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## Melancholy Realism: Walker Evans's Resistance to Meaning

"It is characteristic of philosophical writing," wrote Walter Benjamin, in the opening sentence of a book he was misled enough to hope would bring him academic preferment, "that it must continually confront the question of representation" (27). We might equally substitute "historical" here for the adjective "philosophical," though no doubt it will be insisted that this view is itself dated. Be that as it may, "the question of representation" survives both the 1920s and the 1970s, if not as the slogan of a particular project, then as the marker of what, like some colonial administrator, Paul de Man once called "local difficulties"; local difficulties, one might add, that are only too apt to turn into awkward *events*—the events of representation that compel a shift, as de Man put it, "from historical definition to the problematics of reading" (ix). The difficulty, then, is how to get a handle on these events, even while we also have to worry about how they handle us—their subjects, that is, even those who cannot reconcile themselves to being in their grip.

What concerns me here is the photographic event: not just the production of meaning at a specific moment, in a specific cultural field, but above all the relation the photograph is driven to establish to meaning and to the possibility of photographic narration. The moment is that of the second New Deal in the United States: precisely a moment at which new technologies of photomechanical reproduction enabled a further quantum leap in the proliferation and social dispersion of photographic images, crossing a threshold that marked the emergence of a new economy—visual, social, and political. The status of photography in this economy constituted a particular knot, threading together those dreams of transparency, efficiency, and accelerated exchange that marked the instrumentalization of photographic meaning, in social administration as in commercialized communications, in the documentary archive as in the photojournalistic picture file. The social saturation

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of the New Deal and the market saturation of the New Media: what space for response did they allow, other than immersion, subjection, and seduction? What recourse remained to the subject in the face of their new calls to emergence? What prospects might there be for resisting or evading their new machineries and their demands for the efficient delivery and receipt of meaning? This is the problem of Walker Evans with his camera in the mid-1930s—the problem of the character of his stubborn refusals, his famous “lassitude,” his inertia, his “negative personal magnetism,” and what Lincoln Kirstein irritably called “the skimmed decadence of so much of his work” (qtd. in Mellow 142).<sup>1</sup>

Before we can approach this, however, we must understand something of the economy of meaning in which Evans had to find a way to use his camera. Where to begin with this? At the barber’s shop, perhaps, with Roland Barthes. But, there, we may find ourselves out of luck, at least as regards our choice of magazine.<sup>2</sup>

Laying hands on a copy of the 15 February 1937 issue of *Life*, with its frame-filling face of Japanese Premier General Senjuro Hayashi, was surprisingly difficult in the winter of 1937 (Fig. 1). Surprising, because more than 650,000 copies had been produced. But this was nowhere near enough to meet demand.

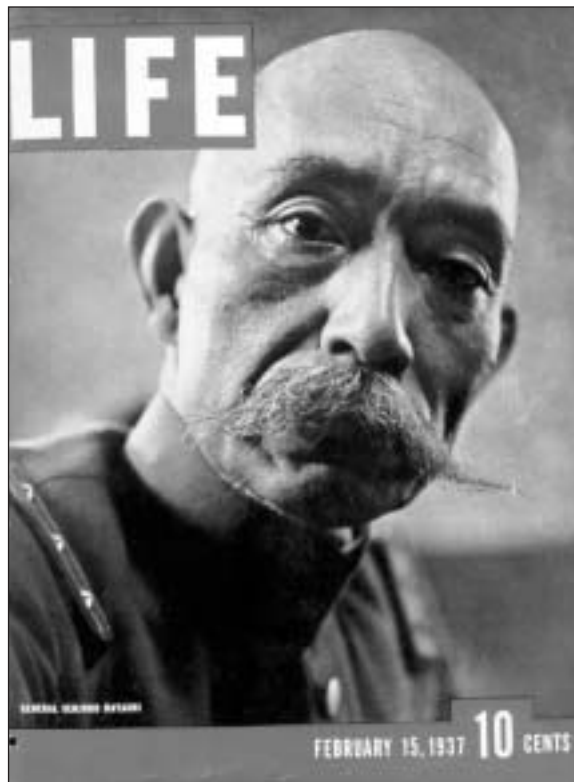


Fig. 1. Cover, *Life*, vol. 2, no. 7 (February 15, 1937).

When *Life* had been in the planning stage in August 1936, a modest circulation of two hundred thousand had been projected for the new picture magazine (Wainwright 32).<sup>3</sup> By the time of its first issue on 23 November, however, it already had 235,000 charter subscriptions and the print order had been raised to 466,000, with more than two hundred thousand copies earmarked for newsstands (63, 74).<sup>4</sup> At ten cents a time, these sold out on the first day and dealers pleaded to increase their orders by as much as five times. For the more than three hundred advertisers who had committed to *Life* before the date of the first issue, this was a windfall. It delivered them an expanding national audience, while their contracts guaranteed them fixed space rates for a year at \$1,500 per page, \$800 per half page, or \$2,500 for a page of inside color. When *Life*'s circulation jumped far beyond its quarter million guarantee and kept on climbing, its budget projections were exposed as a disastrous miscalculation. With its low cover price, the magazine, which by design depended on advertising fees for running costs and any profit, lost more than five million dollars in its first year (see Wainwright 41–42, 81).

The loss did not slow momentum. An extraordinary market had opened in the pages of the magazine. With each issue, production numbers were increased, breaking 650,000 in January 1937 and one million before April. It was still not sufficient. Circulation research on a targeted town in Massachusetts suggested that, nationally, five or six million copies might have been sold (81–82). This was, however, far beyond the capacity of the improvised rotary presses at Donnelley's in Chicago, on which the technologically innovative magazine was being printed. Presses ran day and night in these early months, only clearing one issue in order to begin printing the next. Still the complaints poured in, inflamed by the widely held suspicion that the shortage was being manipulated to force readers to subscribe and to compel dealers to take more copies of *Life*'s sister magazine, *Time*. *Life*'s circulation manager responded defensively, telling Time Inc. employees in December 1936 that, "The demand for *Life* is without precedent in publishing history. If we could supply the copies, the dollar volume of our newsstand sales this month would be greater than the dollar volume of sales of any other magazine in the world" (qtd. in Wainwright 83).

So it was that a copy of *Life* in the winter of 1937 remained a prized possession, the object of competition at barbers' shops and cocktail parties, as well as at newsstands. Frustrated vendors resorted to displaying dismembered copies in their shop windows, in order to preserve the goodwill of their customers.<sup>5</sup> In such ways, the actual readership of *Life* far exceeded the plain circulation figures. In fact, by April 1938, when circulation had reached two million, George Gallup's American Institute of Public Opinion estimated that upwards of seventeen million adults saw that month's first issue, suggesting a "pass along readership" of more than eight adults per copy (Wainwright 98).<sup>6</sup> It would have been hard indeed to dispute the boasting of proprietor Henry Luce when in April 1937, barely five months after the first issue, he told a meeting of the American Association of Advertising Agencies: "Evidently, it is what the public wants more than it has ever wanted any product of ink and paper" (qtd. in Wainwright 94).

Nothing but ink and paper *Life* may have been, but the level of demand it excited was extraordinary, even granting that it had been painstakingly designed and

promoted to have this effect. What was it that drove this demand, or shall we say desire? Novelty, of course, and the established promotional machine of Time Incorporated. But also the seduction of production values: abundant photographs; satisfying paper quality; big format; engagingly varied typography; a dramatic yet open, modern-feeling layout and design; all made possible by a technological leap involving the production of coated paper in rolls for printing at speed on rotary presses that “flash dried” the printed ink. Then there was a new content package, planned like the evening’s viewing of a later network television age: news, features, sports, gossip, celebrity biographies, entertainment, modest titillation, spectacle—“equal parts,” as Bernard DeVoto suggested in the 29 January 1938 *Saturday Review of Literature*, “of the decapitated Chinaman, the flogged Negro, the surgically explored peritoneum, and the rapidly slipping chemise” (qtd. in Swanberg 145). The tone was equally variable, at turns urgent, solemn, comic, crass, or cute. From the beginning, going beyond *Time*’s middle-brow digest and even beyond the dramatizations of *The March of Time* newsreel, *Life* was planned to take a broad perspective in tackling its subjects, to be, in Henry Luce’s words, “simple and naive,” “partly for people who find it too hard going to read *Time every week cover to cover*” (qtd. in Wainwright 12).<sup>7</sup>

As a calculated step down from *Time*, Luce’s particular ambition for *Life* was that it should be “the best magazine for look-through purposes” or, on second thoughts, remembering *Esquire*, “the damnedest best non-pornographic look-through magazine in the United States” (qtd. in Wainwright 29).<sup>8</sup> What bound the mix, therefore, was a new mode of address. As Daniel Longwell, *Life*’s first picture editor and office manager, argued early on, “the quick nervousness of pictures is a new language” (qtd. in Wainwright 21).<sup>9</sup> His views were echoed by Luce’s team, who saw “pictorial journalism” as “a new language, difficult, as yet unmastered, but incredibly powerful and strangely universal” (*Four Hours* n.p.).<sup>10</sup> In the drive to harness that power for profit, the claim to universality would become commonplace; the strangeness would be forgotten. Yet, Longwell’s earlier assessment was nearer the mark. The “pictorial journalism” of *Life* was an enervating language that excited an irresistible drive to look, to possess in the stains of ink on paper all that belonged to the Imaginary, all that was given to sight and, now, had to be seen.

This was the core of Henry Luce’s idea. As he famously remarked: “Today I may not be in a mood nor feel the need to read the finest article about the Prime Minister. But I will stop to watch him take off his shoe” (qtd. in Wainwright 7). Or, as his editorial team put it: “Fortunately perhaps for the race, all standards of news-value yield before the imperious desire to see, and see again, the female form divine” (*Four Hours* qtd. in Wainwright 25).<sup>11</sup> The Prime Minister’s shoe, the “female form divine”: the object changes, but the “imperious,” overriding compulsion to see, this scopoc drive attributed to all, without difference, is the primary process in the reader’s identification with the picture magazine. “The appeal of pictures is universal,” declared an advertisement for *Life* in the December 1936 issue of *Fortune* magazine: “Pictures answer the Great Inquisitiveness which is born in a living animal, part of its lust for life.”<sup>12</sup> We look and look, searching for our object. The only competitor to “the female form divine” is, tellingly, the face: “Farmer faces, mining faces, faces of rugged individualists, Harlem faces, hopeful faces, tired old faces,

smart night club faces—faces from Tennessee and Texas, faces from New England and the Pacific Coast—the faces of the U.S.” (*Four Hours* qtd. in Wainwright 26). From the beginning of *Life*, these faces stare out, page after page. The reader searches them for recognition, hanging on their gaze, wanting, as *Life* photographer Margaret Bourke-White would say: “Not just the unusual or striking face, but *the* face that would speak out the message from the printed page” (*Portrait* 137).<sup>13</sup> An object for a subject and a subject for an object, joined by “the message”: *Life* is a mirror and a window, a screen and a frame. In its pages, readers cannot but find themselves looking and looking.

This is what the first prospectus for a picture magazine then called *Dime* says in mid-1936: “The basic premise” of publication “is that people like to look. . . . They like to look at everything including themselves in the mirror. They also like to look at pictures, and especially in these swift-changing days they like to look at pictures which show them what is going on in America and in the world” (qtd. in Wainwright 30). This is how *Life* would finally declare itself:

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

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

To see, and to show, is the mission now undertaken by a new kind of publication. (qtd. in Wainwright 33)<sup>14</sup>

The lure is the incitement of the drive—the drive driven desperate. Everything that can be seen is put before us, “half mankind.” What cannot be shown and seen is unimportant, though it goes on as before. Government, bureaucracy, policing, surveillance, intelligence, the circuits of capital, the violence of exchange—all this means nothing, except insofar as it is accumulated and commodified as spectacle: the scopie harnessed to consummativity, calling into place a new field of subjects, over-coding the program of social life.<sup>15</sup> Such patterns of investment may be overly familiar now, but the lust for *Life* marked one of those quantum leaps. It registered the emergence of a new polity, a new economy, a new pattern of imaginary recruitment, a change in the very unseen structures of identification and consent, in short, a re-tooling of the social imaginary that enabled the cycles of the social economy to enter a new phase.

A new economy? Hard, perhaps, to see this in the pages of a ten cent magazine. Yet, these pages are screens and their images points of condensation and capture in which a certain compelling force makes its subject arrive. For Luce’s enterprise, *Life* called into existence a new national market. For advertisers, it delivered a national consumership. For readers, *Life* was a conduit to an imaginary integration, national

in horizon, yet founded on fantasized interactions and relations whose locus was the individual, for whom this fantasized field increasingly served as compensation for a displaced, divided, and hollowed out social life. But I am getting, perhaps, too far from my theme.

15 February 1937. Volume 2, number 7, page nine (Fig. 2). The header tells us this is “LIFE.” Immediately below, spread almost across the entire page like a banner headline, “WORLD’S HIGHEST STANDARD OF LIVING,” edged in patriotic stripes running nearly parallel to the top of the page and decorated at the margins with white stars. A thin black wedge to the upper right is warning this is no headline. Below it, what looks like a cable connection crosses “LIVING” and obliterates a star. Then comes the giant, foreshortened family—if such it is—faces pressed against the windshield of a car, the driver’s knuckles bulging through the glass, only the family dog escaping the crush through the open side window. The dog is also the only one without perfect teeth, at least as far as we can see; but its eyes are as button bright as all the others and set on the road ahead. “*There’s no way like the American Way*” floats in cursive over the hood of the car, before a suggested landscape, like the vision of St. Paul.

The atmosphere is certainly that of a kind of ecstasy (Fig. 3). The overwhelming general impression is of a spotless health and happiness in which everything is new, everything is moving forwards—moving obliquely towards the right, which is where the huge yet toylike car will come into collision first with some sort of barrier, then with a rather less fortunate, strung-out group who are all black (unlike the shiny occupants of the looming car) and who, though far from shabby, do not seem so newly pressed. Radiant sunshine falls on the figures in the car, but those in the line cast no shadows. They are caught in a general gloom. Only one of them, a man in a leather helmet, looks back and sees what is coming their way. Another man, further up the line, glances behind, to our left, beyond the frame. Five others look right at us, or to where the camera once was. The remainder stare blankly ahead, over to the right, but apparently not at the future towards which the car rushes on. There is also a ghost, behind the line and directly in the path of the automobile grill, though not quite in either space. Below comes the sidewalk, littered and stained, though it is hard to be certain about this. Beneath the sidewalk, the white page and the black headline: “THE FLOOD LEAVES ITS VICTIMS ON THE BREAD LINE.”

For those who have seen the two preceding issues of the magazine, the story has been well prepared, with extensive agency photographs, maps, and pages of explanation: “Floods Drive 288,000 People From Their Homes,” declared *Life* on 1 February (16–17); “America’s Worst Flood Makes Nearly A Million Refugees,” it announced on 8 February (9–23).<sup>16</sup> “Louisville got the worst of it,” its report went on, “with three quarters of the city under water” (12). The inundation had caused more damage in monetary terms than any previous flood in the nation’s history. In its wake had come disease, fire, looting, martial law, and an overwhelming refugee problem: almost a million homeless along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, filling armories, barracks, tent cities, box cars, stations, and warehouses. The real visual drama of this catastrophe—ruptured levees, flooded fields, roof tops, wreckage, cut off cities seen from the air, evacuations, refugees—is in these earlier editions. Yet, even coming late, when the story if not the flood was receding, the lead page of the



Fig. 2. "The Flood Leaves Its Victims On The Bread Line," *Life*, vol. 2, no. 7 (15 February 1937), page 9.



Fig. 3. "The Flood Leaves Its Victims On The Bread Line," *Life*, vol. 2, no. 7 (15 February 1937), page 9. Photograph by Margaret Bourke-White, Louisville, Kentucky, February 1937.

15 February issue presented readers with a striking graphic layout and image—strong enough, indeed, to survive the visual chaos and contradictory message of the facing page: a photo-strip advertisement for Heinz Aristocrat tomato products from “the Good Green Earth” of Bowling Green, Ohio (Fig. 4). Anchored by the headline and the brief captioning text, the message on the editorial page is trenchant and abrupt. The “Great Flood” had passed on down the Ohio Valley into the Mississippi, leaving debris, “ghastly mess,” and four hundred dead: “It was going to take a lot of money to restore the American standard of living in the cities and towns of the Ohio Valley” (9).<sup>17</sup>

The 15 February issue of *Life* has an undeniably forceful and sardonic opening—if an opening it is, after six and one-half pages of advertising for cars, cruises, fruit juice, and leather goods, and a two and one-half page feature, “Speaking of Pictures,” on the antics of nature photographer William Lovell Finley. Margaret Bourke-White’s photograph on page nine turns, of course, on the ironies of such juxtapositions. In the magazine itself, however, they are to be passed over smoothly, without notice and without interruption. The convention of the separation of powers is strictly maintained, even though the picture magazine format grew out of graphic advertising and even though advertising designers—not least for Heinz, Plymouth cars, and Goodrich Silvertown Tires, in this very same issue—had already responded



Fig. 4. “The Good Green Earth,” Advertisement for Heinz Products, *Life*, vol. 2, no. 7 (15 February 1937), page 8.



to the pages of *Life* by seeking to absorb their novel rhetoric and narrative style.<sup>18</sup> Such mutuality makes clear-cut distinctions between editorial and advertising potentially tricky, on both sides. But that is not the convention.

Officially, then, the photograph in which I am interested, by a commercial photographer who saw the light, may fall on page nine but it marks the proper beginning of the issue. There is plenty more to come: not the aerial photographs of drowned farmlands, broken levees, submerged rail yards, and marooned towns that had filled seventeen pages in the issue of the week before; but rather, how the staff of the Louisville *Courier-Journal* and the Louisville *Times* got out a joint edition by lamp-light; how God has provided a relief station at St. Paul's Episcopal Church; how the "swank" clubhouse at Churchill Downs has become temporary home to African American flood refugees; how five hundred other "Negroes," prisoners from Shelby County Penal Farm near Memphis, have gone to work in chain gangs to repair the levees. And, beyond this, turning the page, how a tiger turned on its trainer; how twenty-two-year-old Charlie Johns has married Eunice Winstead, his third-grade Tennessee neighbor; how the "Women's Emergency Brigade" vandalized the Chevrolet plant in Flint, Michigan; how this caused the upper stratum of Chrysler management to miss the "South Seas" party at the Book-Cadillac Hotel in Detroit; how the President, Andrew Mellon, and Jean Harlow have fared in Washington; how a wife should undress for her husband; how Spanish fascist bombers took out a munitions train from the air. Then, too, there is the Oxford Group at Malvern, Cuban cockfighting, the Japanese Emperor's palace, the Duke of Norfolk's wedding—plenty more. The heterogeneity and indeed the bathos of these successive topics and genres might prove disorienting, even driven along by "the imperious desire to see." But there remains at least the remnant of a conventional journalistic architecture here. Page nine is the "Big News-Picture Story of the Week," as Henry Luce defined it in his repeated attempts to anatomize *Life*.<sup>19</sup> "The Lead," Luce wrote, thinking back on the first twelve issues of *Life*, "is what the Prospectus calls 'The Big News-Picture Story of the Week.' The Inauguration, the Sit-down Strike, the Sand-hog Murder, and above all the Flood proved that there is such a thing" (Wainwright 89).

The Big News-Picture Story. The photograph fills almost three-fifths of the page. With only slight cropping on either side, it is, in turn, filled to its own frame—in its upper three-fifths by the poster image and in its lower two-fifths by the figures standing in line. All points of reference external to the confrontation of these two worlds are excluded. The poster is not shown as a billboard or located in a landscape. The queue has no discernible end in view and, in fact, no end in the picture at all. On the left, it runs into the gutter. On the right, it bleeds from the page. Without referring to the headline below, the line seems pointless and, in this, quite at odds with the ecstatic determination of the family above, which moves on joyously to an end we also cannot see, across the line of standing figures, along the "American Way" whose name fills a space on the right but, in illusion, hovers before the hood of the car, above its winged figure, beckoning onward. This way is "American"—that great amorphous, irresolvable signifier of a settler community, floating untroubled, here, by the violence of its forgetting. The car rushes along it—along a way not taken by those who shuffle across its path, who seem—all but one—to have turned their backs

on it and now, effectively, to stand in the way, soon, perhaps, to be knocked down like skittles, swept aside by sheer speed, washed away by the river of progress of which they have fallen foul.

The photographer, Margaret Bourke-White, has chosen her perspective carefully to give us precisely this. Typically, she spared herself no risk and others no inconvenience to get the shot she wanted. She had made her name “riding jackknife bridges, crawling over skyscrapers and pushing her lenses into white hot steel mills for just the right shots” (qtd. in Goldberg 99).<sup>20</sup> To photograph the Supreme Court, also for the 15 February issue of *Life*, she set up her camera tripod in the perfect spot, which happened to be the middle of street. With her remarkable concentration and oblivious disregard of other people, she gave no thought to fouling up traffic for blocks.<sup>21</sup> For Bourke-White, the viewpoint and the choice of lens were, with the manipulation of lighting, fundamental to the didactic structure of the image, to the message—though the physical positioning of the camera certainly also signaled the heroics of what Luce liked to call the “crack photographer,” the shaping of whose persona was, for Bourke-White, a second, parallel work hardly separable from the photographic work itself.

