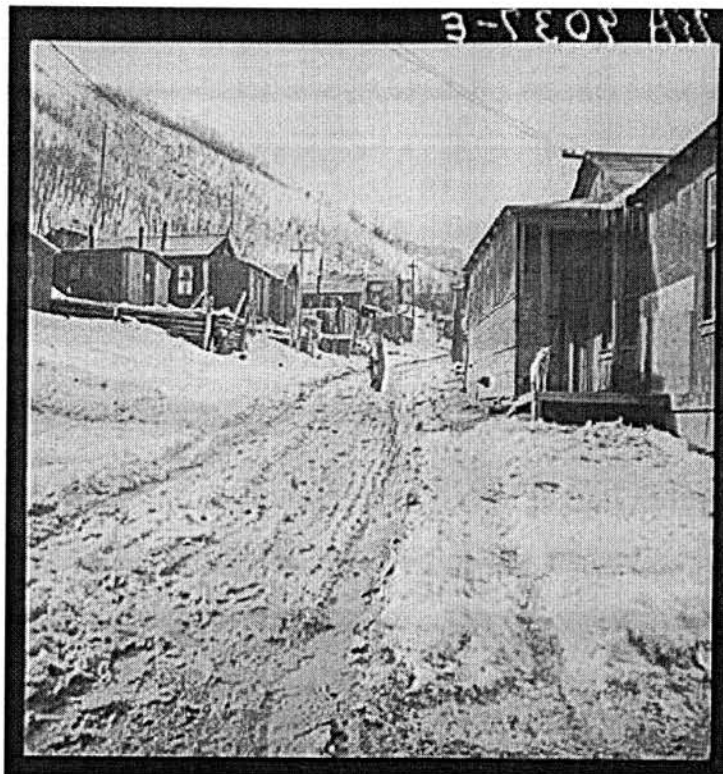


Figure 8 - Dorothea Lange, *Consumers, near Price, Utah. Mar. 1936. A settlement of workers in the Blue Blaze coal mine, which is controlled by absentee capital. Main street.* (LC-USF-34-009037-E)



Figure 9 - Art Van Wagonen, *Consumers, Utah - 1937*, Dorman Collection

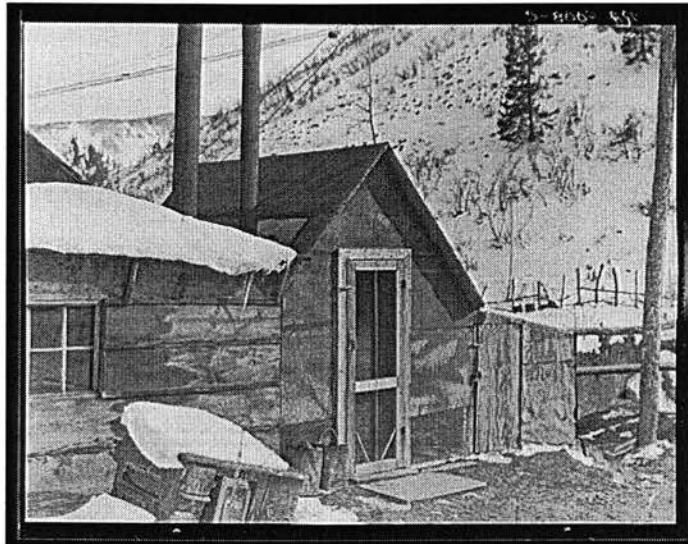


Figure 10- Dorothea Lange, *Consumers, near Price, Utah, Mar. 1936*. A settlement of workers in the Blue Blaze coal mine, which is controlled by absentee capital. Coal-miner's house. (LC-USF-34-009008-C)

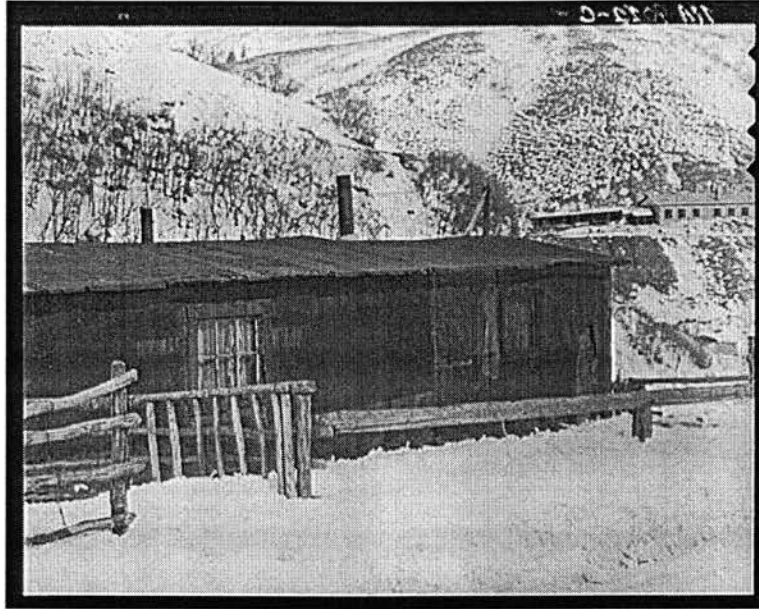


Figure 11- Dorothea Lange, *Company housing, Utah coal town, Consumers near Price.* March 1936. (LC-USF-34-009022-C)

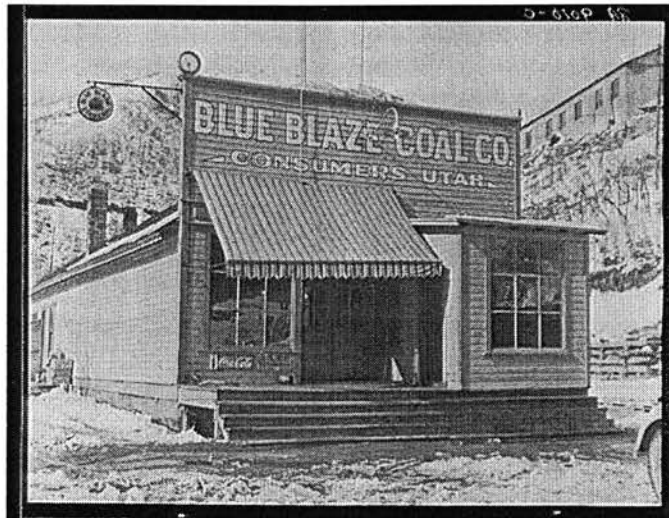


Figure 12- Dorothea Lange, *Company Store in coal town. Consumers near Price.* March 1936. (LC-USF-34-009010-C)