If the construction of this persona was a way in which Bourke-White negotiated the anxieties of insertion into a particular field of subjectivities, then it also had commercial value, as she realized early on, and it equally suited the economy of the new magazine. From the very beginning, the antics of the “crack photographer” were central to the glamour and modernity of *Life*.<sup>22</sup> The photographers were the stars. The writers carried their bags and heavy equipment and, in Bourke-White’s case, reputedly did her laundry (see Goldberg 195, 343). Bourke-White was always the exception among exceptions. At *Life*, she had her own staff and an enclosed office, to go with her \$12,000 a year starting salary. It was a price the magazine was willing to pay, and not just as a cost of doing business, since the salary, the pose, the clothes, the travel, and the life were integral to the package being sold, in which “Margaret Bourke-White makes a picture” was always part of the performative meaning of the image, and in which an essential part of the story would always be an account of her pains to meet the challenge of her assignment.<sup>23</sup>

The drama here was classic fare. Bourke-White’s biographer tells us that Managing Editor John Shaw Billings gave her one hour’s notice to leave on assignment (Goldberg 186). Bourke-White herself was happy to embellish the tale: “I caught the last plane to Louisville, then hitchhiked my way from the mud-swamped airport to the town. To accomplish the last stretch of this journey, I thumbed rides in rowboats and once on a large raft. These makeshift craft were bringing food packages and bottles of clean drinking water to marooned families and seeking out survivors. Working from the rowboats gave me good opportunities to record acts of mercy as they occurred” (*Portrait* 149). Stories like this accumulated. They were part of an expected performance, and issue by issue, over the weeks, the photographs plotted its succeeding acts. This was part of their aura, though that is not at all to say that the photographs are autobiographical. It is rather to say that, at a level of contrived connotation, Bourke-White’s photographs arrived like postcards home from the airplane-hopping career of the woman *U.S. Camera* called in May 1940 “the most

famous on-the-spot reporter the world over”; famous enough for her name to be a public byword; famous enough in the late 1930s for her own face to have become familiar in magazine advertisements for air travel, California wine, telephones, and Camel cigarettes; famous enough by the 1940s to qualify for the title, “Topflight Famous American Woman” (qtd. in Goldberg 194).<sup>24</sup>

Yet, in the magazine spread, the photograph is anonymous. The photographer’s name does not appear until the contents page, all but lost in a column of narrow type with page numbers and names—in this issue on page sixty-four, as always, at the back. The camera’s viewpoint is, therefore, only belatedly personified. On the lead page, its first function is as the architecture of a statement: an editorial message that may be signed, but that is still as efficient, professional, and anonymous as the house-style prose of the text below. The viewpoint invests the grammar of the message, and its effects are dispersed across the image, in which the orchestration of space, laterally and in depth, produces a frieze-like layering of shallow planes that work against any privileging of the center. The viewpoint is purely a matter of structure: the trace of a maneuver necessary to engender a particular coding effect. And this is part of the image’s oddly detached effect. The viewpoint is not a subjective, located space. Nor is it the point of insertion of the viewer into a rhetorical immediacy: the point of capture by the rhetoric of recruitment that characterized the new language of “documentary.” This is not a “documentary” image. It does not demand the enactment of the viewpoint as a psychic space, a point of identification at which the viewer is interpellated into the dramaturgy of the image and compelled to “the plane of decent seeing” (Grierson 38). Nor is this an eyewitness account. It is not written in the first person, though that does not preclude a tone of “commitment.”

What is distinctive about Bourke-White’s photograph is not that it inscribes an act of seeing, but that it constructs a legible message: a pictorial summation from which the arbitrariness of chance and the excess of particularity that afflict photography are strangely drained. The viewpoint is a function of composition, and the composition is painstaking and precise. The unusual choice of camera is crucial here. While the still relatively new small-format, 35 mm cameras predominated in *Life*’s original photography department, and while, in the newspaper world, photographers almost invariably carried heavy four-by-five Speed Graphics, with fixed flash attachments, Bourke-White preferred the image quality of her four-by-five wooden Soho reflex camera and her 3¼ x 4¼ Linhof, with multiple, synchronized flash extensions. Bourke-White’s method of working, with big camera, battery of lights, and long poses, precluded intimacy but placed the whole *mise en scène* under her firm directorial control. Erskine Caldwell said of working with her in 1936, the year before, that “She was in charge of everything, manipulating people and telling them where to sit and where to look and what not. She was very adept at being able to direct people. She was almost like a motion picture director” (Caldwell interview, 1 December 1982; qtd. in Goldberg 168). In Louisville, seen through the screen of her Linhof camera, the dour light from the rain-filled sky flattened Bourke-White’s subject in a way that worked with her use of a long focal length lens, telescoping optical space, pushing the line back against the billboard, and heightening both their proximity and their contrast.<sup>25</sup> More often, however, Bourke-White was unprepared to work with

available illumination. She sought greater plasticity and contrast, thinking of photography as sculpting with light, using multiple artificial light sources set out in series, at a variety of angles, and synchronized with a remote shutter release.<sup>26</sup> This gave her photographs—even those taken in Buchenwald on the day of liberation of the death camp—a melodramatic theatricality and a strange sheen, not unlike the high polish on the family in the car speeding along the American Way. The technical aspects of photography were not, however, what dominated Bourke-White's choices. Having set up her camera precisely, her method was to take the same picture, or a minutely adjusted variant, over and over, so that she could be sure of a correct exposure. As she told Ansel Adams: "I just set the shutter at 1/200th of a second, take a picture with every stop I have. I'm bound to get something" (qtd. in Goldberg 206).<sup>27</sup>

Composed in this way, the photograph as printed, almost full frame, has, for all its sorry subject, the polished inevitability and urbane wit of *Life's* smooth corporate writing.<sup>28</sup> Its meaning is explicit. With controlled and self-confident panache, it says what it has to say, undistracted by the irreducible richness of its anecdotal content: the way different men and women wear their hats; the ways they stand and what they do with their hands; their individual choices of shoes; the decision whether to turn up a coat collar or not; the preference for basket, galvanized bucket, or paper bag—not likely, one would think, to prove equally serviceable to every end. It is not that such incidentals are negligible to the image, to the extent that they give the "bread line" a lived particularity excluded from the untarnished ego ideals above. What matters, however, is the contrast, the overarching polarity that every local detail has to serve, as concrete particulars have to express the underlying movement of the Hegelian dialectic. Economy, force, and aptness of argument are the prime rule. The argument works by binary opposition, its empirical richness only the cumulative elaboration of this simple internal principle.

This is not, after all, an informative image. It does not give us cues to where we are. It does not tell us why the line has formed. It does not show us the causes of the glazed, bemused, or resigned expressions. It does not allow us to see why only African Americans queue here; why or whether they are the sole "victims"; where the white folks form their line; or whether we would be right to surmise that white folks all ride in cars. The photograph does not answer questions such as these. It is not that kind of journalism. Nor does it do what Edwin Locke and Walker Evans, on a short leash from their government boss Roy Stryker, were dispatched to do at exactly this time, accumulating entries for the photographic file, some way downriver in Forrest City, Arkansas, on the flood plain south of the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. For Bourke-White, the meaning of the flood was clear: it was "another bitter chapter in the bleak drama of waste of our American earth" (*Portrait* 150). When it came to making a photograph, Bourke-White had the same summarizing intentions. *Life's* Big News-Picture Story of the Week was not an accumulative record that risked the awkward, the fugitive, and the fragmentary. It was a condensed visual headline. And it was Bourke-White's skill in writing headlines that shaped the internal economy of meaning in this image, anchored by the headline: "THE FLOOD LEAVES ITS VICTIMS ON THE BREAD LINE."<sup>29</sup>

“The American Way” and the path of “The Flood.” “World’s Highest Standard Of Living” and “The Bread Line.” Consumers and “Victims.” Living and lost. Above and below. Movement towards us and movement to the margin. Speed and stagnation. Ecstasy and apathy. White and black. American and something else. One antithesis overlays another. The accumulation of connotations condenses in a single trope. This is the rhetorical gambit of the image. This is the nexus of irony that, for Bourke-White, spoke what she saw. Photographers believe they find their tropes in the world. That is what makes them insist they are real. For Bourke-White it was straightforward: “There was the irony of the relief line standing against the incongruous background of an NAM poster showing a contented family complete with cherubic children, dog and car, its printed message proclaiming, ‘There’s no way like the American Way’” (*Portrait* 150).

Irony. What Bourke-White did with the large-format camera was driven by her determination to fix this rhetorical structure, which she took herself merely to have discovered, yet whose organization into an effective picture involved a process she thought of as symbolization.<sup>30</sup> Where Bourke-White positioned herself put distance and externality over proximity and intimacy; while the long focal length of her lens flattened the queuing figures and collapsed the uncertain space between the billboard and the line, just as the unknown billboard designer had compressed the foreshortened space in the fictive car. It is as if the line of figures has been pasted on the bottom of the billboard, the whole being flattened like a poster, exposing—yet repeating—the spatial deception in the poster itself. This is, however, where the rhetoric of irony begins to turn and the tropic structure of the image to efface itself. The symbolic momentum gathered by the car is thrown into reverse. It is the line that now stands out as the rhetorical platform of the picture, a truth that cannot be ignored, the embodiment of a passive need that calls forth government action. Those who seemed to be the fall guys of a cruel joke made behind their backs now rise up as a concrete reality against which the joke falls flat. They are the Real that measures representation, the Real that marks its final frame.

The rhetoric of the image cashes out in a decisive way. The wrinkled, puckered surface of the poster shows itself, paper thin, easily, we now see, peeled away. The world of the billboard is the world of illusion, held up by its superstructure over the social reality at its base. To use again a favorite term of Birmingham cultural studies in the 1970s, the meaning of the fictive scene is “cashed out” in the real social relations beneath it. The poster is nothing but a representation, demonstrably inadequate to the reality of the “Bread Line.” This is the bad faith of representation: representation is tendentious, motivated, *trompe l’oeil*. Reality, outside all interest, present to itself, is given, unmediated, without re-presentation, to the unfooled eye. We see the truth now. The careful rhetorical construction of the image has brought us to this point. Representation, which seemed to be put at issue in the photograph, is only being *cited*, only being quoted in the image; but what falls outside all quotation marks is the Real itself.<sup>31</sup> It is this to which the photograph claims to give us access. And this is its authorization. The image makes a play with representation only to release itself from representation’s limits, placing itself outside citation on a ground beyond dispute.

There is a striking economy here. The message of the photograph is succinct, succinct enough to be read at a glance, undelayed by ambiguities or uncertainties. But the message of the photograph, unlike the message of the billboard, is the message of the Real itself, given to us to see, even before our eyes drop to the bottom of the page and we read: “The one flood problem which did not abate was that of relief. The water had cut off not only shelter but food and income. Lines formed outside each overworked relief agency. People came with baskets, bags, pails, or merely empty hands and hungry stomachs. Some of them, residents of the completely inundated Negro quarter of Louisville, appear in the picture above. They are inching past a sign erected before the flood as part of a propaganda campaign of the National Association of Manufacturers” (*Life*, 15 February 1937: 9). Everything is accounted for in this economy. Meaning always balances out on the bottom line. The argument may be rhetorical but the argument ends with the Real, and you can’t argue with that. It is beyond dispute. As in the inveterate structure of ideology critique, the photograph finally exempts itself of the charge it levels against representation. Representation is “propaganda,” betraying interests. The denotative force of the photograph puts before us the reality in which these interests are formed and the reality against which representation can be judged. The photograph is therefore put beyond adjudication. No need for representation when it already assumes the force of law.

One has to say it is impressively done. On 16 February 1937, only a day after the image was published, Beaumont Newhall wrote to Bourke-White for permission to include it in the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition, *Photography 1839–1937* (Bourke-White Papers, Box #31).<sup>32</sup> Bourke-White’s photograph of the Louisville flood is, indeed, exemplary, watertight. Nothing leaks. There is no remainder. Always granting, of course, that we do not get distracted by the cable wire that marks the corner like a dog-eared fold. The cable pulls at the inevitable force of the frame, marking the arbitrariness of the cut of the camera’s field of view and the cut of the cropping knife. The wire is like a hair on the negative: by rights, it should not be there, but it cannot be blown away. Then there is the line of figures: the idiosyncrasy of their clothes, their gestures, their facial expressions, their choices of footwear, the things they carry and have seen fit to bring with them on the line. None of this quite plays its allotted role. It is not wholly subsumable within the rhetorical function the line must perform: the mirror other to the world of the billboard Imaginary. It is not wholly absorbable into the structure of binary difference. Even ignoring the ghost, with its spectral witness to the mark of time on the materiality of the photograph, there is too much left over that does not disappear.

In the background, too, the billboard itself has a thickness at odds with its transparent function. Reduced to the role of fall guy, of comic stooge, the poster looming over the figures in the foreground has taken on for later audiences the status of a generic kitsch object, laughable in intent and weakened in effect. It stands for the cynical corporate jingoism and the naively patriotic public culture of a superseded time, gone the way of Ozzie and Harriet. In 1937, however, it meant both more and less than this—something charged with specific resonance, topical controversy, and an identifiable stamp. *Life*’s editorial writers were themselves quick enough to name it and separate themselves from its taint: it is “a sign erected before the flood as part

of a propaganda campaign of the National Association of Manufacturers.” Yet this caption launches more boats than it can keep afloat. We are not told what the National Association of Manufacturers is or why it would engage in a propaganda campaign at this time. Propaganda for what? Directed at whom? How much did *Life*’s writers feel they could assume? How much were readers already cued to supply?

The poster has, in fact, no signature, other than that of the graphic artist, which Bourke-White’s photograph does not show. Yet, as they appeared on the streets of American towns and cities in December 1936 and in the early months of 1937, billboards such as the one in Louisville (Fig. 5) were recognizable enough.<sup>33</sup> They caught the eye not only of Bourke-White, but also of government photographers Ed Locke, Arthur Rothenstein, and Dorothea Lange, who logged them for the Resettlement Administration file in Memphis, Tennessee; Kingwood, West Virginia; Birmingham, Alabama; and along U.S. Highway 99 in California.<sup>34</sup> The billboard campaign, lasting three months and encompassing three different designs posted at sixty thousand sites across the country, was something new, something to remark, even in the turbulent and inventive political landscape of the second Roosevelt administration.<sup>35</sup> Its sloganizing fed into the rising drone of political noise that marked this moment of conflict, the turning point for New Deal reformism, in which new media and new techniques of public communications began to rework the political process. At the level of content, however, the message, if not the smooth delivery, was familiar—as was the voice, whether identified on the billboards or not. Controversy over the political activities of the National Association of Manufacturers al-



Fig. 5. Edwin Locke, “Road Sign Near Kingwood, West Virginia, February 1937” (Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress).

ready had a history, but it was coming to a head again at this time in 1937, when, under force of subpoena, full-time officials and elected officers of the association were called to hearings in Congress, before a Senate subcommittee investigating violations of the right to free speech and assembly and interference with the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively.<sup>36</sup>

The National Association of Manufacturers, “a mutual and cooperative organization of American manufacturers in the United States,” had been formed at a gathering of industrialists in Cincinnati on 22 January 1895, at a time when the organizational and legislative successes of craft unions were pushing manufacturers to go beyond existing trade organizations, to organize themselves across industries and on a national scale.<sup>37</sup> What spurred action in 1895 was the backlash from the wave of violently suppressed “anarchistic strikes” that accompanied the severe economic slump of 1894. In the struggle to shape public opinion, the National Association of Manufacturers emerged as what one historian has called “a permanent propaganda association,” advocating for the interests of industrialists, mobilizing for control of the legislative agenda, and vehemently attacking the rise of unionism (Bonnett 396). In its publications, the National Association of Manufacturers condemned the American Federation of Labor as “un-American, illegal and indecent” (qtd. in Senate Committee Part 17, Exhibit 3803, p. 7547).<sup>38</sup> Its president, John Kirby, Jr., railed that “The American Federation of Labor is engaged in an open warfare against Jesus Christ and his cause” (Exhibit 3804, p. 7547).<sup>39</sup> So determined in the early 1900s was the association’s opposition to legislation favored by the American Federation of Labor that its political and legislative maneuvering came under investigation by committees of the sixty-third Congress. It was not to be the last time.

By the mid-1930s, the prime targets of the National Association of Manufacturers had changed: now, the object of its wrath was no longer the American Federation of Labor, but rather the regulatory agencies of the New Deal, on the one side, and, on the other, John Lewis’s Committee for Industrial Organization, armed with its new weapon of the “sit-down strike.” Nineteen thirty-seven was the year in which conflict between all three parties erupted into the news.<sup>40</sup> The National Association of Manufacturers then had forty-five hundred members, representing companies employing about one-third to one-half of all manufacturing workers in the United States.<sup>41</sup> The association was, however, dominated by a core of around two hundred large firms and corporations that contributed forty-nine percent of the organization’s total income and controlled its board of directors.<sup>42</sup> The same companies bound the National Association of Manufacturers closely to affiliated organizations, such as the National Metal Trades Association, that actively promoted company unions, anti-labor espionage, strike breaking, tear gas, and other “instrumentalities of industrial warfare,” as Senator Robert La Follette was to call them (Senate Committee Part 17, p. 7389). Such policies brought the National Association of Manufacturers into headlong conflict with the extension of union activity stimulated by the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 and given new protections by the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. The National Association of Manufacturers condemned the work of the National Labor Relations Board and was one of the “most active” elements in the movement to discredit the National Labor Relations Act, arguing that it



was unconstitutional and hostile to the welfare of industry and, even after its passage, inciting companies to defy it.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, in the words of one of its own earlier general managers, the National Association of Manufacturers was “not primarily a labor-busting organization” (qtd. in Senate Committee Part 17, Exhibit 3805, p. 7547).<sup>44</sup> The definition of its general objects and purposes given in its constitution had committed it, from the beginning, to “the education of the public in the principles of individual liberty and ownership of property” (qtd. in Exhibit 3788-A, p. 7486).<sup>45</sup> By the mid-1930s, however, in the face of government intervention and “the growing menace of industrial disputes,” “the cultivation of public understanding” had taken on a new prominence, even as the tactics of “industrial warfare” showed signs of antagonizing public opinion (qtd. in Exhibit 3836, p. 7686).<sup>46</sup> “Now, more than ever before,” the association came to realize, “strikes are being won or lost in the newspapers and over the radio” (Part 18, Exhibit 3866; also qtd. in Part 34, p. 13865).<sup>47</sup> A 1933 policy review by the National Association of Manufacturers’ Law Department gave early warning, arguing that:

The problem of public relations must have an active consideration that the Association has never been able to give it. The public does not understand industry, largely because industry itself has made no real effort to tell its story; to show the people of this country that our high living standards have arisen almost altogether from the civilization which industrial activity has set up. On the other hand, selfish groups, including labor, the socialistic-minded and the radical, have constantly and continuously misrepresented industry to the people, with the result that there is a general misinformation of our industrial economy, which is highly destructive in its effect. (Part 17, Exhibit 3807, p. 7550)<sup>48</sup>

Writing with admirable candor in September 1937, the head of the National Association of Manufacturers’ “field force” put it more succinctly: “The hazard facing industrialists is the newly realized political power of the masses. Unless their thinking is directed toward sane and established measures, we are definitely headed for adversity” (Exhibit 3838, p. 7693).<sup>49</sup>

The answer, modeled on new practices of corporate public relations, was a “Nation-wide educational movement” that would cover “every known channel of reaching the public—press, radio, industrial management, stockholders, employees, industry, farmers, and other groups” (7693). Accordingly, in February 1934, a National Industrial Information Committee was set up to raise special funds for “an educational program” prepared by a Public Relations Committee, under the guidance of a Publicity Director.<sup>50</sup> In December 1935, the affiliated National Industrial Committee, housed in the National Association of Manufacturers’ headquarters in New York, was also reorganized, primarily to promote the Public Information Program more effectively. The National Industrial Committee itself went back to 1907, having been organized as the means of extending the reach of the National Association of Manufacturers to forty thousand additional companies. By 1935, the National Industrial Committee linked the National Association of Manufacturers to thirty-three state industrial associations, eighty-five industrial employment relations organiza-

tions, and seventy-eight national manufacturing trade associations.<sup>51</sup> With this extended network as its base, the annual income of the National Association of Manufacturers' Public Information Program grew from nothing in 1933 to over one hundred thousand dollars in 1935, to half a million dollars in 1936, to three-quarters of a million in 1937—fully half the total income of the association as a whole, though this was only seed money for the actual publicity campaigns.<sup>52</sup>