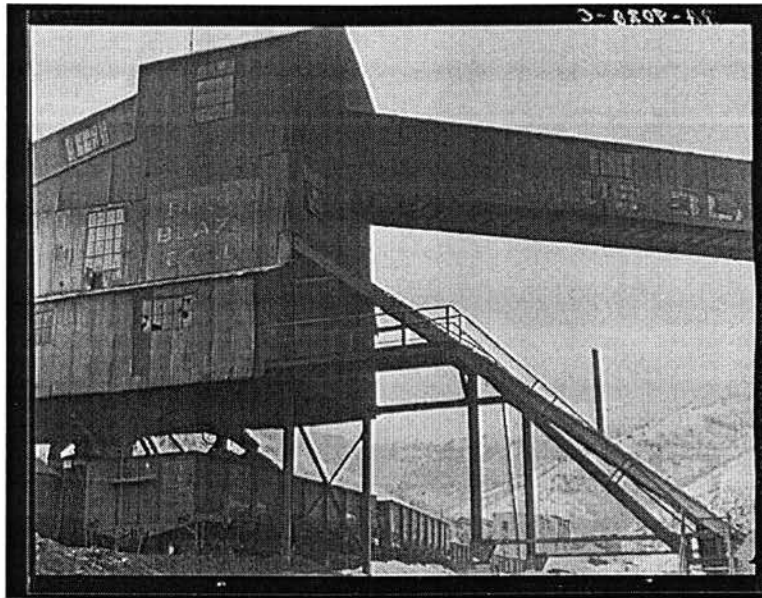


Figure 13. Dorothea Lange. *Consumers. Blue Blaze coal mine. Near Price, Utah. March 1936* (LC-USF34- 009028-C)

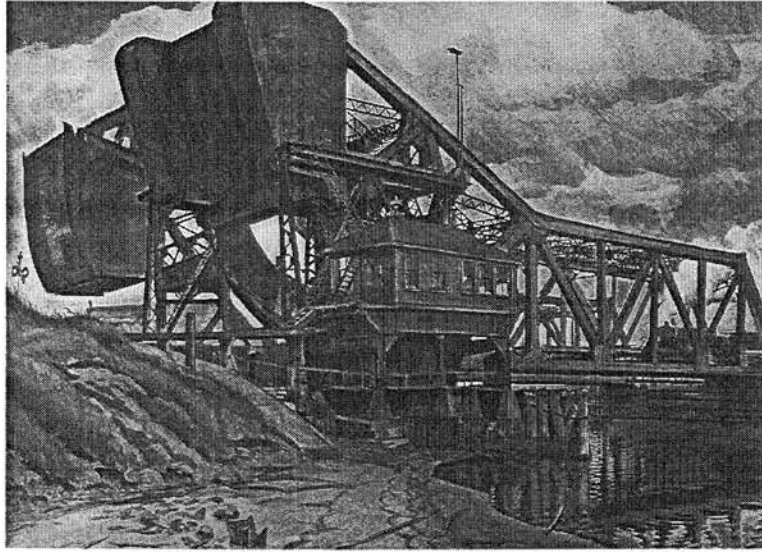


Figure 14- Charles Burchfield, *Black Iron*, 1935.

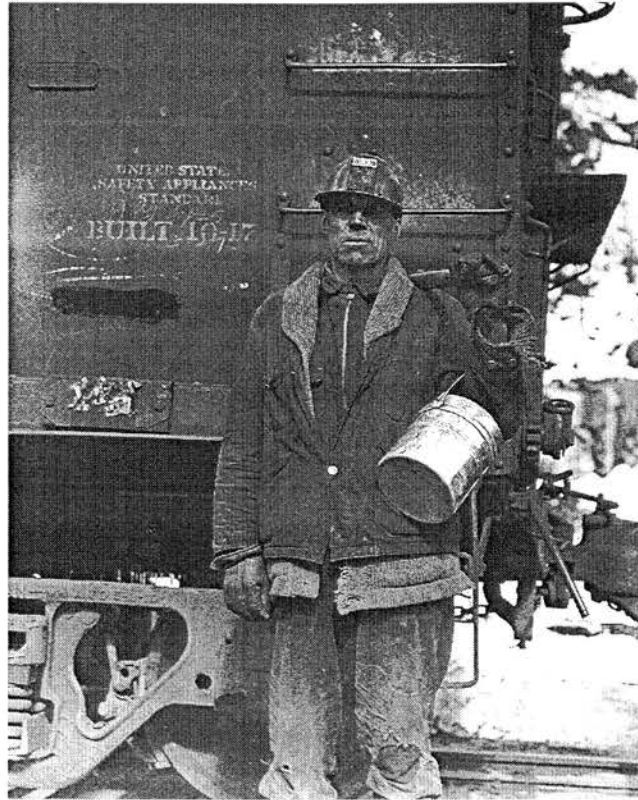


Figure 15- Dorothea Lange, *Coal Miner*. March, 1936. (LC-USF-34-9007-C)

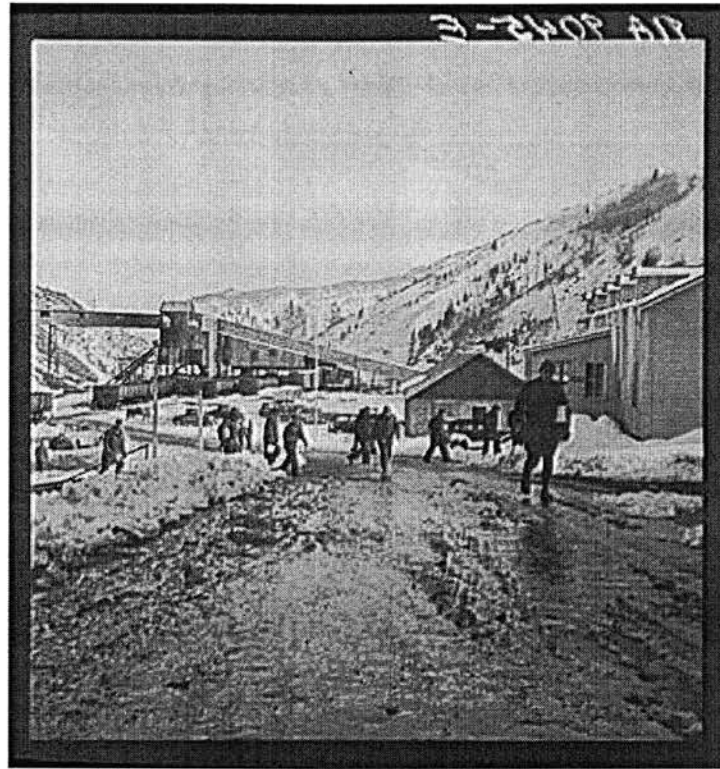


Figure 16- Dorothea Lange, *Miners coming home*. March 1936. (LC-USF-34-009045-E)