The 1937 report, *Industry Must Speak!*, published by the National Industrial Information Committee, outlined what “public information” and an expanded “educational program” entailed: press bulletins to daily newspapers, syndicated newspaper columns, news stories, news-clipping services, cartoons and comic strips, newspaper advertising, outdoor advertising, radio features, radio dramas, motion picture shorts and newsreels, foreign language transcriptions, public speeches, newsletters, direct mailings, employee contacts, bulletin-board posters, circular letters, pamphlets, and publications (qtd. in Senate Committee Part 17, Exhibit 3839, p. 7693–96). The campaign to present “industry as a courageous, progressive force” was to embrace “practically every known medium” (qtd. in Part 35, Exhibit 5485, p. 14384).<sup>53</sup> Rarely, however, was the National Association of Manufacturers' authorship of its publicity materials identified to target audiences. The tactic was to work through local businesses and “civic organizations,” who would sponsor local campaigns using the association's materials. In April 1937, for example, the National Association of Manufacturers bought a series of thirteen “Harmony ads” designed by the advertising agency of MacDonald-Cook, under the slogan “Prosperity Dwells Where Harmony Reigns.” The National Association then promoted these ready-made advertisements to local business leaders as “the means of organizing a community against labor agitators before they get in their work” (qtd. in Part 18, Exhibit 3852, p. 7895).<sup>54</sup> When they appeared in local newspapers, however, as they did in 367 cities across the country, their message carried only the endorsement of the civic organizations and “citizens' committees” that underwrote the publication costs and used the advertisements to raise local donations in support of their anti-labor vigilante activities.<sup>55</sup>

The billboard campaign that appeared on the streets of Louisville and other American cities in December 1936 and the early months of 1937 was, therefore, only part of a broader, concerted program to shape public opinion and to mobilize “merchants, professional men, farmers, white-collar workers, and other groups which are known as the Public” as “a third party” in the sharpened struggle with labor (qtd. in Part 18, Exhibit 3873, p. 8031).<sup>56</sup> According to *Industry Must Speak!*, the aim of the outdoor advertising strategy was to proclaim “on the billboards of the nation that ‘There Is No Way Like the American Way’ with Its ‘World's Highest Standard of Living,’ ‘World's Shortest Working Hours,’ ‘World's Highest Wages’” (qtd. in Part 17, Exhibit 3839, p. 7695) (Fig. 6). The unifying slogan derived from the first of a series of broad themes conceived in 1934 and outlined originally in eight free booklets published under the rubric of the “You and Industry Series.” The theme was “The American Way—An explanation of how our system operates,” part of what the National Association of Manufacturers saw as “a constructive, affirmative story of industry.”<sup>57</sup> In all, the billboard campaign cost \$53,461.97 to prepare, but it would have cost almost \$1.25 million if billboard space had not been furnished free by outdoor

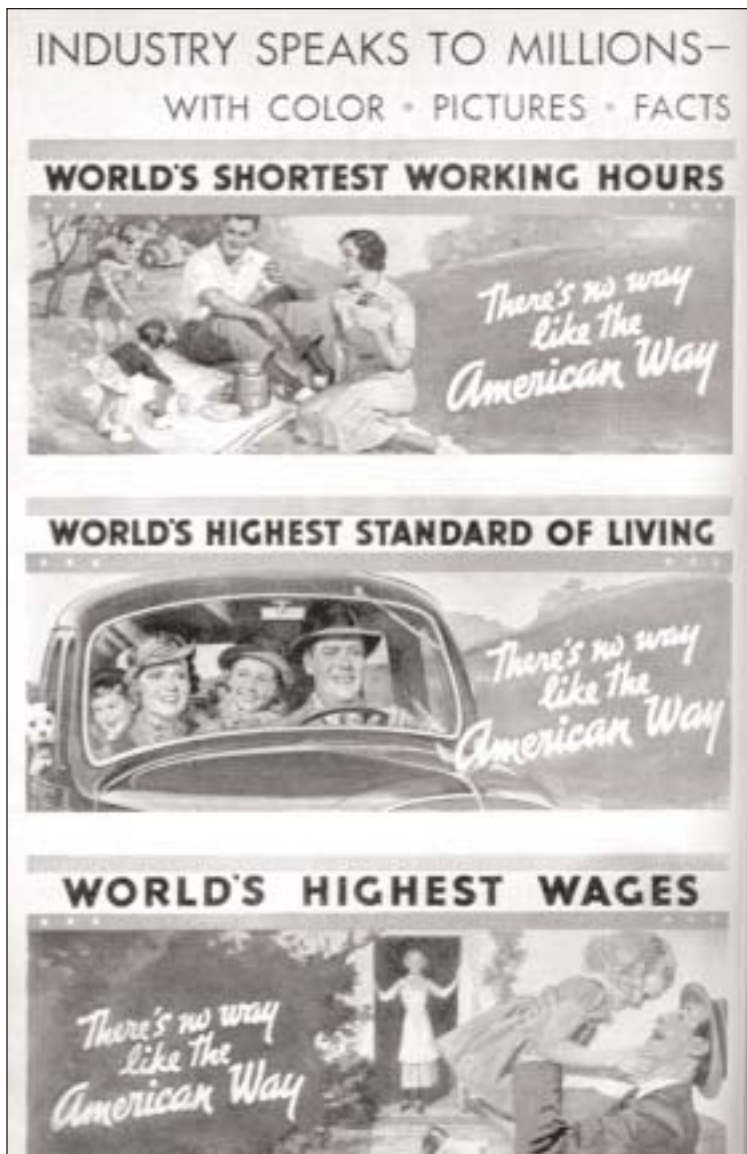


Fig 6. National Association of Manufacturers of the United States leaflet, "Along the Highways of America," describing the outdoor campaign, "There's No Way Like The American Way," 1937.

advertising companies contacted through the General Outdoor Advertising Association.<sup>58</sup> Nothing on the posters identified either the publisher or the sponsor. That was, as we have seen, standard practice for the National Association of Manufacturers. But, pressed on the point by the Senate subcommittee, Walter B. Weisenburger, the association's executive vice-president, blustered: "They were upon the American Way, and the conditions that surround our industrial life, because we felt it was important that the American people commence to have some full appreciation of the industrial system as presented from the manufacturer's standpoint, and there we were presenting the American Way as being superior to any other industrial system in the rest of the world, and did not necessarily think at that time that it was necessary to identify a 'hurrah for America'" (qtd. in Senate Committee, *Hearings*, Part 17, p. 7466).

The distribution for this "hurrah for America," as for the "Harmony ads," was certainly widespread and general. As Ernest T. Weir, Chairman of the National Industrial Information Committee, boasted:

Industry's first outdoor campaign shows the happy America which industry helped to create . . . reaching every class and group through 60,000 billboard advertisements placed throughout the country . . . blazing the trail in placing facts about industrial progress and achievements before the public with pictures and color.

Millions will see it . . . millions will read it . . . telling and repeating to millions the truth that "There's No Way Like The American Way." (qtd. in Part 35, Exhibit 5485-E, p. 14411)<sup>59</sup>

Yet the National Association of Manufacturers also pointedly concentrated its publicity campaigns on the sites of protracted strikes and coordinated strikebreaking interventions, and on localities torn by civic strife spilling over from the industrial arena. This is what brought officers and officials before Robert La Follette's Senate subcommittee investigation of violations of free speech and the rights of labor. Monroe, Flint, and Lansing, Michigan; the Mahoning Valley, Ohio; Johnstown, Pennsylvania; Tonawanda, New York: these were the place names that had filled the pages of the association's publications and then echoed back through the hearing room. Yet the civil conflicts born of ecological disaster down the Ohio and Mississippi valleys and across the dust-choked farmlands of the Great Plains posed as much of a threat to national cohesion and were not without their own relation to the drives of industrialization. Flood, dereliction, and sit-down strikes jostled together on the pages of *Life* in the winter and early spring of 1937. There was a reason for the National Association of Manufacturers to be there, incognito, in Louisville, Kentucky. There was a relationship to be brought out, just as *Life* had cause enough to think about the role of mass-produced images in the new economy of publicity and public opinion formation that had reinvested corporate affairs and the political field in the United States in the mid-1930s. This was not the magazine's purpose, of course, any more than it was the purpose of Bourke-White's photograph. Her headline picture depended on this topicality, this tacit sense of suspended connections; it was part of the

photograph's currency in February 1937. Yet, Bourke-White's strategy worked to reorganize the unruly dissemination of photographic meaning into an immediately readable message whose rhetorical condensation and graphic simplification would absorb particularities and take on the quality of a symbol. In this, other stories were lost, even to readers in 1937, but the thickness of meaning could not be entirely flattened out.

This is not all, perhaps, that shows itself and cannot be closed off by the finality of a reading imposed by the dialectic of the manifest message. Since we have begun to confront the *overdetermination* of meaning in the photograph, here is the story of a dream. Written in characteristic style, it comes from Bourke-White's autobiography *Portrait of Myself*, published in 1963. In this stylized narrative, itself strikingly subject to processes of displacement and condensation, the dream is placed sometime in the first half of 1936, though this is not entirely clear in the compressed narrative time that moves very rapidly from five days in 1934, in which Bourke-White flew from the Dakotas to the Texas panhandle photographing the drought for *Fortune* magazine, to the "miracle" in which she would happen to hear about Erskine Caldwell's project to collaborate with a photographer on an authentic book about people and conditions in the South (*Portrait* 107–13). The dream falls, in this carefully plotted account, "a week or two" before the miraculous event and is offered as final explanation of Bourke-White's rising determination to repudiate her lucrative career as an advertising photographer, whose staple accounts in the early 1930s were Buick cars and Goodyear Tires.<sup>60</sup>

Like propaganda, set aside from "real life," advertising marked what had to be repudiated but could not be escaped.<sup>61</sup> In a convenient distinction, Bourke-White would later insist that her work in the field of advertising gave her "practice in precision," but that her "style" and, "even more importantly," her "convictions" were formed in her experience photographing the heavy industries of Cleveland and the Midwest (*Portrait* 80). On 9 March 1936, however, Bourke-White wrote to Erskine Caldwell that: "I have felt keenly for some time that I was turning my camera too often to advertising subjects and too little in the direction of something that might have some social significance" (Caldwell Papers, Box #1).<sup>62</sup> In the search for "social significance," however, Bourke-White's "unreal" past was apt to stage unexpected returns. In her autobiography, again, Bourke-White writes of traveling with Caldwell in the summer of 1936:

As we penetrated the more destitute regions of the South, I was struck by the frequent reminders I found of the advertising world I thought I had left behind. Here the people really used the ads. They plastered them directly on their houses to keep the wind out. Some sharecropper shacks were wrapped so snugly in huge billboard posters advertising magic pain-killers and Buttercup Snuff that the home itself disappeared from sight. The effect was bizarre.

And inside, the effect was equally unexpected. The walls from floor to ceiling were papered in old newspapers and colorful advertising pages torn from magazines. Very practical, Erskine explained to me. Good as insulation against either heat or chill, and it's clean and can be replaced for next to noth-

ing. I had the uneasy feeling that if I explored around enough, I would find advertisements I had done myself. (127–28) (see Fig. 7)

Guilt and unease. The disappearance of the home. They suggest a rather different relationship between advertising and the real than that to which we have to cling in the midst of the Louisville flood. The recoil in Bourke-White's autobiography is immediate, however. She remembers "a little girl named Begonia." Begonia has a twin sister: "They went to school on alternate days, so as to share their single nondescript coat and their one pair of shoes. And here, right behind Begonia's wistful little face as she told me this, was this spectacular and improbable background showing all the world's goods. Begonia and her sister could look their walls over and find a complete range of shoes, jackets and coats. But never would they find that real coat and real pair of shoes which would take the second twin to school" (128). The real is secured again in the foreground, as an antidote to the "spectacular and improbable back-



Fig. 7. Margaret Bourke-White, *You Have Seen Their Faces* (New York: Modern Age Books Inc., 1937).

ground.” But the real is also an enigma that will never be found, however much the sisters give themselves over to looking and to the world of magazines. On the one hand, the real settles the issue. On the other, it will never resolve the troubling narrative of doubling, separation, and loss that cannot restore the missing twin, the missing coat, and the missing pair of shoes.

I have not forgotten the dream. In *Portrait of Myself*, the encounter with the twin follows the repudiation of the world of advertising precipitated by the dream that ruptures the “circle of madness.” Bourke-White writes:

The circle of madness was closing on itself. Rubber was chasing rubber around in a vacuum. I longed to see the real world which lay beyond the real tire, where things did not have to look convincing, they just had to be true. I felt I could never again face a shiny automobile stuffed with vapid smiles. Never again could I build and rebuild the road that led nowhere.

Then I had a dream. I still remember the mood of terror. Great unfriendly shapes were rushing toward me, threatening to crush me down. As they drew closer, I recognized them as the Buick cars I had been photographing. They were moving toward me in a menacing zigzag course, their giant hoods raised in jagged alarming shapes as though determined to swallow me. Run as fast as I could, I could not escape them. As they moved faster, I began to stumble, and as they towered over me, pushing me down, I woke up to find that I had fallen out of bed and was writhing on the floor with my back strained. (112)<sup>63</sup>

It may be remarked that the narrative in which the dream has its function and the reported dream itself turn on images, tropes, and compressions of space that echo those of the Louisville photograph of 1937: the counterposing of “the real world” and the world of appearance; the “shiny automobile stuffed with vapid smiles”; the road to nowhere; the giant hood, towering above, moving inexorably forwards, pushing down, crushing. This repetition alone would be of interest, irrespective of whether one thought one was dealing with the work of a dream in 1936 or the work of a text in 1963. In the story of Bourke-White’s life, as, in the later 1950s, she wished it to be told, the episode of the nightmare is contrived as a turning point. The retelling of the dream alleged to have disturbed her sleep almost exactly a year before the Louisville photograph was made invests the figure of the advancing car with portentous personal meaning, not untypical of the operation of dream images in the genre of life stories to which Bourke-White’s autobiography conforms. Such investment of meaning, whether consciously wrought or unbidden, must certainly complicate the question of what we are to read in the 1937 photograph. At the same time, the lurid imagery and melodramatic hyperbole of the written account, even if expected of the genre, still register, at a less calculated level, as excessive in relation to their narrative function, speaking more than may be intended of paranoid fantasies of prostration, engulfment, suffocation, and engorgement.

Whether dream or not, the excess of Bourke-White’s story has meaning. It has meaning, no doubt, for the motivation of so driven a woman as Margaret Bourke-White, though psychobiography is not my purpose here. Such speculation may well

be beyond the pale and beside the point, but what it is harder to say is that the tropological activity of the texts in play—dream, autobiography, photograph—can be conveniently closed to the uncertain reaches that have opened up. The least we might say for the photograph is that, once such relays of meaning come to animate the image, there is no convenient way to exclude them. Or, to put it another way, there is, inescapably, an unexcludable excess of meaning in the photograph that does not lend itself to didactic reduction, or to functionalism, or to efficient communication, even in an image such as this, in which semiotic economy and discursive frame work to curtail meaning as exhaustively determined and complete. The economy of accomplished meaning is in doubt, even in Bourke-White's practice of engaged journalism in which the message must always arrive.

As I have said, it was not only photojournalists who, in the early months of 1937, found themselves in the flood plain of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Photographers and filmmakers working for the government were also dispatched to record the disaster and the relief effort and to send back images that might be useful to various forms of governmental, interagency, and public advocacy. Carl Mydans had been in Louisville in March of the previous year, photographing the flooded streets for the Historical Section of the Division of Information of the Resettlement Administration.<sup>64</sup> In 1937, it was Walker Evans and Edwin Locke who were sent out from the Washington office on a "quick trip to flood," this time headed further downriver, to the point where the Ohio and the Mississippi flowed together, pouring out their flood waters into the valley bottom south of Cairo.<sup>65</sup>

This was no freewheeling assignment. The photographers were to link up in Memphis with Pare Lorentz and Willard Van Dyke, who were gathering dramatic footage for Lorentz's didactic documentary film, *The River*. They were also to record the catastrophic effect of land mismanagement in the upper valleys and the short-term emergency response by governmental and local agencies to the resultant inundation of the river plain. Evans was characteristically relieved to be out of Washington and away from routine jobs, but with his reputation for low production and a way of working intractable to direction, he may also have guessed he was being given a final chance by the cash-strapped Historical Section for which he worked as Information Specialist, on a salary of \$3,000 a year.<sup>66</sup> Clearly, Evans was meant to be under the watchful eye of Locke, who duly reported back to Roy Stryker, office chief of the Resettlement Administration's photographic record and publicity arm.<sup>67</sup> For his part, while maintaining friendly terms, Evans thought Locke on assignment looked like "a communist commissar in the Winter Palace" (Evans diary, 2 February 1937, Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.98). Certainly, there is pomposity and condescension in Locke's letters to Stryker: "I had a job annoying Walker out of his lassitude," he would write from Memphis on 4 February, "but today in Forrest City, Arkansas, he worked as I am sure he never has before" (Stryker Papers).<sup>68</sup>

Forrest City was the destination. Having left Washington at three o'clock on the afternoon of 30 January, Locke and Evans had driven west, through Lexington, Knoxville, and Savannah, Tennessee, arriving in Memphis around one on Tuesday, 2 February. The following day, they moved on by train to Forrest City, Arkansas,



photographing waterlogged farmlands, stranded farm houses, and the frightening rush of the swollen river on either side of the raised railroad tracks.<sup>69</sup> Over the next five days, despite Locke's comment, the two worked hard to document the broken flood defenses, the ruined homes, the refugees, and the relief response. But they also could not avoid recording forced black labor on the levees, segregated food lines, and the racially separated camps for victims of the flood. This was far from Evans's first assignment in the South, but what he saw across the wall of segregation still drew him in.<sup>70</sup>

After his first full day working in Forrest City, Evans noted in his small, red leather engagement book:

To white refugee camps in the morning, a sunny day. Refugees being brought in, tents set up in a lot near high school, by CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] men. This is all in charge of Red Cross who want us to be sure to include their insignia in pictures. Careful not to do this. People seem thoroughly depressed, mostly worries about future. We did a good deal of work and got tired. Negro camp at other end of town much larger, much more interesting. Negroes really deflated, more so than I've ever seen them. I tried a few shots with synchronized flash inside the large compress where the sick were lying in an assortment of fancy iron beds (their own?). Felt completely ill-mannered but wanted at the same time to make just these pictures. (Evans diary, 4 February 1937, Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.98)<sup>71</sup>

Ill-mannered or not, he was back the next day, and, in fact, it was in these camps for African American flood refugees that Evans would make the only images he would later choose to publish and reuse from what has been judged a failed assignment.<sup>72</sup>

One of these images was a photograph, taken with flash and a four-by-five view camera, almost at eye-level with a young African American woman, seemingly one of the sick in assorted iron bedsteads, in the overcrowded cotton compress building in Forrest City (Fig. 8). Evans appears to have held the negative back from the Resettlement file and, in 1938, he included a print from it in the monograph that accompanied his Museum of Modern Art solo exhibition—an exhibition in which he hung two different images from the Forrest City series of black refugees in the segregated relief station.<sup>73</sup> In the book, *American Photographs*, “Arkansas Flood Refugee, 1937” appears in Part One as plate 44, uncaptioned on the page, falling between the uninviting boarding house bed of Evans's friend, John Cheever, and white working-class residents relaxing outside their house in Ossining, New York (see Evans, *American Photographs*). Documentary continuities of time and place are entirely dispensed with. The sequencing makes the refugee image all the more enigmatic, no longer segregated, but also kept from too easy a juxtaposition with the detail from a “Minstrel Showbill” discovered on a wall in Alabama in the summer of 1936, placed here as plate 42, following and echoing an image of white entertainment in Coney Island. The conclusive meanings characteristic of journalistic contrasts are thus withheld. The relationships of image to image are not those of thesis and antithesis, but of rhyme, repetition, discrepancy, and reversal.<sup>74</sup> No image finally



Fig. 8. Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), plate 44.

adjudicates any other. The order is deliberate, but the process of reading is not curtailed in advance.

A second image from Forrest City, Arkansas, that would also find its way into publication shows a segregated food line, not unlike the one Margaret Bourke-White saw in Louisville at around the same time. This photograph belongs to an extended series of 35 mm exposures made in the black refugee camp with a Leica, all on the same day.<sup>75</sup> Tightly cropped by the hand-held camera, it frames a woman's hand holding a tin plate and a man's hand holding a broken china bowl (Fig. 9). The figures are cut off at the forearms and ankles. The dishes stand out against the dark clothing. Without comparison with other frames on the same roll of film, it is hard to grasp the context: no spatial setting is given, no wider explanatory frame, no supporting ground, not even feet, or heads, or faces.<sup>76</sup> By Evans's standards of emotional distance, however, the photograph might still seem vulnerable to being taken for an image of outrage or pity and, indeed, it appears it was.