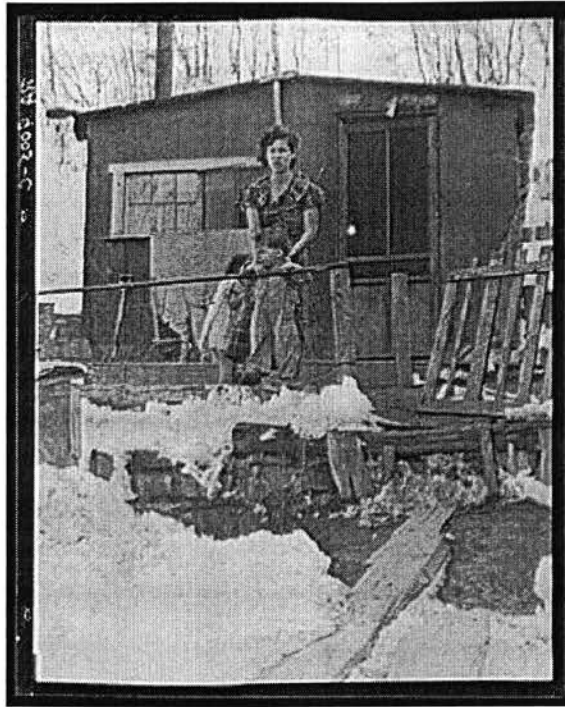


Figure 17- Dorothea Lange, *Untitled*. March, 1936. (LC-USF-34-009005-C)

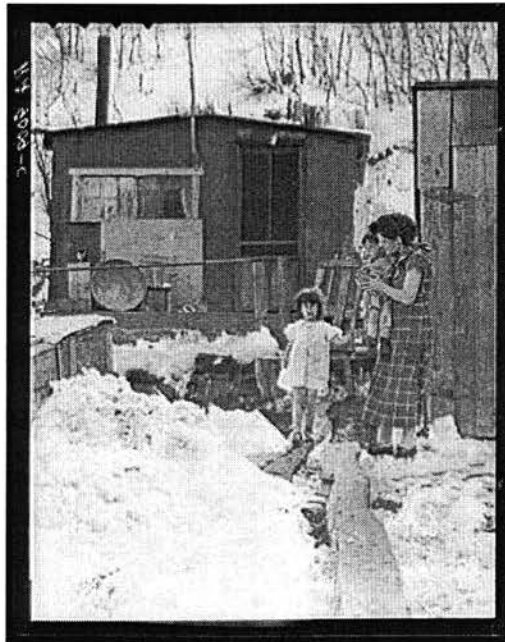


Figure 18- Dorothea Lange, *Home and family of a Utah coal miner. Consumers near Price, Utah*. March, 1936. (LC-USF-009009-C)



Figure 19- Dorothea Lange, *Untitled*, March, 1936. (LC-USF-34-009002-C)



Figure 20- Dorothea Lange, *Main Street, Utah coal town, Consumers near Price, Utah*.
March, 1936. (LC-USF-34-009027-C)



Figure 21- Dorothea Lange, *Untitled*, March 1936. (LC-USF-34-009026-C)

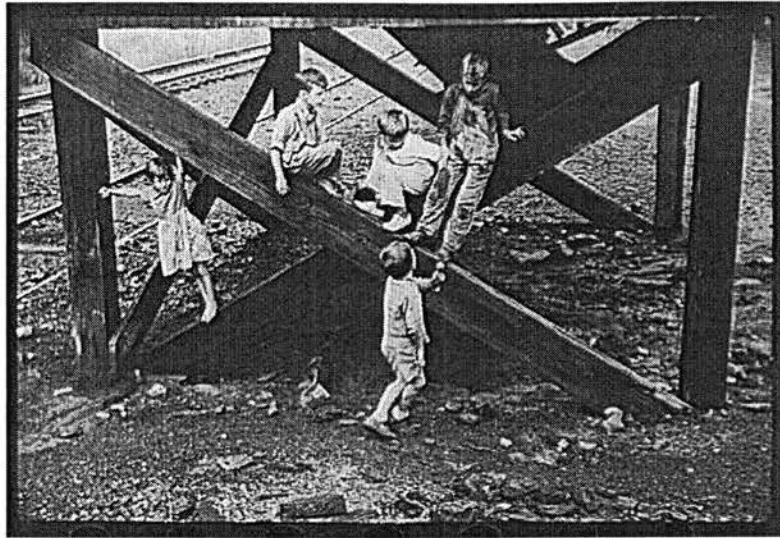


Figure 22- Marian Post-Wolcott, *Children's favorite playground, around coal mine tipples. Pursglove, Scott's Run, West Virginia, September, 1938.* (LC-USF-33-030307-M4)



Figure 23- Dorothea Lange, *Consumers near Price, Utah, Future coal miners.* March 1936. (LC-USF-009044-E)

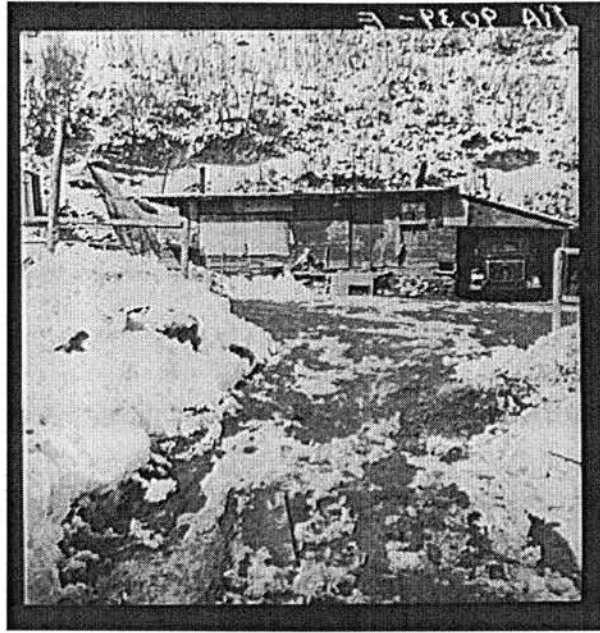


Figure 24- Dorothea Lange, *Untitled*, March, 1936. (LC-USF-34-009039-E)

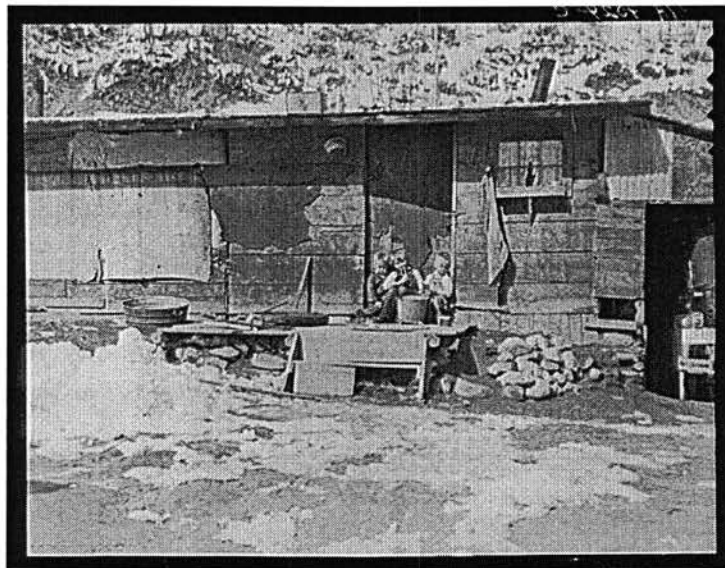


Figure 25- Dorothea Lange, *Miner's shack - company owned, Blue Blaze Coal Company, Consumers near Price, Utah*. March, 1936. (LC-USF-009029-C)

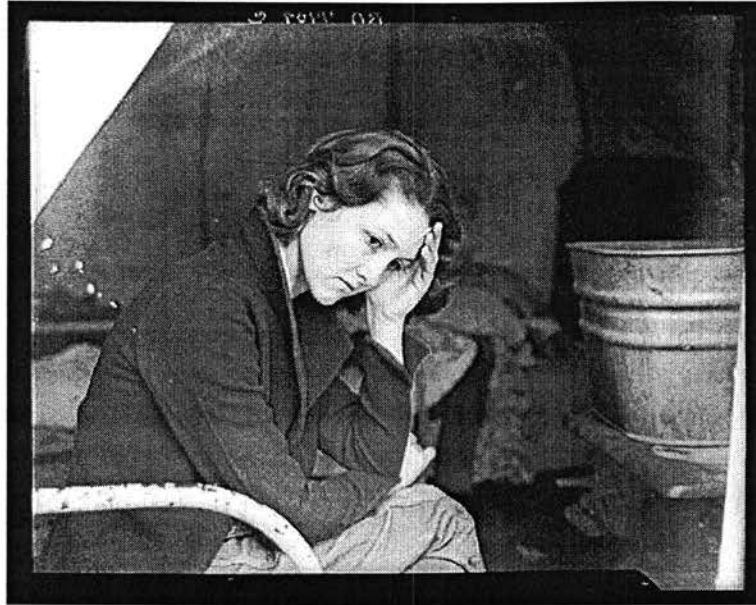


Figure 26- Dorothea Lange, *Daughter of a migrant Tennessee coal miner. Living in American River Camp near Sacramento, California. November, 1936.* (LC-USF-34-009907-C)

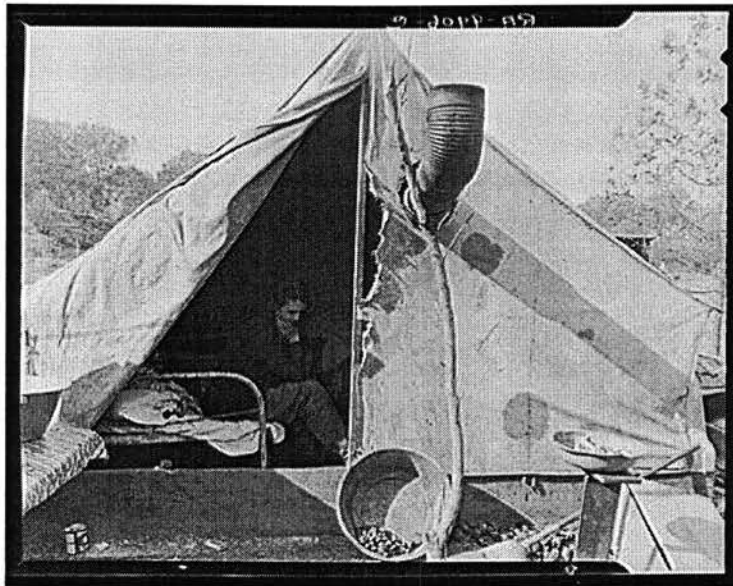


Figure 27- Dorothea Lange, *Home of Tennessee family of seven, now migratory workers living in camp outside of Sacramento, California. Father was coal miner in Tennessee but when the mine were not working received two days a week relief work. "Thought we could make it better out here".* November, 1936. (LC-USF-34-009906-C)



Figure 28- Dorothea Lange, *Widtsoe purchase area, Utah*. April, 1936.
(LC-USF-34-001327-C)



Figure 29- Dorothea Lange, *The town of Widtose, Utah*. April 1936.
(LC-USF-34-001325-C)



Figure 30- Dorothea Lange, *View of the area from the general store. The farm lands purchased lie on the floor of the valley.* April, 1936. (LC-USF-34-001360-E)



Figure 31- Dorothea Lange, *One of the reasons why this region has proven itself unsuited to Crop production is the short growing season, Utah.* April, 1936. (LC-USF-34-001319-E)



Figure 32- Dorothea Lange, *Farm home, in the FSA land use project purchase area.* April, 1936. (LC-USF-34-001361-E)



Figure 33- Dorothea Lange, *Typical home, still occupied.* April 1936. (LC-USF-34-001330-C)



Figure 34- Dorothea Lange, *Detail of an occupied house*. April, 1936. (LC-USF-34-001328-C)



Figure 35- Dorothea Lange, *General Store*. April, 1936. (LC-USF-34-001369-E)



Figure 36- Dorothea Lange, *The church*. This is a Mormon community, as are all the settlements in the Great Basin. April, 1936. (LC-USF-34-001326)