In late April 1938, Evans's photograph was among eighty-one prints selected and arranged by Arthur Rothstein and Russell Lee for a major Historical Section ex-



Fig. 9. Walker Evans, “Forrest City, Arkansas, Negroes Standing in Line for Food at the Camp for Flood Refugees, February 1937.” (Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress)

hibit at the “First International Photography Exposition,” at the Grand Central Palace in New York.<sup>77</sup> Evans went to the show and wrote to Stryker, “the whole thing is so commercial it made me sick” (Evans to Stryker, 21 April 1938, Stryker Papers). This was something less than tactful, since Stryker regarded the exhibit as a *coup*, boasting that “Even Steichen went to the show in a perfunctory manner and got a surprise when he ran into our section” (Stryker to Locke, 26 April 1938, Stryker Papers). It was, indeed, Edward Steichen who, that same year, would edit a selection of Farm Security Administration photographs from the Grand Central Palace exhibition for publication in *U.S. Camera Annual 1939*. The selection included two of Evans’s small-format Arkansas flood pictures, together with another by Edwin Locke, though the anonymity of the “F. S. A.” photographs and the style of presentation were not designed to please Evans. Stryker, on the other hand, was in rapture and bought several copies to pass on to Department of Agriculture administrators (Stryker to Dorothea Lange, 22 December 1938; qtd. in Hurley 136). He was all the more pleased in that, introducing the forty-one selected photographs, Steichen was insistent that it was the collective achievement of Stryker’s photographers as a group that had to be celebrated. Even so, Steichen conceded, “For sheer story telling impact, the picture of the hands with the plates on page 46 . . . would be hard to beat” (Steichen 44).<sup>78</sup> This also seems to have been the view of Richard Wright and Edwin Rosskam, who, in 1941, would put Evans’s food line picture on the dustcover of their sweeping, rhetorical photo-documentary book, *12 Million Black Voices*. For all the complexity of his record of black living conditions in the South, it would be one of only two Evans photographs in the entire publication.

Yet in terms of “story telling,” the Arkansas image is hardly demonstrative. In contrast to Margaret Bourke-White’s view of the Louisville flood, it has no polemic, though one might obviously be supplied. Nor does it make an emotional appeal to the viewer through an imaginary dramatization of the act of looking. It may be informative, but not in the way of a government report. The focus of its attention seems to be on the smallest differences of gesture and anatomy affecting the ways the two hands hold the two utensils. To make the image, Evans must have been embarrassingly close, squatting down in the mud, hardly himself a confidence-inspiring spectacle. No wonder he wrote that he “felt completely ill-mannered” in his urgent drive “to make just these pictures” (Evans diary, 4 February 1937, Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.98).

On the morning of 9 February, however, all photographic activity in and around Forrest City was cut short when Evans woke with influenza. Sickness and fever kept him in bed until the fourteenth and work could not begin again until the seventeenth, two days after Margaret Bourke-White’s flood photograph had appeared as the lead in that week’s issue of *Life*. By then the assignment was, to all intents and purposes, over. On Saturday, 20 February, Evans and Locke scrapped plans to go on to Paducah and Louisville and started back, driving through Tennessee and Virginia, stopping by the roadside in Kingwood, West Virginia, while Locke photographed another of the National Association of Manufacturers’ billboards that had first caught his eye in Memphis.<sup>79</sup> By 6 P.M. on Thursday, 25 February, Evans and Locke were in Washington, where, less than a month later, Evans would have lunch and an “extraordinary conversation” with Roy Stryker (Evans diary, 20 March 1937, Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.98).<sup>80</sup> Newly transferred to the Department of Agriculture and no longer independent, the Resettlement Administration had fallen under heavy Congressional scrutiny. Its chief administrator, Rexford Tugwell, had resigned a month after the 1936 election and, with the programs he championed in doubt, the Division of Information’s budget had been cut. On 23 March, Evans would receive his final dismissal notice. No more bi-weekly checks for \$120. His work for the government was over.<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, the work of his negatives was not. With the exception of those promised first to *Fortune* for the story on “Three Tenant Farmers” that turned into the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, all Evans’s work in the picture file of the Resettlement Administration, later the Farm Security Administration, was government property, available for circulation without his further consent. This is what happened, for example, to a large-format photograph Evans had made in Atlanta in 1936 (Fig. 10). The photograph, captioned “Houses in Atlanta,” appeared without Evans’s foreknowledge in the 1938 photo-documentary book *Land of the Free* (91), published with Stryker’s blessing by poet Archibald MacLeish.

MacLeish was a figure of national stature: a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, editor at *Fortune*, and occasional writer for *Life*, with connections in the Roosevelt administration and the backing of a major publishing house. His goal, as in earlier experiments with a dance drama and radio play, was to find ways to shape public opinion through the direct and public use of poetry, hybridizing his writing with forms drawn from mass media, such as the newsreel and the short documentary film. For his part, Stryker knew that he needed to have his files put to work in a public way in order to



Fig. 10. Walker Evans, “Houses and Billboards in Atlanta, 1936.” (Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.)

justify his hard-pressed budget. He was, therefore, more than eager to cooperate with MacLeish’s proposal to compose a poetic photographic book using the Historical Section’s collection. In fact, he took it upon himself to pull an initial set of five hundred photographs to start MacLeish off and wrote enthusiastically to Section photographer Russell Lee that the book would contain “a series of pictures which will portray the people left behind after the empire builders have taken the forests, the ore, and the top soil” (Stryker to Lee, April 1937; qtd. in Natanson 203).

MacLeish began work with Stryker’s selection in July and August of 1937, editing, sequencing, developing new orders for agency photographers, and writing his poetic “accompaniment” (*Land* 89), like the soundtrack to one of Pare Lorentz’s documentary movies, trying, as he put it, to give the photographs “a theme, a running, continuing sort of choral voice” (qtd. in Drabek and Ellis 95).<sup>82</sup> Like the “Voice of God” commentary in *The Plow That Broke the Plains* and *The River*, the “choral voice” of MacLeish’s *Land of the Free* is sonorous, grandiloquent, and affectedly populist, mixing Southern Agrarian themes of the betrayal of Eden with quasi-Marxist themes of capitalist exploitation in a way that seemed convincing at the time to so many east coast intellectuals, including Evans’s friend Lincoln Kirstein. Delivered in high oratorical style in the first person plural, MacLeish’s verse rises to anger but has little depth as an indictment of the American system, never descending to the level of specific institutions or concrete alternatives. Its preference—part Popular Front, part Frontier Myth—is for larger histrionic gestures and the overarching rhetoric of an imaginary collectivity that transcends private interests and rises above the violence of the class struggle. On this would-be epic plane,

MacLeish's "Sound Track" sought to give voice to the faces of the "eroded human beings" in the photographs, conjuring up a metaphoric unity for the images far removed from the day-to-day concerns of the photographers and the metonymic realism of their archival project (MacLeish qtd. in Drabeck and Ellis 95).<sup>83</sup>

Evans's photographs did not yield easily to this enveloping context. His measured view of an empty street in downtown Atlanta was especially oddly placed in MacLeish's troubled meditation on rural decay, the collapse of the land, and the loss of the promise of plenty that asked if "the liberty's back of us," now the "Land's gone," "Or if there's liberty a man can mean that's / Men: not land" (*Land* 29, 87). Bled to the edge of the page and with no identifying caption, "Houses in Atlanta" falls about halfway through MacLeish's orchestration of image and text, next to page 43, opposite the line: "And we're not telling them: not from our own front doors." "We're not telling them" marks the breakdown of what "we've been telling ourselves" for "a hundred and fifty years" about liberty, self-evident truths, and being American (3). It is one of a series of repeated refrains—"we can't say," "we don't know," "we aren't sure," "we get wondering"—that turn, on the very last page, into "We're asking."<sup>84</sup> It is not clear on page 43 who "we're not telling" or, indeed, whose front doors these are, since they are not visible and, in any case, may be unreachable. It is also uncertain what meaning there might be for a radicalized Agrarianism in boarded up Victorian houses in the heart of Atlanta.

The sequence only adds to the puzzle (Figs. 11, 12, and 13). Evans's urban street scene is preceded by a view of a "bleeding hillside" in a Virginia valley, eroding away one hour after rain, and is followed by an image of wind-stripped, hard-pan land in Alabama with a seemingly abandoned farm house (see "Index of Pictures" in *Land* 91). The continuity of context is far from clear. What it is that the photographs bear witness to is not readily discernible. The "chorus" goes on gesturing and declaiming, but the action itself is hard to follow, even though MacLeish maintained that it was the photographs, "the power and the stubborn inward livingness of these vivid American documents," that carried the narrative, only "illustrated by a poem" (see "Notes" in *Land* 89). The intransigent particularities of the photographs have, of course, been stitched up. Bound into MacLeish's book, the photographs are overruled by a uniform graphic code, subsumed by sequence, and interpellated by a text that calls them into the epic space of the collective subject as it emerges into its historical consciousness—unless, that is, they prove intractable. Evans's photograph is more "stubborn" than most. As the thick black graphic line and the voice-over of the "Sound Track" move resolutely on, "trying to find words for the purgatory of the Depression, for the American hopes and expectations and what had happened to them" (MacLeish qtd. in Drabeck and Ellis 80), it seems to be left stranded. Sprung from worn-out fields, bracketed by rural decay, it goes on standing in another semantic space, unassimilable and unreadable.

This tear in MacLeish's book did not seem to worry its readers. Published in April 1938 by Harcourt Brace and Company, *Land of the Free* was never a bestseller but it did receive heavy coverage in the press, and not just in the small magazines. The New York *Herald-Tribune* hailed it as "a document of real social significance" (Lechlitner 6). The *New York Times* saw it as a "Poem for Our Day": "a grim and

Under our feet and our hands the land leaves us:  
The continent richer than any: heavy with earth:  
Spade-head deep with leaf mold where the trees were:  
Handle deep with black land under grass:  
The new continent: new in our time even: —  
Whole counties cankered to rock and hardpan:  
One acre in twenty dead as haddock:  
Two farmers in five tenants: the rest of them  
Hoeing the company's mortgage for three rows:  
Hoeing their own on the fourth till their backs break with it:  
The tilled land of the Mississippi Valley —  
"The most spacious habitation for man in the  
World anywhere" —

goldenrod where the corn was:

A quarter and more of it —

goldenrod where the corn was



Fig. 11. Archibald MacLeish, *Land of the Free* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938), p. 42.

And we're not selling them: not from our own front doors:



Fig. 12. Archibald MacLeish, *Land of the Free* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938), p. 43.



Not from the front stoops sagging toward the ditches:

Not from the gullayed acres tilled for cotton:

Cut for bunkock: harvested for stones



Fig. 13. Archibald MacLeish, *Land of the Free* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938), p. 44.

beautiful book, a masterpiece of collaboration” (Jack 2). Evans was less taken. A couple of months after publication, he sent Roy Stryker a note with a clipping from a book-trade pamphlet reproducing, without acknowledgment, a plate from *Land of the Free*: Evans’s own 1936 photograph of the elaborately-carved wooden porch of a boarding house on Fourth Avenue in Birmingham, Alabama. Evans insisted that he was sending the cutting to Stryker only “as an item of mild interest and amusement, not as a howl of pain.” But the clipping was annotated with the one word: “Gawd!” (Evans to Stryker, 17 June 1938, Stryker Papers).<sup>85</sup>

Evans, of course, had understood from the start the risks he was taking for his work by entering government employment. At one level, he seemed to think he could deal with these risks by maintaining a contempt for bureaucracy and by continuing to operate behind the back of officialdom. He made duplicate negatives and additional prints and held them back for his own use, just as he padded his often thin file submissions with work made before his official employment, for purposes other than those of government record and publicity. His distrust and self-interest did not stop here. From the outset, he had worried about interference and the taint of association that government work might bring. In 1935, still in negotiations over various possible government jobs, defensive and self-protective as ever, he tried to clarify issues in his own mind, scribbling down lists headed “Want,” “Will give,” and then, on a second sheet of paper, in an accusatory tone: “never under any circumstances asked to do anything more than these things. Mean never make photographic statements for the government [or do photographic chores for gov. or anyone in gov. no matter how powerful, (inserted)]—this is pure record not propaganda. The value and if you like, even the propaganda value for the government lies in the record itself which in the long run will prove an intelligent and farsighted thing to have done. NO POLITICS whatever” (Evans Archive, Miscellaneous Notes 1920s–1930s, 1994.250.4, folder #12).<sup>86</sup> In equal measures intransigent and naive, Evans’s notes start in mid-breath: an unattached adverb; verbs with no clear subject, unqualified, undecidable in tense or person, with no identifiable addressee. “Want,” “Will give,” “asked,” “mean”: these are the fragments of a speech he cannot own, into which he cannot quite insert himself. Without doubt, something has to be defended and protected. But even to speak about this “pure” thing, in itself, proves impossible.

Evans would still be at it more than a year after his summary dismissal from government service, even while preparing for his exhibition and major publication with the Museum of Modern Art. At one moment, he would be jotting down notes for his “file on STRYKER.”<sup>87</sup> At another moment, he would be writing a letter to Stryker that he might later think better of sending, on “the matter of the extent of my freedom in th[e] choice of pictures for this Museum book”: “a book about and by me” that the Museum “is to bring . . . out as an example of the work of an artist,” and in which the number of Resettlement pictures reproduced “has been determined solely on the grounds of my opinion of their worth as pictures” (Evans to Stryker, 16 July 1938, Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #57).<sup>88</sup> The book clearly focused Evans’s anxieties, especially as Stryker would not hesitate to point out that “about half of the photographs in the book are from negatives in the Department of Agriculture files” (Stryker to Mrs. L. A. Collings, Jr. [Frances Strunsky

Collins, head of publications at the Museum of Modern Art], 19 October 1938, Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #41). Even the preparation of a belated formal contract had Evans scribbling notes, speaking of himself in the third person, insisting that the book appeared “without a hint of commercial compromise,” that it was he who had “installed the [present] style of government still photography,” and that he had “retired from the government” “because of the readiness of the bureaus in Washington to play with and cater to commercial interests and to aim at [immediate] publicity [more] than at [straight] historical recording” (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #12).<sup>89</sup>

Evans’s anxiousness returned as he sketched a “Plan Or Arrangement Of Museum Book.” His first thought was that he wanted it recorded on the inside front flap of the dustcover that he had worked “more or less independently” since 1928 and that he himself had “arranged and divided and ordered” the selection of photographs “made by him from this ten years’ work” (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #7).<sup>90</sup> As his thinking developed, he made notes for “PEOPLE BY PHOTOGRAPHY,” “a book of pictures without captions,” on the back of what seems to be an old photographic mount, and still felt the need to write down that “this work is arranged in seriousness not journalism or not a trick” (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #8).<sup>91</sup> Then he began painfully drafting, annotating, amending, and redrafting an explanatory “NOTE.”<sup>92</sup> He wanted to draw a clear line between the compromised commercialism of contemporary photojournalism and the picture selection in his book. His aim, he said, was “to sketch an important, correct, but commonly corrupted use of the camera” (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #11, p. 1).<sup>93</sup> The pictorial journalism of the period, he argued, was too corrupt to produce, other than by accident, “records which will become valuable in themselves,” images capable of revealing “the movements and changes or, again, the conflicts which in passing become the body of the history of civilizations” (1). Turning, “perhaps sick,” from this commercialism, with its parade of pictures of “prominent people,” Evans asked his reader to “think of the general run of the social mill: [these (deleted)] anonymous people who come and go in the cities and who move on the land. It is on what they look like now; what is in thier [sic] faces and in the windows and the streets beside and around them; what they are wearing and what they are riding in, and on how they are gesturing, that we need to concentrate, consciously, with the camera” (2).

Evans’s “NOTE” would not be published; nor would any of the tortured versions of his “Acknowledgments,” which had said too much about a history of intellectual and emotional debts. As it appeared, *American Photographs* was emptied of all direct captions and almost all words of his own, leaving the images facing bare white pages, cleansed of everything but the plate numbers, with brief titles consigned to pages at the end of each of the two parts. The acknowledgments had contracted to two unsigned sentences, recognizing permissions from the Farm Security Administration, Harper and Brothers, and the editors of *The Hound and Horn*. A further blank page had the inscription: “J. S. N.”<sup>94</sup> Then came a page with the single heading: “PART ONE.” Nothing else was to intervene between the reader and the photographs. Yet, something still remained of what Evans had wanted to say in his

defensiveness. It survived in traces in Lincoln Kirstein's afterword and in what Frances Collins excerpted from Kirstein's commentary for the jacket text. It also survived, in greatly shrunken form, in a curt and impersonal sentence added to the acknowledgments: "The responsibility for the selection of the pictures used in this book has rested with the author, and the choice has been determined by his opinion: therefore they are presented without sponsorship or connection with the policies, aesthetic or political, of any of the institutions, publications or government agencies for which some of the work has been done" (Evans, *American Photographs* n.p.).

The sentence marked what still rankled. It was the stunted heir to all the notes, the unsent letter, the drafting and redrafting, and the curdled prose. Masked as restraint and good taste, it was the strangulated sound of words that seemed to have to be cut off in the throat. Prevented from speaking and compelled to speak, Evans seemed to want to disown all debts, to disallow all frames of meaning, all the nets in which his work might be caught, even, or especially, those that had prompted and occasioned the photographic acts whose results made up the corpus of the book. Everything had to be purged from the space of the "pure record." Yet, the photograph cannot stand alone, in its own discursive space; it must enter circulation, pass from hand to hand, in some form. The medium of this pure circulation was the book. Not the photo-book as Archibald MacLeish conceived it, a filmic blending of words and pictures. Not the photo-documentary book that had become something of a publishing fashion since the appearance of Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell's *You Have Seen Their Faces* in 1937, and that critics were then claiming as a new medium (see McCausland and Roskam). It was to be a new kind of photographic book, a book for which there was no real precedent in photographic publishing, severe and restrained from the first, bound in "Bible cloth," with no image on the cover.<sup>95</sup>

Still, the book did carry the imprimatur of the Museum of Modern Art. The Museum had supported Evans's work since 1933 with exhibitions and commissions. It seemed to be the one institution with whose policies, "aesthetic or political," Evans was not unwilling to be associated, even if he thought little of its director, Alfred H. Barr, and had open contempt for its "so called curator of photography," Beaumont Newhall.<sup>96</sup> This exemption of the Museum, despite distaste for its social aspect, is odd. Certainly, the Museum conferred status, and Evans wanted it seen that the Modern was bringing out *American Photographs* "as an example of the work of an artist" (Evans to Stryker, 16 July 1938, Evans Archive, *American Photographs*, 1994.250.57, folder #57). Yet Evans also defined his notion of "pure record" as "non-artistic" photography, as distinct from "romantic art-photography" and New Vision experimentalism as it was from the commercial corruption of photojournalism and the "advertising values" of photography's "Chrysler period."<sup>97</sup> It is not clear, therefore, how he could blind himself to the framing machinery of the Museum and the way it worked to establish his reputation, establish the terms of an appropriate critical discourse, and establish a space of difference for his work. "There's the problem," Evans would later say of his connection with the Museum of Modern Art. "How do you get around Establishment when something is establishing you?" (qtd. in Trachtenberg, "A Book" 238).<sup>98</sup>

One must be cautious here, however, in judging Evans's incorporation of the Museum as a condition of his work. It is tempting, for example, to see the monochrome space that opens in the pages of *American Photographs* as a replication of the white cube of the modernist museum: a contrived space of erasure that is the condition for the apparent self-presentation of Art. Yet such a space, extending and purifying the function of the frame, did not exist for photography at this time. *American Photographs* took shape precisely in the time in which the Museum of Modern Art's new international-style building at 11 West Fifty-Third Street was under construction. The exhibition took place in a temporary space in an underground concourse of the Rockefeller Center, at 14 West Forty-Ninth Street. There, at the last possible moment, Evans rejected the installation ideas of the Museum's staff and set about hanging his prints himself, showing some with mats, in frames, under glass, others matted but mounted under glass without frames, and still others mounted on cardboard cropped to the edges and glued directly on the wall. There were also great discrepancies in print size: some were overscale, others comparatively small; occasionally they were hung two or three deep, but always on or around a continuous horizontal line that gave continuity to the erratic clustering of thematically related images without softening the sudden contrasts of format and presentation.

In a letter to Evans dated 27 September 1938, Beaumont Newhall called the installation "exacting," "simple and straightforward—and daring" (qtd. in Mellow 388). Certainly, there was nothing about it to suggest an attitude of preciousness. Evans did not fetishize his negatives or prints. In later life, he said: "I would cut any number of inches off my frames in order to get a better picture" (qtd. in Katz 86). His was not a pristine minimalism, as it has retrospectively appeared. We must be careful, therefore, about what we deduce from the luxurious austerity of *American Photographs*. Yet its spare lines still marked a tension. On the one hand, the design of the book constructed an ideal, Evans might have said "pure," space under the shelter of the Museum. Here, it is hard to avoid seeing at work the bad faith that allowed Evans to designate the Museum a non-site from which he could then declaim the freedom of his work from contamination by the aesthetic or political policies of any of institution.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, the sparseness of his book was also the product of an active negation. Just as the photographs themselves emerged through what they precluded, so the book defined itself by what it excluded. Tom Mabry was quick to grasp Evans's strategy and wrote to Lincoln Kirstein that, when writing his essay for the book: "I should think that you might want to define as simply and clearly as possible the difference between Walker's work and the majority of photographers both 'documentary' and 'lyric.'" In particular, a line had to be drawn between Evans's vision and "the canonization of the commonplace that documentary photography has turned into" (Mabry to Kirstein, 29 April 1938; qtd. in Mellow 368). Mabry's examples here were Margaret Bourke-White, *Life's* photographers, and many of those who worked for the Federal Art Project.