Figure 37- Dorothea Lange, *Resettlement clients to be moved from Widtsoe area to a farm in another county. Site not yet determined where they will have better land and hopeful future. These people have been in distress throughout the valley.* April, 1936 (LC-USF-34-001323-C)

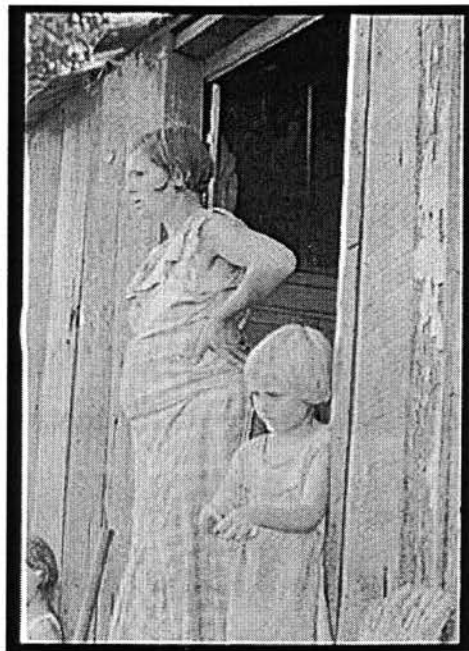


Figure 38- Arthur Rothstein, *Sharecropper's wife and child, Washington County, Arkansas.* August 1935. (LC-USF-33-002022-M4)

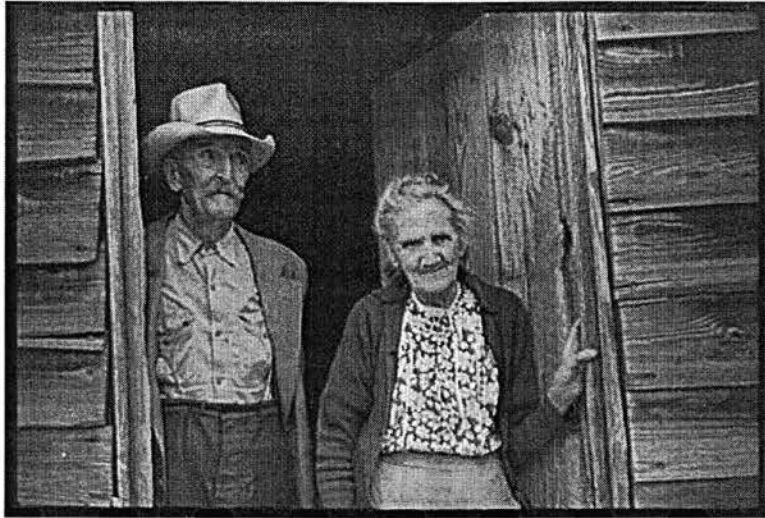


Figure 39- Jack Delano, *Green County, Georgia, Old Couple who receive old age pension assistance.* Fall 1941. (LC-USF-33-021252-M2)

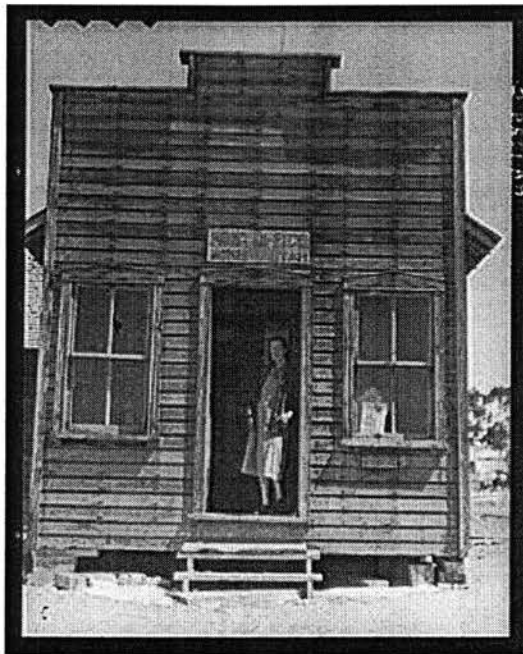


Figure 40- Dorothea Lange, *Post office and post mistress, view number two, Widtsoe, Utah.* April, 1936. (LC-USF-34—1324-C)

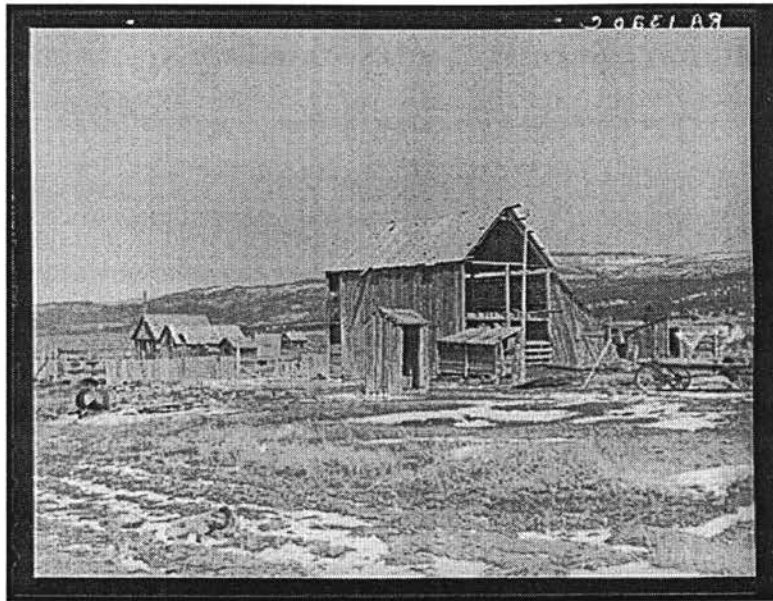


Figure 41- Dorothea Lange, *Farm Buildings in the purchase area. Widtsoe, Utah.* April 1936. (LC-USF-34-001320-C)



Figure 42- Dorothea Lange, *The road to Widtsoe from Panquitch.* April 1936. (LC-USF-34-001331-C)



Figure 43- Dorothea Lange, *Widtsoe land use adjustment project. Garfield County, Utah. Loading boulder on stone boat, while excavating new spillway of Tropic Dam. May 1936.* (LC-USF-34-009075-E)



Figure 44- Dorothea Lange, *Central Utah Dry Land Adjustment Project*, forty miles from Tooele, Utah. May 1936. (LC-USF-34-009082-E)