*American Photographs* was therefore, in part, Evans's corrective to the photojournalism of *Life* and a judgment on books such as MacLeish's *Land of the Free*. Ironically, however, when the book came out on 27 September 1938, it was the poet who had the first, if not the last, word. Sealing the book was a contrasting yellow

paper bookband quoting a testimony from Macleish, saying: “Walker Evans’ remarkable work suggests that great photography may translate objects into meaning. These American photographs are not Sandburg—no photographs could be—but they do much more than record one area of American experience. They make it speak” (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #21). Translating objects into meaning. This, of course, was the problem: the problem of meaning. But it is meaning that seems to be strangely withheld in Evans’s work.

Here is that street in Atlanta again, now titled “Houses and Billboards in Atlanta, 1936.” It occurs as plate 47 in the first part of the book, which Kirstein advised “might be labeled ‘People by Photography’” and in which, he said, “we have an aspect of America for which it would be difficult to claim too much” (198). The Atlanta photograph comes after “People in Summer, New York State Town, 1930” and “Birmingham Boarding House, 1936,” which also appeared in *Land of the Free*. It is followed by two photographs of “South Street, New York” from 1932 that Evans distinguished as “Trio” and “Close up, unbuttoned” (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #1).<sup>100</sup> The last picture in the sequence, closing Part One, is “Louisiana Plantation House, 1935.” Then come the titles. The reader should know from the dust cover and from the concluding paragraph of Kirstein’s essay that “The photographs are arranged to be seen in their given sequence.” The difficulty is in saying what the sequence discloses (Figs. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19).

The houses with their balconies overlooking the street follow images of life around the doorstep and on the porch, ambiguous spaces between sidewalk and interior where the public and private meet and become confused. Then comes the collapse of the private onto the street: the homeless men in lower Manhattan reading, sitting, and sleeping on cardboard on shallow workshop steps. And finally, the collapse of an entire social world: the decayed plantation house and the massive fallen shade tree, “cumulative emblem” of “a doomed civilization” Alan Trachtenberg calls it,<sup>101</sup> rhyming with the prostrate bulk of the sleeping vagrant who fills his niche like a tomb figure, his flies undone. It is a somber procession, building to an emotional crescendo. Yet, at the same time, following a sequence of four telescopically compressed frontal images, the space in the view of the plantation house and dead tree tilts and pulls back, letting us see sky and sunlight. The didacticism of the sequence and the weight of visual metaphor are tempered, just as the pace with which image follows image is likely to be changed by the fact that we get distracted by small things—signs, numbers, inscriptions, litter, stains, architectural details and moldings, carved and chalked graffiti, typography, words: “LB LOVES,” “Furnished Rooms,” “VODVIL,” “SWIM.”

Despite Kirstein’s advocacy for the Hegelian dialectic and his vision of an “ordained design” in the “poetry of contrast” in and across Evans’s pictures, it is not beyond all doubt that we are following a narrative here (195, 193). Nor is it entirely certain that we are looking at “records of the age before an imminent collapse”: pictures that testify “to the symptoms of waste and selfishness that caused the ruin,” but that “salvage whatever was splendid for the future reference of the survivors” (196). Evans, it has to be said, liked what Kirstein wrote.<sup>102</sup> Frances Collins, too, found the contrast between what is and what *could be* “one of the most shattering things in the



Fig. 14. Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), plate 45.



Fig. 15. Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), plate 46.



Fig. 16. Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), plate 47.



Fig. 17. Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), plate 48.





Fig. 18. Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), plate 49.



Fig. 19. Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), plate 50.

book": "it's insisted on: you're not allowed to forget it for a minute" ("F" [Frances Collins] to Evans, 4 May 1938, Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #29). Contemporary reviewers all the way up to Eleanor Roosevelt also seemed to agree there was a message here.<sup>103</sup> Edward Alden Jewell in the *New York Times* saw "a true portrait of America" (9). The 15 October 1938 *Washington Daily News*, reproducing "Houses and Billboards, Atlanta" under the headline "This, Our Native Land: America, The Beautiful," called Evans's book "our truest composite portrait of the face of this country." In the Sunday *New York Herald Tribune* Carl Van Vechten declared that "if all America except Evans' photographs were razed they would tell our story" (4). The *New Masses* reviewer David Wolff was cut by "the merciless edge of truth" in Evans's photographs, "by a combination of reticence, delicacy and a bitter surgical honesty" that set Evans's work against those commercial photographers on assignment for *Life* who have "corrupted our taste into a desire for hasty titillation" (n.p.). And in *The New Republic*, William Carlos Williams, echoing fellow poet MacLeish, declared: "The pictures talk to us. And they say plenty" (282).

There is a sense in all the reviews of Kirstein's essay and Mabry's publicity materials being to hand, as a necessary crib. But the orchestration of Evans's reception did not always work. The 7 October 1938 *Washington Post* saw "a parade of dreary, drab and depressing scenes." The 17 December 1938 *San Francisco News* thought Evans's book "unnecessary and cruel." The *New York Times Book Review* critic looked at what Kirstein hailed as "the physiognomy of a nation" (Kirstein 198) and saw "bumps, warts, boils, and blackheads" (Williamson 6). Privately, the photographer Ansel Adams was apoplectic, writing to Edward Weston that "Walker Evans' book gave me a hernia" (qtd. in Rathbone 166), and to Georgia O'Keefe that it was "atrocious": "mixed social meaning, documentation, esthetics, sophistication (emotional slumming), etc." (qtd. in Mellow 381). Pare Lorentz, typically, felt that the pictures "should have been captioned" (6). Even the reviewers who did not choke on Kirstein's vision of the book as a "monument to our moment" found it less easy to say what precisely it was that Evans's book said when it spoke (193). As Tom Mabry, thinking to clarify matters, wrote in *Harper's Bazaar*: "Perhaps one clue to Evans's work is that his photographs are not symbols for something else; they are what they mean" (84). It was a typically skillful negotiation on Evans's behalf but, beyond the negation, it offered only tautology.

The critics' solution to this dilemma was to mimic the book. In place of a paraphrased message, what we get is a catalogue: "a mass of motor derelicts, a cluttered slum, a row of ramshackle huts, a small town main street eye-sore, the grimace of a jig-saw boarding house in ruins" (Jewell 9); "two sullen boys with 'sez-you' expressions, a moronic youth and his girl in a parked roadster, and Mr. Evans's row of drab, depressing houses, as well as his squalid interiors" (Williamson 6); or, more sympathetically: "the used cars abandoned on a field; a confused and helpless back room, revealed through an open door; the tires, tubes and spare parts displayed on the front of a garage; and the magic advertising words, the names, the signs, ubiquitous, ugly, meaningless, and powerful" (Wolff n.p.). This is what, in a memorable phrase, the leftist critic David Wolff called "a certain hideous miscellaneousness of American life." The miscellaneous, however, has no general category. It can only be enumer-

ated, inventoried, logged on a list: a “list that has been prepared,” as William Carlos Williams remarked of *American Photographs* (282), but a list nonetheless.

Evans was an inveterate list maker. In 1934, characteristically drafting an unfinished letter to Ernestine Evans, then an editor at Lippincott, about his ideas for photographic “picture books,” Evans confided: “American city is what I’m after . . . keeping things typical.”

People, all classes, surrounded by bunches of the new down-and-out.  
Automobiles and the automobile landscape.  
Architecture, American urban taste, commerce, small scale, large scale, the city street atmosphere, the street smell, the hateful stuff, women’s clubs, fake culture, bad education, religion in decay.  
The movies.  
Evidence of what the people of the city read, eat, see for amusement, do for relaxation and do not get it.  
Sex.  
Advertising  
A lot else, you see what I mean. (qtd. in *Walker Evans At Work* 98)<sup>104</sup>

Written well before Roy Stryker’s “shooting scripts” for his imagined “pictorial encyclopedia of American agriculture,” Evans’s list is a manifesto for *American Photographs*.<sup>105</sup> Architecture, smell, “hateful stuff,” misogyny, decay, movies, frustration, sex, advertising: it is also a provisional inventory of the street view of houses and billboards in Atlanta.

Four years later, gathering his thoughts for the rushed exhibition and publication with the Museum of Modern Art, Evans would be writing lists again, jotting the columns down hastily on odd sheets of paper:

Rivera  
Paintings  
Architecture  
Housing  
Slums  
Greek Revival Architecture  
Portraits  
People  
Shops  
Street  
New York  
New Orleans  
Cuba  
Americana  
Victorian Architecture  
Interiors  
Abstract.

## SHOW IDEAS

small defined sections

people

faces

architecture

repetitions

small pictures

large pictures. (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folders #4 and 5)<sup>106</sup>

Lists of subjects, lists of categories, lists of possible titles, lists of prints needed from Washington. Later, there will be lists of invitees, lists of those to receive exhibition notices or complimentary copies of the book, lists of the final titles. Lists are not prose: they are free from the demands of structure, coherence, and grammatical agreement that made writing for Evans such a painful process of drafting, erasure, interpolation, and revision. The list is epigraphic. It does not need to be expanded or explained. It has sequence but without finality, at least potentially retaining its mobility. The list asks to be rearranged. Like the file, it is open to reordering, insertions, recategorization, and regrouping. The list allowed Evans to handle ideas in words the way he handled his negatives—or the postcards he collected from the age of ten and methodically organized with card dividers: “Flatiron,” “State Capitols,” “Summer Hotels,” “Persons,” “Factories,” “Automobiles,” “Street Scenes.”<sup>107</sup>

The list is the genre of the collector. Categories can be shuffled and reconfigured like postcards in a shoebox. For Evans, as for Roland Barthes, the pleasure of this sorting and resorting pointed to a solution to the problem of making a book, in whose rigid form the binding sequence might be undone by a provisionality that allowed the reader to imagine the book unmade and remade again. *American Photographs* retains the feel of having been made in this way, in spite of Lincoln Kirstein’s theories and his help in untying the knots and getting it right.<sup>108</sup> Kirstein saw the photographic book on the model of film, in which he believed Evans might “achieve his ultimate lyricism,” though, in several actual attempts, this never proved the case (196).<sup>109</sup> The structure of film, for Kirstein, was in turn determined by montage, “elevating the casual, the everyday and the literal into specific, permanent symbols” (196–97), just as the contrast of opposites in Evans’s photographs, “looked at in sequence” (193), could be seen to “elevate fortuitous accidents of juxtaposition into ordained design,” turning “accidental conjunctions” into “serious symbols allied in disparate chaos” (195–96). This is Kirstein’s view. The model of the list and the card file index opens other possibilities, less committed to narrative convergence and the cumulative symbolic effect of juxtapositions. *American Photographs* belongs to such a model, “arranged and divided and ordered” by Evans, as part of the collector’s compulsion and unending pleasure. Perhaps that is why attempts, at the time and since, to literalize a narrative in the sequence have always seemed overwrought.<sup>110</sup>

The list, like the file, evokes the archive—another series into which the photograph might be inserted, quite different from the book and the film. Yet, the list differs from the archive in that it does not demand consistency. Its typologies are not

bound to follow a general rule. The list is the archive without the law and without the public function.<sup>111</sup> And it was the civic function that Evans balked at. Nevertheless, we cannot neglect the fact that a complicated relation to the archive hung over all of Evans's photographic work. Indeed, as Roy Stryker was not prepared to forget, "about half of the photographs" in *American Photographs* were "from negatives in the Department of Agriculture files" (Stryker to Mrs. L. A. Collins, Jr., 19 October 1938, Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #41). Or, as Pare Lorentz chose to put it in print, "almost half were taken at the instigation of Professor Stryker of the Farm Security Administration and were paid for by the U.S. Government" (6).

In actually preparing the plates for the book, Evans seems to have had his own prints to work from, since he wrote to Stryker more than once that he did not have time to come to Washington.<sup>112</sup> Tom Mabry also turned down Stryker's offer of help with printing, telling him that the publication schedule made it necessary to use the prints that Evans already had in New York (Mabry to Stryker, 20 June 1938, Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #36).<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, a one-page manuscript in Evans's hand, apparently from this time, contains a list of numbers bracketed together as "flood leica shots of mine, want prints," and a list of titles also seeming to describe prints Evans needed from the file (Evans Archive, Miscellaneous Notes 1920s–1930s, 1994.250.57, folder #17).<sup>114</sup> The list includes "Atlanta billboards," indicating how Evans remembered the image and suggesting he needed at least an additional print as he began to prepare his work for the Museum. Perhaps this explains why, as time ran out, the photograph appeared in the book but not in the exhibition.

Whatever the circumstance, the negative—or negatives—remained in Washington, where they had quite another place in the system of the file. Here, mounted on eleven-by-fourteen-inch blue-gray board and filed between thick, color-coded card dividers, the print from Evans's plate fell under "E," the South-East Region, where it was further classified as belonging not to "Streets," nor to the category "2563 Abandoned Buildings" or "631 Advertising," but to "213 Buildings," under the broader class "2 CITIES," itself part of "2–278 Cities and towns—as background" (Fig. 20). We should remember, of course, that this geographical and subject-based system was a later solution to the problem of storage and retrieval of somewhere around 107,000 photographs; though the place of the print in the "classified file" tells us not a little about the priorities of one, near-contemporary reading of Evans's photograph. The systematic subject classification under which Evans's image was subsumed was developed by Paul Vanderbilt only after his hiring by Stryker in 1942.<sup>115</sup> Earlier, prints and negatives seem to have been filed state by state, according to assignment, in the sequences developed by the photographers on location, following the dozens of shooting scripts and hundreds of memos sent to them by Roy Stryker outlining thematic directions for their work in the field. This story-driven arrangement allowed for Stryker's larger ambition to compile a "pictorial encyclopaedia" of a passing way of American life, while simultaneously catering to the outlook of newspaper and magazine editors whose cooperation was needed if the publicity needs of the New Deal agency were to be fulfilled in "bringing the facts before the public" in order to

recruit their consent (Stryker Papers, NDA 4).<sup>116</sup> Even so, Stryker's didactic concern with the series did not easily survive picture editors' concern to find individual images to fit a given layout style and story line.

To what series Evans's Atlanta image might be allotted is precisely the problem. Reorganizing the files, Paul Vanderbilt took the view that Evans's work "was never quite divorced from an instinctive cynicism or even the hatreds inherent in his personal philosophy" and thus did not fit the agency's programs (12). Stryker would not have gone so far, though he knew that Evans had little respect for his instructions. In any case, the "nice big order" Stryker sent to Evans "on the ground" in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in February 1936 does not mention Atlanta (Stryker to Evans, February 1936, Stryker Papers, NDA 25).<sup>117</sup> Neither does Evans's earlier "Outline Memorandum" for his projected eight-week automobile trip to the states of the southeast. This only says: "Cross Georgia and Alabama, rural subjects" (Stryker Papers, NDA 25). We have, of course, the file caption, typewritten, cut out, and pasted on the mounting card. It reads: "Atlanta, Ga. Mar 1936. Frame houses and a billboard. LC-USF-342-8057-A. Walker Evans." The back of the card is marked "Resettlement Administration" and stamped with the classification "E 213" and the lot number 1538. The stamps are Vanderbilt's later additions. The title, different from that in *Land of the Free* and different from others Evans would ascribe, is hardly accurate as a description, even if it does go back to 1936; though, again, it suggests what it was thought important to see, in short, what at the time the picture was presumed to be about.

On the surface, this was not a mystery. As we have seen, the picture was prominent enough in the file for Stryker to pull it for MacLeish's book, just as Evans was to include it in the book version of *American Photographs*. The print had also been memorized by John Vachon, who joined the Historical Section in the summer of 1936 as "assistant messenger" and general helper but soon became the primary custodian of the picture file. Though not officially classified as a photographer until 1941, Vachon was allowed by Stryker, after 1937, to take on a limited number of



Fig. 20. Walker Evans, "Atlanta, Ga. Mar 1936. Frame Houses and a Billboard." Department of Agriculture, Resettlement Administration/Farm Security Administration file card. (Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.)

field assignments. His photographic education had been the file and he later confessed to walking around “looking for Walker Evans’ pictures” (qtd. in Hurley 156). From Dubuque, Iowa, he wrote enthusiastically to Stryker: “There are 4 Walker Evans type RR Stations in town” (Vachon to Stryker, from the Hotel Canfield, Dubuque, Iowa, 19 April [1940?], Stryker Papers, NDA 26). And, in 1938, passing through Atlanta, where he knew so well a certain house Evans had photographed, he recalled: “I walked all over town looking for it, and when I had found the real thing, . . . it was like a historic find” (qtd. in Hurley 156).<sup>118</sup> Vachon’s image, too, a duplicate of a duplicate, joined the file, under the same classification, though now captioned: “Atlanta, Ga. May 1938. Houses and advertisements.”<sup>119</sup> The homage is instructive, especially to a man who had been fired. Clearly it also says much about the power of Evans’s work to make over the world as photogenic in its own terms. The act of replication is telling, too, driven as it may have been by something provoking in this particular photograph. But the doubling of the image in the file is also uncanny (Fig. 21).

What Vachon’s reproduction brings out is that, in a sense, the file is filled with duplicates. This was itself an Evans theme and, indeed, duplication is a veritable mania in the picture that fascinated Vachon: two houses, duplicates without an original, two balconies, two billboards, two eyes, two eyes twice over, doubled doubles, duplicated in the posters duplicated by the photographic negative and again by the print that is duplicated by Vachon. Vachon’s return to the scene confirms only that it is not there. This place in Atlanta, the site that had to be visited and revisited but that is now gone, was already a site of duplication—a duplication that, in turn, incited a gesture that set off a chain implicating the very internal processes of photographic meaning in and after the act of exposure with the camera, so that Evans’s image becomes, in a certain light, a photograph about a relation to photography as a process of duplication, and to meaning as postponement in repetition without a source (cf. Owens 85–86, 88).

This is not to suggest that Evans’s picture was puzzling to a degree that excited concern or critical comment. In Congress and in the press, other images from the file



Fig. 21. John Vachon, “Atlanta, Ga. May 1938. Houses and Advertisements.” Department of Agriculture, Resettlement Administration/Farm Security Administration file card. (Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.)

would be held aloft as proof of the dangers of government run amok, wasting public money, interfering where it ought not be concerned, engaging in absurdities to justify a gross and parasitic bureaucracy. "Love Before Breakfast" did not arouse such passions. This does little, however, to allay the uncertainty of the image or to resolve what use it might have had in a government agency file. Perhaps we can make more headway starting elsewhere.

The photograph was made in Atlanta on Friday, 20 March 1936, somewhere near the city's business district, probably within a few blocks' walk of the Kimball House, the landmark hotel where Evans and his unofficial assistant, Peter Sekaer, were staying.<sup>120</sup> When Evans arrived in Atlanta on the twelfth, he was working his way back from New Orleans, on the second leg of a long trip through the South for the Historical Section that had begun on 24 November 1935.<sup>121</sup> After recall to Washington on 11 January 1936, Evans had been sent south again by Stryker on Saturday, 8 February to pick up his car in Gulfport, Mississippi, then head down the coast to New Orleans and on northward to Vicksburg, Mississippi, the old Confederate lynch-pin that once held together the eastern and western territories of the Confederacy. After dropping out of sight here for more than two weeks, Evans had been once again roused up by Stryker to head north to Tupelo, for an emergency publicity job, then back south and east to Birmingham, Alabama, and on eastward via Atlanta to Monticello, Georgia, en route for Waycross and for St. Marys at the southeasternmost corner of the state. From here, Evans was to begin the return trip up the coast to Savannah, then on through South Carolina to Washington, D. C., via Virginia but cutting out a planned excursion to West Virginia.<sup>122</sup>

Evans was known to abhor the agency jobs that Stryker's long lists of instructions pressed on him. He had no more sympathy for the increased levels of production Stryker urged him to meet by shooting more rolls of film with his Leica. Nevertheless, after Vicksburg, Evans largely stuck to his task, following both the itinerary and the assignment schedule Stryker had laid out for him. The route to Atlanta led on from the industrial landscapes of Birmingham. Evans and Sekaer arrived on the twelfth, a Thursday, but Evans had to catch a plane back to Birmingham on 14 March to meet Ernestine Evans and complete certain routine assignments. It is not clear that Ernestine Evans ever turned up in time.<sup>123</sup> In any case, Evans was back in Atlanta by the sixteenth, staying until 21 March, when he left by car for Monticello. On the day before he departed, he made this photograph, on the date, in fact, that appears on the billboard itself, the shutter opening exactly as prescribed.

Earlier in the city, Evans and Sekaer had set about photographing segregated African American housing, as they had in New Orleans, Vicksburg, and Tupelo. In Atlanta, Evans recorded the dilapidated wooden row houses with their ramshackle fenced yards that lined the dirt alleys leading off the city roads, behind the homes of white people (Fig. 22). But he also pictured life on the porch and the interior of a thriving black barber's shop, moving the barbers out of the frame of his view camera and taking care not to include the customers who appear in Sekaer's small-format shot.<sup>124</sup> Evans also found other things to his liking in the area: the Cherokee Parts Store and Garage on Marietta Street, around the corner from his hotel; E. J. Foy Used Tires, with its display of elaborate painted spare-tire covers and his own self-



portrait reflected in the workshop window; a painted butcher's sign, like the one that had attracted his attention in Mississippi earlier the same month; and the gesturing statue of Populist Senator Thomas E. Watson, in front of the columns of the State Capitol Building.<sup>125</sup>

Atlanta was the largest city in which Evans would work on this entire sweep of the South. Yet, judging by the small number of negatives produced during his eight-day stay, it seemed to offer him relatively little of what he was seeking. Evans had been in Atlanta once before, in February of the previous year, on his way through Georgia from Savannah, traveling with Gifford Cochran and his butler, James, on a commission from Cochran to photograph Greek Revival architecture in the South. He did not then make any known photographs in the city, though this was understandable given his particular interests on that trip. Atlanta had suffered badly in 1864, in Sherman's last campaign of the Civil War, as presidential electioneering inflamed demands for speedy results. Bombardments of the city and the siege of Confederate fortifications from July to August had left Atlanta almost in ruins. Of the buildings that remained, most were blown up in the Confederate retreat, were demolished by Union army engineers laying out new defenses, or were burned and blasted by Sherman's army as it pressed on from Atlanta to the sea. Evans was fa-



Fig. 22. *Georgia: The WPA Guide To Its Towns And Countryside* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1940), n. p. Walker Evans photograph, "Negro Section, Atlanta," lower left.

miliar with this history from his acquisition of the ten volumes of Francis Trevelyan Miller's *Photographic History of the Civil War*, which served him as a model of an elegiac "photographic evidence" and mapped out an iconography of the southern town, fallen into ruins.<sup>126</sup> In Sherman's wake, there was little architecture of an earlier period that might interest Evans in the Georgia capital. Little of the Victorian era, too, at least in the downtown area around Five Points, the new hub northwest of the old city center that was now boxed in by concrete and steel office blocks. As the WPA state guide conceded, unlike most southern cities, Atlanta had "no old houses and few old families"; the railroad-driven boom that had begun under Reconstruction had left Atlanta "few classic Columns but many smokestacks" (160).

Then Evans came across these two artisanal houses, if that is in fact what he saw first. The age of the buildings would have attracted him, as well as their variations on a common pattern-book style. The juxtaposition of vernacular houses and mass-produced billboards was also something Evans had attuned himself to notice; it was one of his trademark finds. In New Orleans, earlier on his trip, he had stopped to photograph a black family house in the Greek Revival style next to a poster advertising Heinz tomato ketchup. At a later date, on the outskirts of the factory district, he had carefully framed a billboard against a scruffy industrial background so that all one sees is "Defective Vision."<sup>127</sup> There were also other billboards and movie posters along the way from New Orleans through Mississippi and Alabama.<sup>128</sup> So, here in Atlanta, he set up his tripod and eight-by-ten Deardorf camera, probably on the sidewalk opposite, if not in the middle of the street as the picture invites us to think, and made two exposures: one, without filter, at *f*/22 for one twenty-fifth of a second; the second, again without filter, at the same aperture but for one-tenth of a second. On a duplicated form headed "Photographer's Record of Legends," Evans jotted down: "20th"; "Atlanta"; "houses and movie posters ('Love before breakfast')." <sup>129</sup> So the movie title did catch his eye. The photograph itself, however, takes more reading.

The flat light and dense print make this a day of breathless grayness, without shadow and unwarmed by the sun. The conditions, however, served certain ends where making the picture was concerned. Flat light makes a flat space that seems so evident, at first, but turns out to be troublingly unreadable. The space of the street is already odd enough. The steps from the sidewalk lead nowhere. They no longer access the houses behind because they have been boarded up in a way that also provides the opportunity for the posting of billboards, and the quite recently pasting of advertisements onto the wooden planks above the two-tiered brick-and-stone walls. Whether this means that the houses themselves are boarded up, too, is not at all easy to tell. There seem to be signs of life on the balcony to the left and there are curtains at the window. Compared to what Evans shows us elsewhere at this time in Atlanta, in the back alleys south of Decatur Street, these houses seem inhabitable enough. They do not seem to be scheduled for demolition, as so many others in the downtown area were, "to make way for apartments, filling stations, chain stores, and open-air eating places" (WPA, *Georgia* 162). Certainly, as we know from John Vachon's reenactment of Evans's photograph, they will still be standing two years hence, much the same, though *Chatterbox* and *Love Before Breakfast* will have given place to *Kentucky Moonshine* and *The Count of Montecristo*.<sup>130</sup>

If the houses are lived in, however, there would seem to be no means of entry; at least, we are shown none. Because of our viewpoint, we also cannot be sure of the depth of the buildings or of what lies beyond. The height of the fence blocks our view and cuts off any horizon. How far it is to the blocklike building or the chimney stack to the right remains a matter of conjecture. Moreover, these puzzling arrangements are made no more legible by what is done with the camera. A hasty scanning sees the billboards in front and the houses behind, the reverse of the relation of food line to billboard that presented Margaret Bourke-White with her “ironical” juxtaposition. But how much space, if any, is there between the temporary-looking billboards and the house fronts? How far do the porches project from the buildings’ walls? How deep are the steps from the sidewalk? How much of a ledge is there where the first wall creates a platform for the second? Any calculations we might make are fraught by the compressing effect of the telephoto lens, no doubt the longest of the two components of the Zeiss Protar triple convertible lens that Evans used with the Deardorff view camera, giving an angle of vision markedly narrower than the forty-five degrees that are taken as “normal.”<sup>131</sup> Recourse to his longest focal length lens typified Evans’s large-format work at this time. It was a deliberate choice. As Jerry Thompson has remarked, the world to which Evans’s lens opens is a particular world: “The world compacted, held at arm’s length, flattened to be read like a page of literature, full of irony and delicate meaning” (12).

The choice of lens, the corrective adjustments: these things overcoded the entire surface of the image, as it once appeared, upside down, on the ground glass screen before Evans’s eyes. At the same time, certain contrivances of composition have also made our task all the harder. The difficulties seem to reach a pitch along certain confounding rift lines. Take the utility pole, which just happens to be there, but which, like the factory chimney, comes in handy as a device, holding in place the grid on which the photographic frame is built. The pole, however, proves rather slippery—at least as slippery as the word “frame” in the previous sentence. If you follow the pole up with your eye, it begins, on its left-hand side, to duplicate the edge of the Carole Lombard poster, already emphasized by what seems to be a graphic line that has, however, no parallel on the left. The pole, here, does not quite coincide with the poster edge: there is an uncertain gap, and as one moves up, more parallel lines appear to the left that seem to denote wood planking—the planking, perhaps, of the billboard support itself. But, if one follows the top edge of this planking left, it disappears *behind* the capital of a square wooden pillar supporting the house porch. It does so, moreover, at around the point that a diagonally attached piece of wood passes *in front* of the pillar, intersecting the boarding on which the poster is mounted. Whether this piece of wood actually touches the entablature of the porch or the planking proves surprisingly difficult to determine. If it did—if, say, it touched them both—then that would mean that the billboards were not some unspecified distance in front of the houses, but were battened to the pillars of the porches—pillars that, if we could only see them, would be grounded on the brick plinth, so that the houses would rise directly from the street, without any set-back, at least until that cut-out corner on the right-hand house front veers away.

This surprising conclusion seems to be confirmed by the fact that the feet of the

pillars do, indeed, appear to break through the tattered lower edges of the posters, which were still relatively new, remember. Even so, a consistent correspondence between protruding base and requisite pillar is not always to be found. One extra base unfortunately appears in the middle of the billboard on the left. This is worrying, but already enough has been done to unsettle that initial assessment of the space in which the houses form a backdrop. The billboards and facades no longer have a foreground-background relation, and this is a change that does not leave the question of meaning in the picture untouched. From this point of view, the new proposal is rather unwelcome, though there does not seem to be sufficient evidence to settle it absolutely at this point. Let us try the pole's other side.

The right edge, as it appears, threatens to lead us into even greater difficulties. Where it crosses the upper brick wall, we enter a very uncertain zone. Perhaps the vertical post that the pole now seems to abut is seated on brickwork that is not a low wall but rather the foundation of the porch. The pole, however, gets in the way of settling this matter with any certainty. Moving up, to escape this problem, we find the edge of the pole begins to echo a series of four vertical lines that parallel but run beyond a further series to the right, where the intervals are larger and where surely we are dealing with the planking that provides the posters' support. The more closely packed lines, by contrast, seem to describe the edge and vertical grooving of a squared porch pillar, as becomes somewhat clearer further up. But how the pillar so neatly fills the available slot in the fence, where exactly one runs into the other, and in what plane pillar, plank, and post may be said to lie are all questions that remain hard to answer with any sense of definitiveness. And the further up we go, the more likely we are to be set off at right angles, with the result that we have to worry about the conjunctions of capital and board, window and fencing, shadow and stain, poster and porch roof.

The whole matter is disturbingly undecidable, and since the relation of posters to houses has been taken by critics to be the crux of meaning in the photograph, we seem to be in larger trouble. It is as if we were at one of those junctions in a text where, de Man says, the cognitive and the performative functions do not flow smoothly into each other, along the lines of a common grammar, but disconnect along a threshold of unreadability, without erasing earlier readings, but without being able to resolve them either (299–300). The pole cum compositional device has brought us nothing but trouble. And doubt is contagious. Now we can no longer be certain about that object nearest to us, joined to our space by a wayward line. It is an object that might stand for the place of the camera or of the viewer reiterated in the space of the picture, in the street. Is it, by its placement on the sidewalk, a severed trash can? Or is it an upturned tin bath, having lost its bottom; the inverted double of the one on the left-hand balcony whose bottom, alas, we cannot see? But, what would a bath be doing in the street? What would it say for domestic life in the houses beyond? And what sort of figure can it cut for the viewer now?

These are peculiarly enervating questions. They take us rather far from the felicitous decodings we have been offered. In contrast to Bourke-White's Louisville image, in Evans's photograph it proves surprisingly difficult to settle with any certainty the exact spatial relation of billboards and houses. Even at this level, it is not at

all clear that they are physically separated or can be visually held apart as a prerequisite for some broader separation and contrast, say, of the world of representation and its refutation in the real. An additional problem, here, would be that the buildings themselves are part of an architectural discourse, are representations, one might say, or at least constitute a vernacular language, of pattern-book architectural elements, spatial articulations, decorative emblems, and so on. As “homes,” as public representations of domestic life, the private domain, or individual taste—representations elaborated in conventional rituals of practice and use—the buildings further enmesh us in a text that the photograph does not effectively equip us to unravel. As metaphors—“sullen houses blind and deaf to the comedy they enact against the seductive billboards they cannot see” (Trachtenberg, “A Book” 265); “aging houses plastered with ads for a pair of coming attractions . . . themselves become ‘painted ladies,’ unwitting victims of the Depression” (Rosenheim, “‘The Cruel Radiance’” 83)—they take us even further, if we are prepared to follow the critics.<sup>132</sup> Representations and representations of representations. But what of the world with which the houses are to be contrasted? What of the posters? Surely, here, we are dealing with things reliably held in place, framed for us to see, here on this street in Atlanta—and simultaneously on thousands of other streets across America?

The printed billboards already mark a tear in the presupposed unities of photographic place and time. On the left is an advertisement for *Chatterbox*, an RKO-Radio production, directed by George Nichols, Jr., and based on a play by David Carb, in which a naive, stage-struck chatterbox, Jenny Yates from rural Vermont, played by Anne Shirley, runs away from her grandfather’s farm and is discovered by a cynical producer (Eric Rhodes) who casts her as Alice Murgatroyd in a parody Broadway revival of “Virtue’s Reward”—the very play and the very part in which Jenny’s now deceased mother had made her name on the stage.<sup>133</sup> Even as knowing kitsch, the play proves a flop and Jenny’s dreams collapse; though, in her disappointment, she finds unexpected consolation in handsome, aspiring artist, Philip Greene (played by Phillips Holmes), who is charmed by her innocence and has come to love her as she really is. Not quite up to the standards of its Restoration prototypes, *Chatterbox* is, then, the story of an *ingénue*, up from the country and at the mercy of the venal city. The poster shows Anne Shirley, formerly known as Dawn O’Day, who changed her name after playing the lead in the 1934 film of *Anne of Green Gables*. Anne Shirley is seen as Jenny Yates playing the role of Alice Murgatroyd—all of these names fictitious, referencing only the layering of representations. Rather incongruously, behind the couch on which the actresses sit are the lights of Broadway, evoking Evans’s New York here on an unknown street in downtown Atlanta, but also citing “Broadway Composition,” an untypical “New Vision” composite image that Evans published a number of times between 1930 and 1931, notably on the cover of the 24 June 1931 issue of *Advertising and Selling* (Fig. 23).

Next to *Chatterbox*, starting today all across America, is *Love Before Breakfast*, a 1936 Universal production, directed by Walter Lang, from a book by Faith Baldwin with the rather less promising title of *Spinster Dinner*.<sup>134</sup> The film is a pioneer screwball comedy, worked on uncredited by Preston Sturges, in which, in the year she was nominated for an Oscar, Hollywood’s highest paid actress, Carole Lombard, is the



Fig. 23. Walker Evans, "Broadway Composition," 1930.

center of cinematic attention as a fey and fickle Park Avenue beauty, Kay Colby, who is unable to decide between the dubious attractions of Cesar Romero as Bill Wadsworth and rich oil tycoon Scott Miller, played by Preston Foster. The black eye is what everyone sees. Kay gets it in reel two, in a night club fight, from a punch landed in the dark by her frustrated suitor, Scott, as he tries to protect her from the unwanted attentions of a college football team. The black eye is the signature of the screwball comedy, a metonymy for Kay and Scott's knockabout relationship, and a metaphor for Carole Lombard's feisty screen persona. It is also, strangely, the sign and reenactment of what must not be seen: the actress's damaged face, badly scarred on the same left side in a 1926 automobile collision and painfully rebuilt by early plastic surgery. Hiding what is no longer there, the sign repeats a trauma that has been repressed. Captioned by the title of the film, which has no apparent relation to the plot, the black eye continues to bloom with meaning: it is a trope for Evans's own

troubled love life; a social comment on the black eye dealt by the Depression to the houses behind; a graffito put there by the photographer himself—all this in the imagination of the picture's readers.<sup>135</sup>

A film of a book, signed by a black eye that is make-up covering the damaged face of an actress who always plays herself before her part. A film of a play in which an actress, playing an earlier character, acts an actress acting a repetition of her mother's signature role. The posters and the films they advertise, by chance perhaps, compound the problem of the houses, the billboards, and the street, the problem of the photographic event, in downtown Atlanta, "starting Friday Mar 20": the problem of representation to infinity that is the problem of representation as such—representation for which there is no final frame of the real made present for us in the photograph. Representation, then, as Derrida would say, "in the abyss of presence"; not an accident of presence, for "the desire of presence is, on the contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc." (163).

The distance from Louisville to Atlanta proves surprisingly great. For the photography of Margaret Bourke-White, the world itself is rhetorical: it is not merely intelligible, but constituted as a series of messages whose tropes are present in the world. The message of the world—"the real world"—captured by Bourke-White decodes all other messages, of which it is both the condition and the measure of truth. For Evans, by contrast, the intelligible world is a world of representation, and the proliferation of representation opens on the abyss of the real. The camera, as an instrument of pure record, is a portal to a world that has no message, that is addressed to no one. But the camera is also a black box, a means of encrypting this encounter beyond meaning, of producing pictures as impenetrable puzzles. The camera is both crypt and encrypting machine: the tomb of the real in which the present has already passed away, and an engine of overcoding in which the unbearable encounter is buried and postponed, made bearable as the cryptic without end.

This needs unpacking. But I should say immediately that, in this contrasting of Evans and Bourke-White, I do not intend to repeat what has become obligatory in the Evans literature as a means of setting off his supposed ethical superiority. The denigration of Margaret Bourke-White usually begins with her personal vanity and ends with condemnation of her luridly theatrical and manipulative photographic work. The cue here comes from Evans's friends and supporters in the 1930s, most famously James Agee, who chose to include a gushing journalistic interview with Margaret Bourke-White as an unglossed appendix to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Cameron 450–54). Here, preserved against the vagaries of time and fashion, Bourke-White's "superior red coat," "the reddest coat in the world," finds itself hanging next to Sadie Ricketts's flour-sack shift and George Gudger's heroic overalls. It is an image of pettiness that has been reworked many times, most notably after the 1960 reissue of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by William Stott, for whom the counterposed images of Evans and Bourke-White stand for a moral contrast, grounded on irreconcilable ethics of life and practice.<sup>136</sup>

Bourke-White, of course, readily confessed that she "loved clothes" and "attached great importance to appropriate costumes for each many-faceted day" (*Por-*

*trait* 87). Not at all defensive, she wrote that: “Believing as I do that getting pictures is only part of getting a picture story—a great part lies in persuading people to do things—I made a special project of having the right wardrobe for each job. I always felt more persuasive in the right clothes” (Bourke-White Papers, Box #62).<sup>137</sup> But, in the 1950s, with the security of a photo editor’s salary from *Fortune*, Evans, too, showed a marked taste for Brooks Brothers jackets, Saville Row suits, and hand-made shoes from Peal Company of London. It is said that he shopped compulsively at this time, the more so when he was without funds. It is also reported that, in 1961, he spent the best part of his second Guggenheim Fellowship award on securing a coveted Jaguar sedan, for which he was then eager to obtain a Blaupunkt radio, pestering his publisher for the specs.<sup>138</sup> These are no doubt trivial and salacious facts, and it is far from clear how they will help us think about Evans’s work. Is it not striking, then, that they have been given such prominence in the assessment of Margaret Bourke-White’s?

A comparative reading of biographies would not readily furnish material to shore up the critical myth of Evans’s moral stature—the record of the war years alone might be fatal enough. The ethics of picture making, too, of which Stott, following Agee, makes so much, is also something that does not survive much scrutiny. Even on the trip to Alabama in the summer of 1936, when Evans traveled alongside Agee and produced the signal body of work that would be made the ethical center of the Evans canon, Evans, like Bourke-White, rearranged objects and furniture in other people’s houses where he was working, just as he brought in artificial lighting and flash, and did not hesitate to photograph his hosts unawares with an angled viewfinder (Rosenheim, “‘The Cruel Radiance’” 91, 93, 94, 104, n202). His relationships with those he pictured and later published, even those with whom he stayed as a guest in Hale County, do not appear in a complimentary light in subsequent investigations.<sup>139</sup> While on Bourke-White’s side, it might be said that, contrary to Evans’s later claims, she was not unreflective about the moral implications of her practice. In her technical note to *You Have Seen Their Faces*, as in her autobiography, she makes no effort to conceal her mistakes and is the first to raise the difficult questions of intrusion and exploitation that are only exacerbated by the technical set up demanded by equipment at the time.<sup>140</sup>

The one-sided contrast of Bourke-White and Evans must therefore be approached with suspicion. Undoubtedly, there was antipathy on Evans’s side—even though, or perhaps because, he had exhibited alongside Bourke-White at the John Becker Gallery in New York as early as April 1931 and again at the Museum of Modern Art in 1937.<sup>141</sup> Bourke-White’s reputation—her reputed behavior, but also her success—called forth the misogyny that Evans had honed in his relations with his mother. Beyond this, Bourke-White was also required to serve as shorthand for a kind of practice against which Evans’s backers, such as Agee and Tom Mabry, sought to define a space of distinction for his work, in the face of Bourke-White’s visibility, success, and critical acclaim.<sup>142</sup> The production of a difference was what Evans’s supporters worked for, as part of a discursive strategy to institute a particular status for his work. Within that context, the ethical terms of the contrast had a function. Outside it, they are not only questionable, but also essentially beside the point.



For what is at stake, and what interests me here in bringing together the two representations of representation at which we have been looking, is not a moral or ethical difference, but a difference in the relation to meaning—a difference whose ethical, political, and personal implications are not easy to unravel.