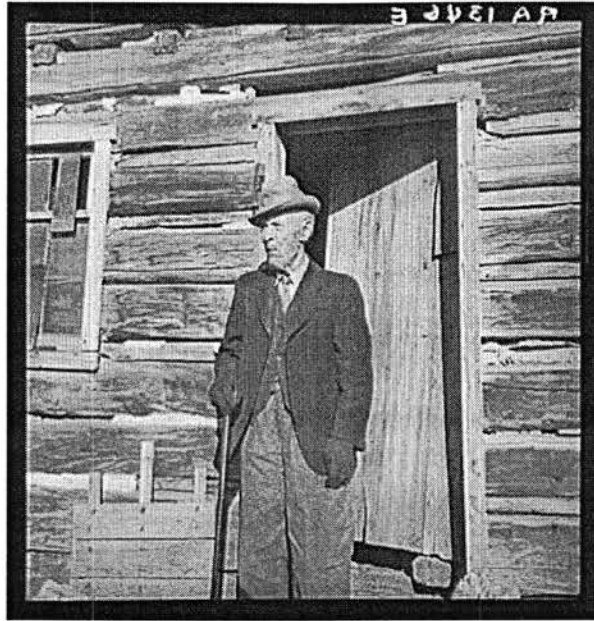


Figure 45- Dorothea Lange, *Escalante, Utah*. April, 1936. *Mormon convert who came to Utah from Denmark as a boy. He is now 94 years old.* (LC-USF-34-001346-C)

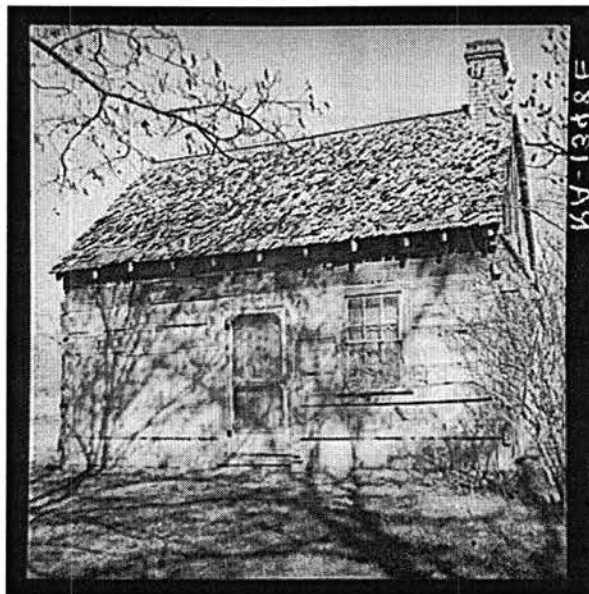


Figure 46- Dorothea Lange, *Village Dwelling*. April, 1936. (LC-USF-34-001348-E)



Figure 47- Dorothea Lange, *Latter Day Saints portrait group*. These people, man and wife, are both eighty-five years old. Converts to Mormonism from South Africa. She was the first schoolteacher in Escalante. They are dressed in their Sunday clothes. April, 1936. (LC-USF-34-001343-C)



Figure 48- Dorothea Lange, *First school teacher of Escalante, Utah*. Eighty-five years old. April 1936. (LC-USF-34-001345-C)

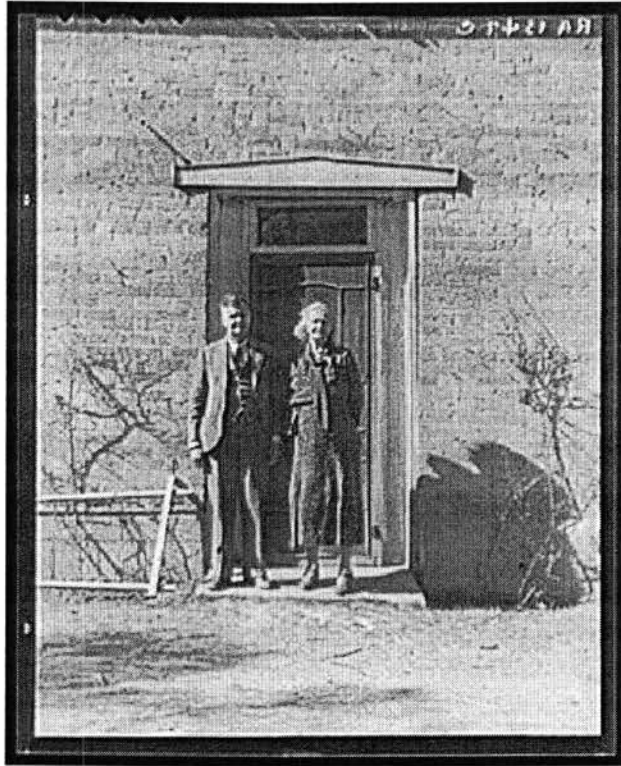


Figure 49 -Dorothea Lange, *Escalante, Utah. April, 1936. Residents.*
(LC-USF-34-001347-C)

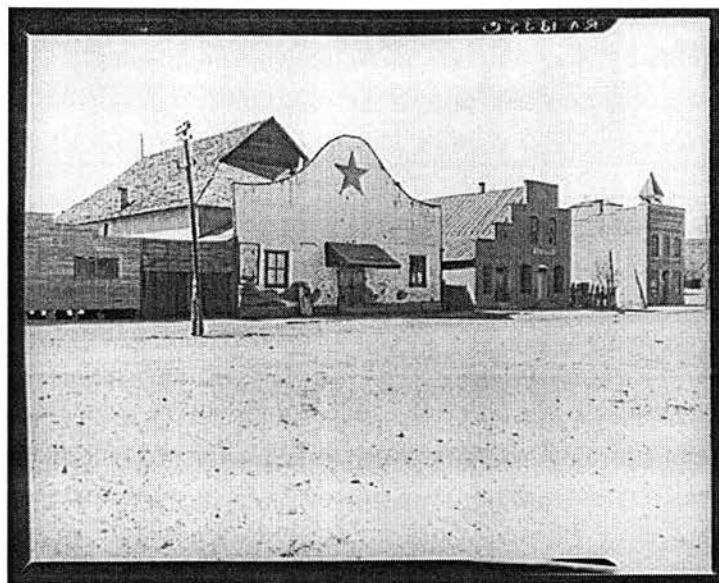


Figure 50-Dorothea Lange, *The Movie Theater*. April, 1936. (LC-USF-34-001335-C)