For Bourke-White, meaning must be delivered and the viewer must take receipt. In Evans's image, meaning is held back, seemingly less by the photographer than by the objects themselves, from which the viewer is cut off by an uncertain distance that reintroduces the presence of the lens between the eye and the scene. In the one case, meaning always arrives, guaranteed by the transparency of rhetoric and the finality of photographic truth, through which the misrepresentations of American capitalism may be confronted with the reality they occlude. In the other, we encounter an attachment to the object that does not accommodate itself to instrumental communication, but is encrypted, locked away in layers of representation like an infinite series of Russian dolls. This is a melancholy realism whose appearance in the archives of a government department is a puzzle in itself. I call it melancholic and realist quite deliberately. Ideas of melancholia have had a long history in the West, but at play within them, from the beginning, have been not only questions of subjectivity, but also questions of the limits of knowledge, of language, and of meaning. Perhaps a reconsideration of melancholy may help us think about the character of those practices of representation that will not give way to the demand for efficient communication but resist the arrival of meaning, while mourning a real that does not lend itself to representation. Perhaps, in the face of the regimens of meaning that speak us and hold us to account, such practices of refusal are marks not of failure but of a certain kind of resistance to which, amidst all the recruitment calls of the 1930s, Evans's photograph bears witness: as inadequate and overwhelming thing, impossible testimony to an ineradicable remainder and to the inescapability of an unencounterable real.<sup>143</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. The comments on Evans come from Lincoln Kirstein's diary, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
2. This is, of course, how—or where—Barthes begins his famous reading of a cover of *Paris-Match*. Casting the event in the barber shop allows Barthes to place his object—the magazine, the example—in a little theater of popular culture while, simultaneously, assuring us he is not himself a subscriber. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (201), as well as Annette Lavers's selection and translation of Barthes's text (116).
3. The projected figure comes from the first, mid-1936 prospectus for Henry Luce's proposed "Picture Magazine," then called *Dime*.
4. Wainwright's figures are, however, inconsistent and may be exaggerated. On page 81, he says that: "All 250,000 newsstand copies of Vol. 1, No. 1 sold out the first day." He goes on to claim: "Within three months, the Donnelley presses were turning out 1 million copies a week." The numbers Wainwright cites also conflict with the circulation figures given in the 4 January 1936 issue of *Life* itself, where the paid circulation figure for the first issue, 23 November 1936, is put at 380,000, and the print order for the magazine is said to have climbed to 650,000 by the beginning of January 1937. See "With This Issue *Life* Prints 650,000 Copies," in *Life*, 4 January 1937: 2–3.

5. See "Pictures to the Editors," in *Life*, 8 February 1937: 67. A reader, Charles J. Levine of Rochester, New York, had sent in a photograph of a window display of the 11 January 1937 issue at Lapidus's newsagent shop: "At the end of the first day, Mr. Lapidus estimated that nearly 3,000 Rochesterians stopped to view *Life*—free of charge."
6. The study was commissioned by *Life* and reported in an advertisement in the magazine on 12 December 1938.
7. This is Henry Luce's apology for the third trial dummy of the magazine that became *Life*. In 1923, Henry Luce had been a cofounder of *Time* as a national weekly digest of news. In 1931, he launched *The March of Time*, a weekly radio dramatization of the news that, in 1935, also lent its name to a monthly filmic version.
8. This appears in Henry Luce's notes for a prospectus for a "Picture Magazine," written mid-1936.
9. This is from Daniel Longwell's memorandum accompanying a sixteen-page demonstration picture supplement that he produced in 1935, putatively to show what might be done with *Time*, but implicitly to re-enthuse Luce about the potentialities of a picture magazine.
10. This is the opening text for *Four Hours A Year*, a seventy-two page, large format, hardcover, illustrated book published in 1936, under Luce's direct supervision, to celebrate and promote *The March of Time* newsreels. The volume was later to serve as what Longwell called *Life*'s "Bible" or "Magna Carta." See Wainwright 24–25. The words may actually have been written by Luce, since they are repeated almost verbatim in a letter from Henry R. Luce to prospective charter subscribers to a magazine called "The Show-Book of the World," 8 September 1936 (Bourke-White Papers, Box #49).
11. This is the caption to pictures taken from the publicity handouts of various beauty queens.
12. The advertisement goes on: "The Great Inquisitiveness makes you and your banker react to pictures much as your cook does, or your taxi-driver."
13. Bourke-White was commenting on the absolute aptness of the title Caldwell had found for their 1937 collaborative photo-documentary book, *You Have Seen Their Faces*.
14. This is the opening of the final prospectus (June 1936), based on a text by Henry Luce. See also the variation on the same wording in the letter from Henry R. Luce to prospective charter subscribers to a magazine called "The Show-Book of the World," 8 September 1936 (Bourke-White Papers, Box #49).
15. Modifying Debord, one might say the spectacle is the image to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes capital. It is the moment when the occupation of social life has become commodity. Cf. Guy Debord, *Society of Spectacle*, chapter 2, nos. 34 and 42. For the concept of consummativity ["consummativité"] see Jean Baudrillard 82–84.
16. This was followed by "Faces in the Flood" (46–47), which included a photograph by Margaret Bourke-White of a black baby bundled up on a school room chair next to a blanketed bird cage, and "Railroading in the Land of High Water" (48–49).
17. By the following issue, it might be noted, the story had run down to one photograph of undermined tracks in Cincinnati's railroad yards, at the bottom of page 16. *Life* had moved on to Trotsky in exile, Hitler in full pomp, President Roosevelt's struggle with the Supreme Court, and Tallulah Bankhead. See *Life*, 22 February 1937.
18. See, for example, the direct imitation of *Life*'s feature, "Speaking of Pictures," in the movie advertisement, "Speaking of Motion Pictures" (*Life*, 22 February 1937: 6). Or, following the Louisville story, the timely advertisement for Goodrich Silvertown Tires, "How Trucks Rushed Food To Stricken Flood Area" (*Life*, 15 February 1937: 63). *Life*'s picture editor and office manager, Daniel Longwell, readily admitted that *Life* "came right out of the advertising world of the United States" (qtd. in Wainwright 14). While, on the other hand, completing the circle, Luce urged advertisers to "compete photographically with the editorial content"—a call to which many were eager to respond

- (Luce, notes for a prospectus for a picture magazine, 1936; qtd. in Wainwright 29). Wainwright reports one advertising executive boasting in 1936: "We're going to run you ragged—copy your technique so that you can't tell ads from editorial pages" (42). He also records that, in *Life's* first twenty years, advertisers spent more than one billion dollars promoting products in its pages (94).
19. The phrase initially appears in the first prospectus for the magazine with the provisional title *Dime*, in 1936; see Wainwright 30–31. It is still retained as a name for the lead in the confidential memorandum titled "Redefinition" that Luce wrote in March 1937, looking back on the first twelve issues of *Life* and reconsidering the original prospectus. See Wainwright 89.
  20. This quotation is from a Newspaper Enterprise Association magazine article, 1929. See also Marjorie Lawrence, "Dizzy Heights Have No Terrors For This Girl Photographer." In a letter dated "Wednesday evening" (1937), Bourke-White was later to write to Daniel Longwell at *Life*, "I can't seem to get over being tired since the flood—I suppose because it was so continuous and strenuous" (Bourke-White Papers, Box #49).
  21. Confusingly, Goldberg says in the anecdote that Bourke-White was photographing the Capitol, but this would suggest she was working on an assignment for an earlier February issue, to photograph Roosevelt's second, rain-soaked inaugural (see Goldberg 186). For Bourke-White's photograph of the Capitol beyond a sea of umbrellas, see *Life*, 1 February 1937: 12. This was also the issue in which the first pictures of the floods were printed: "Floods Drive 288,000 People From Their Homes" (16–17). Bourke-White's photo-essay on the Supreme Court appears in the same issue as the photograph of Louisville flood victims and concentrates largely on the lavish fabric and domestic life of the new Supreme Court building, as light relief, one takes it, from the story of Roosevelt's attempt to force six of the nine justices to retire following the invalidation of the National Recovery Act. See *Life*, 15 February 1937: 20–23.
  22. In a confidential memorandum written in March 1937 and reassessing the original 1936 prospectus for *Life*, Henry Luce opined: "You can pick practically any damn human or sub-human institution or phenomenon under the sun, turn a crack photographer on it (after a little lecture by a journalist) and publish with pleasure in eight pages the resultant *photographic essay*. Fifty or twenty years ago, people used to write 'essays' for magazines. . . . The essay is no longer a vital means of communication. But what is vital is *the photographic essay*" (qtd. in Wainwright 89).
  23. This was the case within a year and a half of the start of Bourke-White's career in 1927, even before she definitively gave up commercial and industrial photography for photojournalism: see Goldberg 98–99 and Wainwright 89.
  24. See also Margaret Thomsen Raymond, "Girl With a Camera, Margaret Bourke-White." Even at the end of her life, Bourke-White would be the subject of *The Margaret Bourke-White Story*, broadcast on national television in 1960 with Teresa Wright as Margaret Bourke-White.
  25. The technical specifications for this photograph were recorded at the time of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, exhibition, *Photography 1839–1937*, in a letter to Beaumont Newhall from Margaret Smith, secretary to Bourke-White, dated 5 March 1937: "When the Flood Receded—taken in February 1937, at Louisville, Kentucky, with 3 1/4 x 4 1/4 Linhof camera, Zeiss Tessar lens, 15 inches" (Bourke-White Papers, Box #31).
  26. In a letter to Beaumont Newhall dated 28 June 1937, Bourke-White wrote: "I am deeply impressed with the possibilities of flash bulbs distributed through the room instead of using one attached to the camera in the usual way. I work mine with extension cords from a synchronizer attached directly to the shutter but always use two sources of light and sometimes three or four or even six distributed around the room. . . . I use a strong light to the side with a small light to the front. The flashlight gives a soft, very fine quality. The beauty of it of course is that you can watch your subject until they show just the expression or movements you wish and then release your flash" (Bourke-White Papers, Box #31).
  27. For more on Bourke-White's technique, see Goldberg 148, 168, 176, 206, 231.

28. We may guess from its proportions that the image was printed in the magazine nearly full frame. When Bourke-White submitted her photographs, she insisted that her negatives be printed to the edge, initiating a practice that, in *Life*'s photo-lab, came to be called "printing black," where the photographic image is bordered by a black margin as proof that it has not been cropped. This did not mean, however, that Bourke-White would raise objections to her pictures being cropped in the editorial process. See Goldberg 185.
29. Vicki Goldberg comments: "As she had known how to simplify industrial subjects and present the detail that summed up a process, so she knew how to simplify her human subjects and present a moment that would instantly telegraph a message on the page" (188). Elsewhere, more critically, she adds: "Margaret could produce with surety and apparent ease the summaries that made good journalism in the thirties and still constitute a major part of it today. However much she longed to find greater insight with her camera, much of her work was clearly intended to be the most efficient and pointed reporting of surfaces" (190).
- Looking back, Roy Stryker, chief of the RA/FSA/OWI Historical Section, would characterize photojournalism at this time as "noun" and "verb" pictures, adding that "our kind of photography is the adjective and adverb" (Stryker, "FSA Collection" 8).
30. Bourke-White's biographer calls this "the symbolic detail," "the symbolic expression," or "the symbolic moment": "opinions that have been compressed to the size of an aphorism to be instantly grasped by the viewer," often "a stereotype in a more visually compelling form than it usually commands" (Goldberg 190). Elsewhere, Goldberg suggests: "The muscular compression of forms in a small space, the masterly distribution of design elements, give her photographs a poster-like clarity and power. The symbolic content is equally clear, the message unambiguous and instantly telegraphed, as it must be in a mass medium. . . . At times she reduced men and women to the status of message carriers; she saw them less as individuals than as symbols or universals" (317–18). Bourke-White herself was well aware of the established tropes of rhetoric and their function in advertising and journalism, remarking of one photograph made at the Oliver Chilled Plow Company in 1929, for the *Fortune* story "The Unseen Half of South Bend": "I made a picture of plow blades, plow handles which symbolized the whole plow factory" (Reilly 68; qtd. in Goldberg 190).
31. Cf. Colin MacCabe's analysis of the hierarchy of discourses composing what he calls the "classic realist text," in "Realism and the Cinema: Notes On Some Brechtian Theses." MacCabe writes: "In the classic realist novel the narrative prose functions as a metalanguage that can state all the truths in the object language—those words held in inverted commas—and can also explain the relation of this object language to the real. . . . [a metalanguage] is exactly that language which, while placing other languages between inverted commas and regarding them as certain material expressions which express certain meanings, regards those same meanings as finding transparent expression within the metalanguage itself. Transparent in the sense that the metalanguage is not regarded as material; it is dematerialized to achieve perfect representation" (35).
32. Newhall, the director of the exhibition, refers to the photograph in what was the current issue of *Life* as "When the Flood Receded." Number 394 in the exhibition catalogue, the Louisville photograph would be one of five pictures by Margaret Bourke-White in the show.
33. On the timing of the billboard campaign, see the letter reporting on the outdoor advertising program from F. D. Richards, President of Campbell-Ewald Company of New York, Incorporated, to Walter B. Weisenburger, Executive Vice-President of the National Association of Manufacturers of the United States of America, 16 October 1936 (Senate Committee Part 35, exhibit 5505, p.14466–67). The billboard campaign was held over by the advertising agency until 1 December 1936—after the presidential election campaign—specifically to avoid confusion with party political propaganda. Richards argued: "Industry's important job is to establish and confirm confidence in the American way of doing things in the minds of the great mass of people all over the nation. This isn't a political issue" (14467). Earlier in the same letter, however, Richards had already conceded that: "The posters had to be non-political in character in order that the plant operators and the outdoor industry would not be

subject to criticism in return for their free co-operation, and they had to be of a character that would do a good job with the great mass of people who make up the outdoor audience” (14466).

34. See Edwin Locke, “Billboard in Memphis During the Flood. Memphis, Tennessee,” February 1937 (LC-USF33-4211-M2) and the series of frames of “Road Sign Near Kingwood, West Virginia,” February 1937 (LC-USF33-4228-M2/M3/M4/M5); Arthur Rothstein’s series of 35mm shots of “A Billboard. Birmingham, Alabama,” February 1937 (LC-USF33-2393-M2/M3 and M1 and M4, which were punched with holes by Roy Stryker); and Dorothea Lange’s larger format photographs of three different posters, all titled “Billboard on U.S. Highway 99 in California. National Advertising Campaign Sponsored by National Association of Manufacturers,” March 1937 (LC-USF34-16209-C/16211-C/16213-C). Subsequent billboard campaigns were also recorded in 1939 by Marion Post Wolcott in Georgia and in Alabama, and in 1940 by John Vachon in Iowa.
35. For details of the campaign, see F. D. Richards to Walter B. Weisenburger, 16 October 1936 (Senate Committee Part 35, exhibit 5505, p.14466–67). See also the announcement from Ernest T. Weir, Chairman of the National Industrial Information Committee of the National Association of Manufacturers of the USA (Exhibit 5485–E, p. 14411); and T. J. Needham, Jr., of Campbell-Ewald Company of New York, Inc., to Walter B. Weisenburger of the National Association of Manufacturers, 15 October 1936 (Exhibit 5504, p. 14465).
36. See Senate Committee, *Hearings*. *Life*, too, paid early attention to the work of this committee, chaired by Robert M. La Follette, Jr., Democrat of Wisconsin, running a full-page story on the committee’s inquiry into the strike-breaking role of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency: “Life On The American Newsfront: Two Famous Names Clash At A Senate Hearing” (*Life*, 22 February 1937: 19). I am grateful to Patrick Kane for first drawing my attention to the subcommittee records.
37. For the organization’s public mission, see the *Constitution of the National Association of Manufacturers of the United States of America*, Article II, Section 2 (Senate Committee Part 17, Exhibit 3788-A, p. 7486).

Founded originally as a voluntary association, the National Association of Manufacturers was subsequently incorporated in 1905 as a nonprofit membership association under the Membership Corporation Law of the State of New York. The first suggestion for such a national association had come from the southern journalist, Thomas H. Martin, editor of *Dixie Manufacturer* in Atlanta, Georgia, whose editorials during the industrial depression of 1894 greatly impressed Thomas P. Egan of J. A. Fay and Egan Company, leading the latter to invite manufacturers and businessmen from all parts of the country to a gathering in Cincinnati, Ohio, on 22 January 1895. See the National Association of Manufacturers of the USA response to a questionnaire from the Special Committee of the United States Senate to Investigate Lobbying Activities, 24 January 1936 (Part 35, Exhibit 5253, p.14023–25).
38. This is taken from *American Industries*, a boycott supplement dated 15 August 1904 (4).
39. This is from *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the National Association of Manufacturers*, 1911 (86).
40. See, for example, *Life*’s coverage of the sit-down strike in its 18 January and 25 January 1937 issues: “U.S. Labor Uses A Potent New Tactic—The Sit-Down Strike” (*Life*, 18 January 1937: 9–15); “Governor Murphy and the National Guard Bring A Truce to the Automobile Strike” (*Life*, 25 January 1937: 8–19). See also the coverage of the sit-down strike at General Motors’s plant in Flint, Michigan, in the 15 February issue that contained Bourke-White’s Louisville photograph (*Life*, 15 February 1937: 16–17).
41. See the testimony of Walter B. Weisenburger, Executive Vice-President of the National Association of Manufacturers (Senate Committee Part 17, pp. 7378–79).
42. In 1936, around 4,000 members and contributors gave the National Association of Manufacturers an income of \$1,171,390, \$572,761 or 48.9 percent of it coming from 207 companies, representing five

- percent of the total membership. See the testimony of Robert Wohlforth, Secretary to the Committee (Senate Committee Part 17, p. 7381–82, 7385–87, and Exhibit 3798, p. 7540).
43. The characterization of the National Association of Manufacturers' activities comes from the National Labor Relations Board Annual Report to the President, 4 January 1937. See the National Association of Manufacturers' letter to the National Labor Relations Board of 31 March 1937 (Senate Committee Part 18, Exhibit 3863, p. 8015).
  44. The quotation is from a speech by J. Phillip Bird, General Manager of the National Association of Manufacturers, and appears in *American Industries*, December 1911 (41).
  45. See the *Constitution of the National Association of Manufacturers of the United States of America*, Article II, Section 1.
  46. See the circular letter from the Chairman of the National Industrial Information Committee, 27 February 1937.
  47. This is quoted from the National Association of Manufacturers' Memorandum on Community Public Information Programs to Combat Radical Tendencies and Present the Constructive Story of Industry.
  48. The review, *A Consideration of the Policies and Program of the National Association of Manufacturers*, was authored by Robert L. Lund and appeared on 7 September 1933.
  49. This is a letter from H. O. Patton, for the Board of Directors of the National Association of Manufacturers, to Horace Hayden, Jr., 24 September 1937.
  50. See the testimony of the committee chairman, Ernest T. Weir, Chairman of the National Steel Corporation (Senate Committee Part 17, p. 7458); and the statement of Walter B. Weisenburger, Executive Vice-President of the National Association of Manufacturers (Part 18, p. 7861–62).
  51. See the statement of Walter B. Weisenburger (Senate Committee Part 18, p. 7851).
  52. The income figures for the Public Information Program were: \$36,500 in 1934; \$112,659.58 in 1935; \$467,759.98 in 1936; \$793,043.06 in 1937. The total income for the National Association of Manufacturers in this period was: \$480,317.52 in 1934; \$617,143.75 in 1935; \$1,171,390.83 in 1936; \$1,439,548.06 in 1937 (Senate Committee, *Hearings*, Part 18, p. 7828; Part 17, Exhibit 3794, p. 7538; Exhibits 3834-B and 3824-C, p. 7587; and Exhibits 3824-D and 3824-E, p. 7588).
  53. These phrases are from Minutes of the Committee on Public Relations of the National Association of Manufacturers, 19 April 1937.
  54. I am quoting a letter from Charles A. MacDonald, President of MacDonald-Cook Company, to C. M. Chester, 25 March 1937. See also Senate Committee Part 36, Exhibits 5540–5624.
  55. See the testimony of Walter Weisenburger (Senate Committee Part 18, p. 7776; also Exhibit 3853, p. 7895).
  56. See *Industrial Strife and the Third Party*, an unsigned pamphlet distributed by the National Industrial Council, July 1937.
  57. See the statement of Walter B. Weisenburger, Executive Vice-President of the National Association of Manufacturers (Senate Committee Part 18, p. 7862). See also "The American Way" (Part 35, Exhibit 5485-J, p. 14433–39); and the promotional poster for schools and colleges (Exhibit 5514, p. 14480).
  58. This information comes from a form letter by the President of the National Association of Manufacturers, 29 November 1937 (Senate Committee Part 17, Exhibit 3850, p. 7762). See also L. J. Mulhearn, National Association of Manufacturers officer in charge of community programs, to Carl H. Bischoff, 15 December 1937 (Part 19, Exhibit 4047, pp. 8740–41). The budget figure for art work, printing, and shipping for twenty thousand copies of three different poster designs comes from a letter from T. J. Needham, Jr., of Campbell-Ewald Company of New York, Inc., to W. B. Weisenburger of the National Association of Manufacturers, 15 October 1936 (Part 35, Exhibit 5504, p. 14465). In the letter to W. B. Weisenburger from F. D. Richards of Campbell-Ewald, 16 October 1936, it is re-