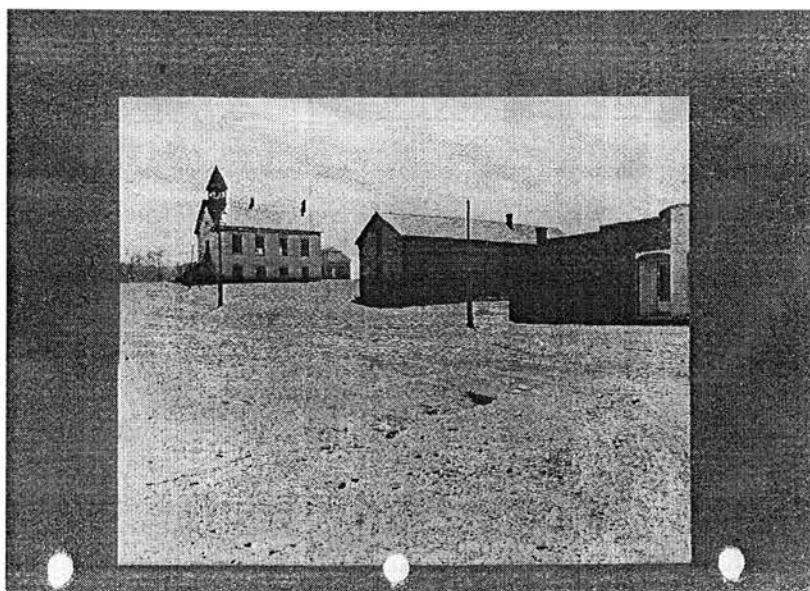


Figure 51- Dorothea Lange, *Approach to the Church*. April, 1936.
(LC-USF-34-001357-C)



Figure 52- Dorothea Lange, *Main Street and town center. Escalante, Utah. April, 1936.*
(LC-USF-34-001336)

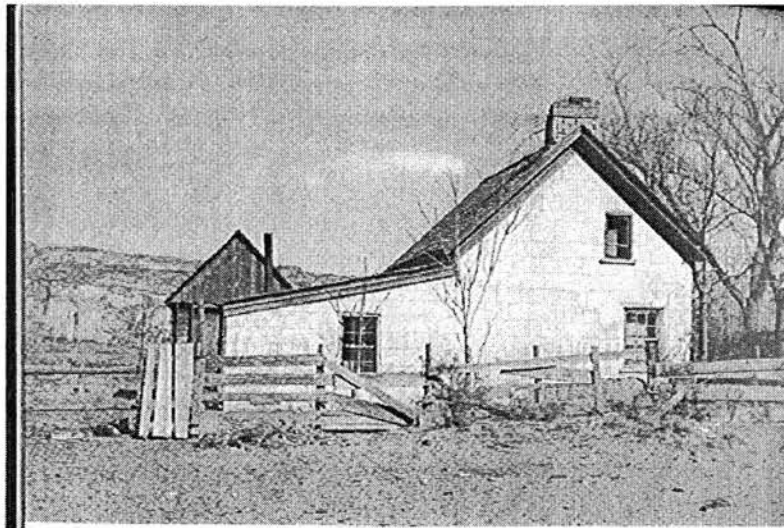


Figure 53- Dorothea Lange, *Mormon Village home. Escalante, Utah. April, 1936.*
(LC-USF-34-001344-C)

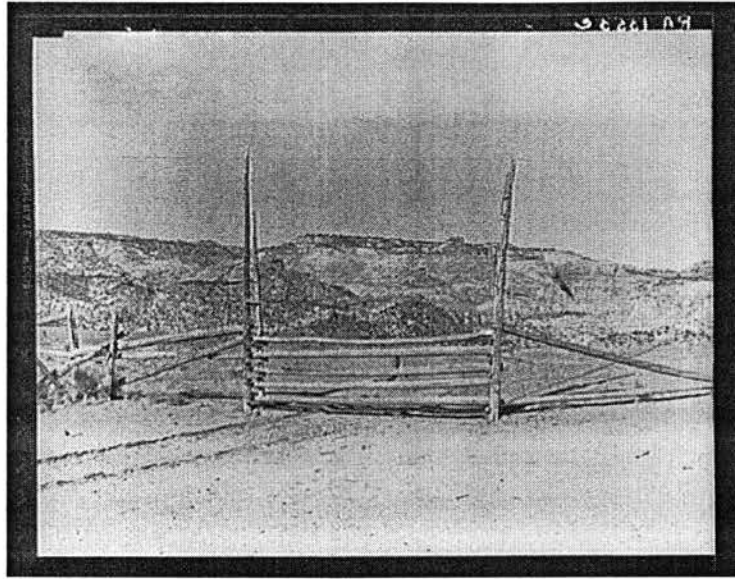


Figure 54- Dorothea Lange, *Form the village to the field*. Escalante, Utah. April, 1936.
(LC-USF-34-001353-C)



Figure 55- Dorothea Lange, *Main Street of town. Shows irrigation ditch*. Escalante, Utah.
April 1936. (LC-USF-34-001350-C)

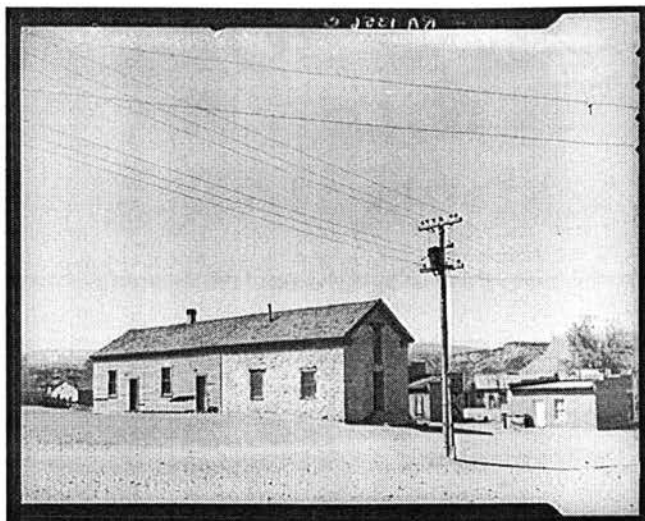


Figure 56- Dorothea Lange, *High School (Tithing House)*. April, 1936.
(LC-USF-34-001356-C)



Figure 57- Dorothea Lange, *The Mormon church is the center of town. Escalante, Utah*.
April, 1936. (LC-USF-34-001355-C)

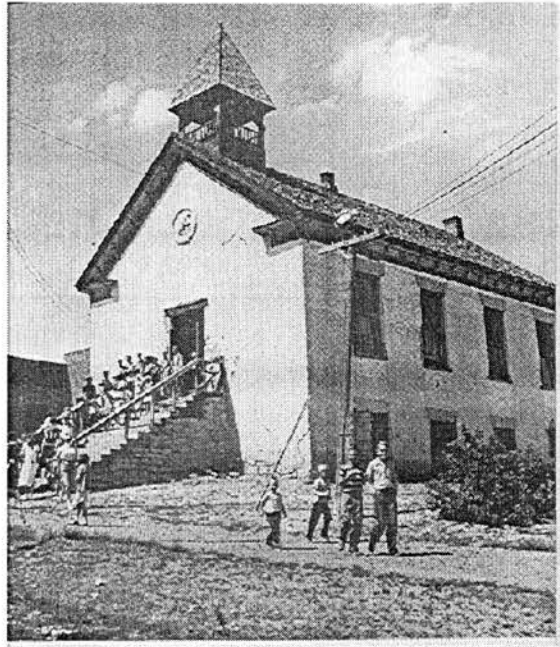


Figure 58- Dorothea Lange, *Escalante Ward House*, Summer 1951.

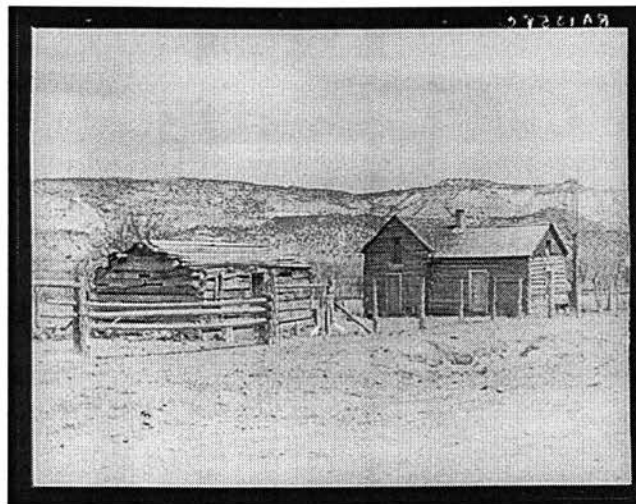


Figure 59- Dorothea Lange, *A home after the Utah pattern. Escalante, Utah*. April, 1936.
(LC-USF-34-001358-C)



Figure 60- Dorothea Lange, *Springdale (vicinity), Utah. Aug. 1938. Utah farm family in the orchard at the peach harvest. (LC-USF-34-0018327-E)*



Figure 61- Russell Lee, *Box Elder County, Utah. August 1940. FSA cooperative tractor and Mormon members.* (LC-USF-33-012862-M1)

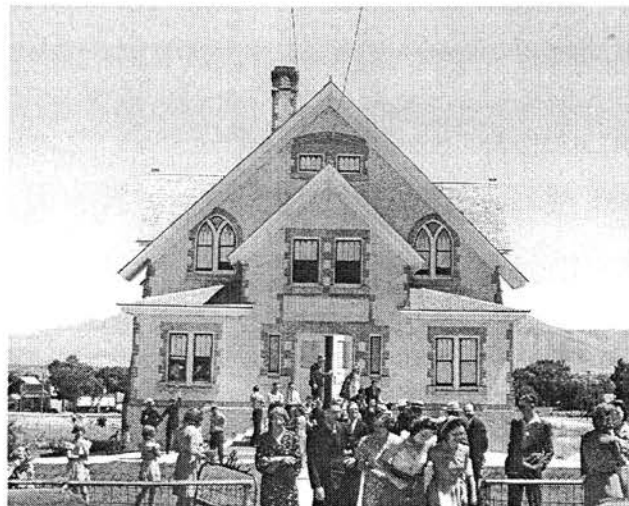


Figure 62- Russell Lee, *Congregation Leaving Latter Day Saint's church.* August, 1940.

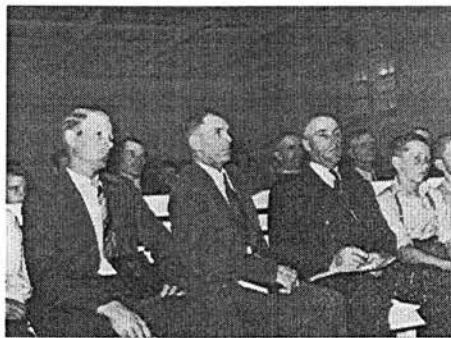


Figure 63- Russell Lee, *Members of the Priesthood of the Latter Day Saints' church.* August 1940. (LC-USF-34-37414-D)

It was hard for self-sufficient people to accept welfare help. This Finnish woman receives her first old-age assistance check, Winslow, Utah, April 1936.



Utah in the Great Depression

22

In a dramatic turn, the general prosperity of the twenties brought suddenly to the depression. There was widespread unemployment in every field. Factories were idle. Business activity was slow. For many people there was little or no work, little or no money. Food, clothing, fuel, and shelter were hard to obtain. The conditions of agriculture, and mining were touched in parts of economic life. No depression in America has history had struck so hard or stayed so long.

People came to believe that government should take an active role in finding solutions to serious economic problems.

In Utah, the depression struck hard. Some people left the state to find jobs elsewhere. Others tightened their belts and stayed on. Private groups, churches, and government agencies waged war on the depression. For the most part, the morale of the people carried them through.

MAIN POINTS

1. The depression of the thirties was worldwide.
2. Utah was among the states hardest hit by the depression.
3. The burden of relief was on local programs until 1935.
4. The New Deal was a national effort to overcome the depression.

5. Federal, state, and local agencies worked in Utah to combat the depression, 1933-41.
6. The depression left an important heritage for Utah.

1. The depression of the thirties was worldwide.

The optimism of the twenties led to heavy borrowing and installment buying. People bought goods with a promise to make monthly payments. Many people wanted to share in the profits of leading companies. To do this, they purchased shares. This meant the people owned shares of the company. Many of the shares were bought for speculation. That is, to get money changed hands. It was done through a system of credit.

Stock market crash. Unlimited speculation caused the Wall Street stock market crash of 1929. Wall Street in New York City is the key place in this country where stocks are bought and sold. The crash signaled the nationwide Great Depression. Manufacturers cut back production. Workers were laid off. People out of work stopped buying. More banks failed as their customers were unable to repay loans. Disaster touched every part of the country. It spread to other countries through trade relations.

Figure 64- S. George Ellsworth, *Utah's Heritage*, pages 308-309