- ported that: "Some idea of the extent of the co-operation offered [by outdoor advertising plant owners] may be found in the fact that the cost of these boards, if the space had to be paid for, would be about \$335,000 per month, or over a million dollars worth of space during the three months' period. The labor cost alone in just posting the paper on the boards would amount to over \$180,000 to plant operators" (Part 35, Exhibit 5505, pp. 14466–67).
59. This is quoted from a publicity circular entitled "Along the Highways of America," issued by Ernest T. Weir. The circular included a reproduction of all three billboard designs, under the heading: "Industry Speaks To Millions—With Color, Pictures, Facts" (p. 14412).
  60. It was these "husky" advertising accounts that kept her penthouse studio in the Chrysler Building afloat for the six months each year during which she was not working for *Fortune*. See Bourke-White, *Portrait* 80. Bourke-White's relinquishing of advertising photography coincided not only with her collaboration with Erskine Caldwell on *You Have Seen Their Faces*, from July to August 1936, but also with her hiring in September of the same year by *Life*, then two months away from its first issue. *Life*, to which Bourke-White said her first loyalty belonged, paid her a minimum of twelve thousand dollars a year, with two months free to do work that did not compete with Time Inc. publications. See Bourke-White, *Portrait* 159; see also the Agreement between Margaret Bourke-White and Time, Incorporated, dated 4 September 1936 (Bourke-White Papers, Box #49).
  61. On 15 October 1936, Bourke-White wrote from New York to her friend Dr. François Archibald Gillfillan: "The new job will give me more opportunity to work with creative things like this [*You Have Seen Their Faces*]—real life rather than attractive poses. I have had to do such a great amount of advertising photography in the last few years. . . . I am delighted to be able to turn my back on all advertising agencies and go on to life as it really is" (Bourke-White Papers, Box #20).
  62. The letter, attempting to persuade Caldwell to work with her on his documentary book project, also included the gift of a photograph, "Three Women Eating."
  63. See also Goldberg 159–60, where, subject to further (secondary or tertiary) revision, the dream acquires "metal beasts of prey," but gives rise to no uncertainty about its dating ("early in 1936"), about its authenticity, or about its reported immediate consequences.
  64. See, for example, Mydans's 35 mm shot of the flooding in Louisville, "Louisville, KY. Mar 1936. The Ohio River Flooding the Streets." (LC-USF-33-569-M4).
  65. In his red-leather bound diary, Evans made the following entry on Wednesday, 27 January 1937: "Mercy, Stryker suggested quick trip to flood. I got Ed. Locke company" (Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.98).
  66. According to a letter from William D. Littlejohn, Chief of the Appointment Section, on 16 September 1935, Evans was first appointed Assistant Specialist in Information, CAF-7, at a salary of \$7.22 per day, effective 24 September 1935 until 30 June 1937. A subsequent letter from Littlejohn, on 1 October 1935, changed this, however, to Information Specialist, P-2, promoted from a salary of \$2,600 to \$3,000 per year, effective 21 October 1935. Information Specialist is also the title Chief of the Historical Section, Roy Stryker, used when writing to Miss McKinney of the Division of Information on 9 October 1935, confirming Evans's permanent appointment. It is only in the description of duties in this letter that Stryker refers to the position as "Senior Information Specialist," "with wide latitude for the exercise of independent judgment and decision." See correspondence in the Stryker Papers, NDA 25. Despite being urged by Stryker to get to Washington and out into the field as soon as possible, Evans did not actually begin work for Stryker's unit until 29 October 1935. He himself recorded having first asked for \$3,600 while negotiating his appointment with Stryker. See Evans's diary entries for Friday, 30 August and Monday, 28 October 1935 (Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.97). At the time of the flood assignment, Evans's diary entries for 28 January and 15 February 1937 and the accounts pages at the back of the volume show that, in addition to \$283.60 travel expenses, he received salary payments of \$120.90, \$128.96 and \$104, covering the periods 1–31 January and 15–28 February 1937 (Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.98).
  67. Locke was, in fact, Stryker's assistant chief, appointed to the position on 16 April 1936. Despite this,

- in later years, Stryker remembered him as “an extremely able, but unstable young man.” See Hurley 182, n47.
68. Locke writes from “Locke-Evans Hdqs” at Hotel Chisca in Memphis, Tennessee. He adds: “My God, we are tired tonight! Got up at 6 this morning, worked until 5:30 P.M., made the 6:20 P.M. train back to Memphis.”
  69. Evans recorded in his diary: “Much land flooded after leaving Memphis, water swift and deep and frightening. Auto road under water. Train tracks dry” (3 February 1937, Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.98).
  70. Evans first drove through southern states in February 1934, on his way to the winter resort of Hobe Sound, Florida. He called it “a real revelation.” Rural South Carolina and Georgia were “simply unbelievable for nostalgia and incidentally for poverty.” Evans made a dozen photographs on his way back to New York, including a street scene in Fort Motte, South Carolina, but his first sustained photographic excursion came in February 1935, when he was commissioned to photograph Greek Revival architecture in the South, especially Savannah, Georgia, New Orleans, and Louisiana on up north to Natchez, Mississippi. He first photographed black street life in the South and the segregated housing of “the Negro Quarter” in Savannah and New Orleans at this time, but he returned to the theme in a concerted way on his long, two-stage swing through the South for the Resettlement Administration, beginning in November 1935 and ending in April 1936. On the first stage of this trip, in December, Evans photographed in Alabama, especially in Selma, and in Louisiana, in and around New Orleans. Returning south in the second week of February 1936, on the second leg of his major assignment, Evans continued photographing black living conditions in Louisiana, around New Orleans; in Vicksburg and Tupelo, Mississippi; in Birmingham, Alabama; and in Atlanta, Georgia, on his way to the Atlantic coast and the return route north to Washington, D.C. See Rosenheim, “‘The Cruel Radiance of What Is’: Walker Evans and the South.”
  71. In his letter to Roy Stryker of 4 February 1937, Locke wrote: “The Negro camp: Overcrowded. There are many more negroes than whites affected by flood in this area. Found 11 in one tent. They are not ‘happy-go-lucky’ about it, but dazed, apathetic, and hopeless. There is a good deal of illness: excruciating coughs, pneumonia and influenza cases laying in a dark cotton warehouse” (Stryker Papers, NDA 25).
  72. Stryker professed himself pleased with the results (Stryker to Ed Locke, 13 February 1937, Stryker Papers, NDA 25). The negative judgment is that of later critics and biographers. James R. Mellow, for example, writes: “It had not been a successful assignment nor had it given Evans much satisfaction, partly because of his illness, partly perhaps because of a lack of interest in what he was doing” (348). Evans himself wrote to his friend, Jay Leyda, on 17 March that: “I had the flu but the flood was damned interesting, highwater, refugees and all that” (Correspondence in the Tamiment Institute Library, New York University; qtd. in Mellow 347). In the midst of his shooting, in an 8 February 1937 diary entry, Evans also noted: “Developed some of the Forrest City films; some good” (Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.98).
  73. It was Evans’s practice throughout his government employment to reserve certain negatives and duplicated images in this way for his own files. Moreover, correspondence between Evans, Stryker, and Tom Mabry, Executive Director of the Museum of Modern Art, indicates that, for the most part, only prints already in Evans’s possession in New York were used in the production of *American Photographs*. See Evans’s letters to Stryker, 21 April 1938 and 17 June 1938 (Stryker Papers, NDA 25); and Tom Mabry’s letter to Stryker, 20 June 20 1938 (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #36). Another exposure of the same sleeping woman (LC-USF34-8202C) can be found in the Resettlement Administration/Farm Security Administration (RA/FSA) file. It is this photograph, giving a fuller view of the face of the woman and the child lying watchfully next to her, that was hung in the exhibition, alongside a startling image of refusal (LC-USF34-8205C), showing only the feet and part of the upper face of an African American man whose eyes stare back through a gap in a tent of blankets hung for privacy, defying the camera’s gaze. Both images, numbered 44 and 43 on the exhibition checklist, were severely cropped for the exhibition, to remove distracting figures.



See the graphic reconstruction of the original hanging in Mora and Hill, *Walker Evans: The Hungry Eye* 180.

74. This despite the best efforts of Evans's friend and collaborator, Lincoln Kirstein, whom Evans remembered "helping me very much compose the thing" and who, following Evans's own emphasis on the work being "arranged and divided and ordered by him," stressed in his catalogue essay for *American Photographs* that: "The photographs are arranged to be seen in their given sequence" (Kirstein 198). Much influenced by Eisenstein's theory of montage, however, Kirstein also saw in the juxtapositions within Evans's photographs "living citations of the Hegelian theory of opposites" (195). For Evans's later recollections of Kirstein, see the edited transcript of a taped interview by Leslie Katz (Evans Archive, 33–34); and the published excerpts, Leslie Katz, "Interview with Walker Evans" (83). For Evans's stress on the arrangement of the photographs, in his notes for the inside front flap of *American Photographs*, see the one-page manuscript titled "PLAN or ARRANGEMENT OF MUSEUM BOOK" (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #7).
75. The photograph is filed in the RA/FSA collection at the Library of Congress as "Forrest City, Ark. Feb 1937. Negroes standing in line for food at the camp for flood refugees," (LC-USF-33-9217-M3).
76. The faces actually appear in an adjacent image (LC-USF-33-9217-M5) showing the young teenage woman, who holds the tin plate, between two older figures, who may be her mother and father, the latter a robust, smiling man in a hat whom it is hard to connect to the truncated arm in the better-known frame.
77. The Exposition and the Farm Security Administration contribution, "How American People Live," opened on 18 April 1938, and ran until 24 April, after which the FSA section was transferred to Washington and shown again, on the patio of the Department of Agriculture, from 20 June to 2 July 1938. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, also offered to tour the FSA exhibit throughout the United States.
78. Steichen's comment refers to Evans's 35 mm picture of African Americans in Arkansas standing in a food line (LC-USF-33-9217-M3), which appears on page 46, but also to Evans's eight-by-ten photograph of a cemetery, workers' housing, and the steel plant in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (LC-USF-342-1167A), which fills a double-page spread on pages 64 and 65. The second of Evans's flood refugee pictures, of black children waiting in line in Forrest City, Arkansas (LC-USF-33-9231-M1), appears on page 53, tellingly below his Alabama "Minstrel Showbill" of 1936 (LC-USF-342-1137A): precisely the juxtaposition Evans was to avoid in *American Photographs*.
79. The reference to Evans wanting to go on to Paducah and Louisville when recovered from influenza comes in Ed Locke's letter to Roy Stryker from Memphis on 11 February 1937 (Stryker papers, NDA 25). Locke made four photographs of the National Association of Manufacturers' billboard, all filed under the title "Road sign near Kingwood, West Virginia" (LC-USF33-4228-M2/M3/M4/M5). As noted above, Locke also photographed the billboard campaign in Memphis, during the flood (LC-USF-33-4211-M2).
80. The complete entry reads:
  - tacked poster show prints
  - lunch with R. Stryker
  - extraordinary conversation.
  - spent evening in Arlington
  - with P. Taylor.
81. The official communication simply read: "Reasons for action: Services no longer needed" (National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis; qtd. in Mellow 348). Oddly, Evans would file one further picture series with the RA/FSA collection in Washington, D.C.: the study of a single New York City block on East 61st Street, between First and Second Avenues, that he completed in August 1938 with a 35 mm camera. Fifty of Evans's negatives entered the file, but nothing in the written records explains how the assignment was selected or whether Evans was paid. See "New York City, 1938" and "New York City Block: Walker Evans."

82. It may be worth noting that Lorentz's *The Plow That Broke The Plains* derived from an essay of the same title that MacLeish had written for *Fortune* on winter wheat farming in Montana: see Drabeck and Ellis 80.
83. The term "Sound Track" is also MacLeish's and is inscribed on the recto of page 1, above the running black line that recurs on every page of text throughout the book, like the continuous optical sound track strip on a cinematic film. See also MacLeish, "The Soundtrack-&-Picture Form: A New Direction" 167-70.
84. See *Land*: "We're not telling" (33, 40, 41, 43, 46, 47); "we can't say" (30, 34, 39, 84); "we don't know" (1, 15, 31, 80, 88); "we aren't sure" (2, 35, 39, 84); "we get wondering;" (9, 22, 23, 29, 49, 79, 88); "We're asking" (88).
85. Evans added: "They even reproduced one of the great M. de Bourke-White pictures without mentioning that august name."
86. Two pages of grouped handwritten manuscript notes in ink, 1935. Under "Want:" fourteen lines, including "all rights retained by me," and "guarantee of one-man performance." Under "Will give:" two lines, "1 complete set prints and word records."
87. See Evans Archive, Miscellaneous Notes 1920s-1930s, 1994.250.4, folder #18:  
 file on STRYKER  
 Among things you really think of me  
 (1) that you picked me up from a state of obscure poverty  
 2 that I benefited by having a good job  
 3 that you gave me my chance and defended my kind of work  
 And folder #26: two handwritten manuscript pages: "Stryker's background"; and "Stryker & hole punching."
88. This is a typed letter with carbon, but is unsigned. See also Evans to Stryker, 15 June 1938 (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #35), in which, five days after Mabry had written to Stryker about the proposed "general review" of Evans's work, Evans casually described the Museum of Modern Art show, but was careful not to ask for permission himself (see Mabry to Stryker, 10 June 1938, 1994.250.57, folder #34).
89. These comments appear on five pages of manuscript notes on small note paper concerning the contract for *American Photographs*. Square brackets denote Evans's insertions in the text.
90. One-page manuscript, "PLAN or ARRANGEMENT OF MUSEUM BOOK." In the text, "more or less independently" is then crossed out.
91. This is another one-page manuscript, "PEOPLE [FACES (deleted)] BY PHOTOGRAPHY."
92. The Evans Archive has three different versions of the 1938 draft "NOTE" for *American Photographs*, which was never published. Miscellaneous Notes 1920s-1930s, 1994.250.4, folder #23 contains a one-page manuscript, in pencil, on the verso of a letter from Edith McCombe, secretary to Joseph Verner Reed, dated 29 June 1938, which includes draft notes for the unpublished "NOTE" and for unpublished acknowledgments. In addition, the American Photographs, 1994.250.57, box contains two typescript versions of the unpublished "NOTE": folder #17, a fifteen-page typewritten carbon of Lincoln Kirstein's "Photographs of America by Walker Evans," which includes on its final page a one-page text of a "NOTE" by Evans, amended by him in pencil, with further notes on its reverse; and folder #11, a two-page typewritten carbon that incorporates the editing of the earlier typewritten draft, but is itself further revised in pencil by Evans, each page having further pencil notes on the verso.
93. Two-page typewritten carbon amended by Evans in pencil.
94. Jane Smith Ninas, who had met Evans in New Orleans in February 1935 and had accompanied him on his first photographic exploration of the Greek Revival architecture of Louisiana plantation

houses. After a hiatus in their relationship, following a traumatic scene with Smith Ninas's husband in February 1936, Smith Ninas and Evans renewed their relationship in June 1939 and were married on 27 October 1941. On 21 December 1955, they were divorced and Evans made a point of deleting the dedication from the republished version of *American Photographs* that came out in 1962. A three-by-five notecard in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Walker Evans Archive has the curt penciled reminder: "remove J. S. N. dedication" (Evans Archive, American Photographs exhibition and book reissue 1962, 1994.250.58, folder #27).

95. See Peter Galassi 201. The designation "Bible cloth" was Evans's own.
96. Evans's first exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art took place between 16 November 1933 and 1 January 1934, displaying thirty-nine of the one hundred prints of American nineteenth-century architecture that had been donated to the Museum's permanent collection by Lincoln Kirstein and that would be circulated as a traveling exhibit until 1940. In the same year, 1933, through the Downtown Gallery, Evans photographed Mayan and Aztec objects for Holger Cahill's exhibition, "American Sources of Modern Art," principally motivated by his effort to earn much-needed cash. More officially, in 1935, with the support of a grant from the General Education Board, Evans was commissioned by Alfred Barr and Tom Mabry to photograph all five hundred exhibits in the "African Negro Art" exhibition and to prepare seventeen portfolios of his complete prints. Over the next two years, the Museum also included Evans's work in two major survey exhibitions: Barr's "Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism," in 1936, and Beaumont Newhall's "Photography, 1839–1937," in 1937. Then, in spring 1938, Tom Mabry engineered the purchase of work by Evans for the permanent collection that was to precipitate the hastily scheduled solo exhibition, the Museum's first for a photographer, from 28 September to 18 November 1938, accompanying the publication of *American Photographs*. It was Mabry and Kirstein, and later Frances Collins, who represented Evans's main supporters at the Museum. Without much cause, Evans thought a great deal less of director Alfred H. Barr and Museum librarian Beaumont Newhall. Even while negotiating the African Art commission, Evans made an entry in his diary on Saturday, 13 April 1935, that reads: "Barr so nice and so confused. Quite a useless man, I'd say; though a sweet one" (Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.97). Three years later, worrying about misreadings of his forthcoming exhibition and book, Evans composed a defensive letter to Stryker that ends with a crossed out passage: "When I say Museum I do not mean their so called curator of photography who, a[s] I told you, has had and will have nothing to do with my book or exhibition, and who as a matter of fact has not the right to use that title" (Evans to Stryker, 16 July 1938, Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #57).
97. See Evans, "The Reappearance of Photography." The definition of his work as "documentary, non-artistic photographs" comes from Evans's draft application to the Ford Foundation Fellowship Program for Studies in the Creative Arts, dated 28 April 1960 (Evans Archive, Grants and Foundations, 1994.250.85). The draft proposal begins: "My project is a book of documentary, non-artistic photographs, with text essay and extended captions, recording aspects of American society as it looks today. This work is in the field of non-scholarly, non-pedantic sociology. It is a visual study of American civilization of a sort never undertaken at all extensively by photographers, who are all either commercial, journalistic, or 'artistic.'" Some years later, revising his publisher's proposed jacket text for the 1966 republication of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Evans wrote: "If most professional photography is dominated by the commercial stance or the artistic posture, Evans is in recoil from these" (*Walker Evans at Work* 136).
98. This is from a transcript of a tape-recorded interview of Walker Evans by Paul Cummings, 13 October 1971, Archives of American Art.
99. It may be worth noting that Evans sold 171 photographs to the Museum for the exhibition, at \$25 each, for a total of \$4,275—rather more than his annual salary at the Resettlement Administration. See the invoice sent to Evans by Dorothy H. Dudley, Registrar of the Museum of Modern Art, 19 September 1938 (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #25). The book was less profitable. He received a \$260 advance royalty on the thirteen hundred copies of the book distributed to members, half on signing the contract, half on delivering the final material. See the contract for "Photographs by Walker Evans," 6 May 1938 (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57,

- folder #30). Between 1 January 1939 and 30 June 1944, he received a further \$249.25 in royalties on 1,071 sales and review copies. See Statements of Royalties due on American Photographs to Walker Evans, 11 July 1939 to 28 July 1944 (Evans Archive, American Photographs, 1994.250.57, folder #55). The book sold for \$2.00 to members and \$2.50 to the public.
100. Four-page typewritten carbon of a list of plates, annotated in pencil and ink.
  101. See Trachtenberg's intense reading of Evans's *American Photographs* in "A Book Nearly Anonymous" 265.
  102. James Agee wrote to Evans on 20 June 1938: "I had heard from Via [Via Agee] that you felt thoroughly well over Lincoln's introduction [sic]" (Agee Papers; qtd. in Rathbone 159). See also Katz 83; and the longer transcript of his taped interview, qtd. in Mellow 370, 377. These latter testimonies to Kirstein come later in Evans's life. Ten years earlier, however, Evans had drafted the one-page typescript annotated carbon of his unpublished "NOTE" for the reprint edition of *American Photographs* by the Museum of Modern Art and Doubleday, stamped 29 November 1961 and marked "revision" (Evans Archive, American Photographs exhibition and book reissue 1962, 1994.250.58, folder #5). Here, Evans concludes: "In addition, Lincoln Kirstein's accompanying essay stands out as one of the few intelligible, knowledgeable, illuminating statements made for the field of still photography, a field commonly muddled and corrupt as a cistern."
  103. Eleanor Roosevelt drew attention to Evans's book in her "My Day" column in the *New York Telegram*, 30 September 1938.
  104. This is from Evans's unfinished draft of a two-page letter in ink on hotel stationery to Ernestine Evans, from Hobe Sound, Florida, dated February 1934 (Evans Collection, JPM 84.XG.963.42).
  105. See Roy Emerson Stryker, "The FSA Collection of Photographs" (7) and "Selected Shooting Scripts" (187–88).
  106. The first list, in folder #4, is from a one-page manuscript in an envelope marked "Lists for American Photographs?" The second list is a one-page manuscript in folder #5.
  107. See the subject dividers for Evans's postcard collection (Evans Archive, 1994.264); see also "Collections," in Rosenheim and Eklund 199–245. See further the publications drawn by Walker Evans from his collection: "When 'Downtown' was a Beautiful Mess" and "Come on Down."
  108. See Evans's comments on Kirstein's "helping me very much compose the thing," in the transcript of his taped interview with Leslie Katz (qtd. in Mellow 370). On Barthes's method of writing on index cards, see Louis-Jean Calvet 59, 189.
  109. Evans was an avid filmgoer, a particular fan of newsreels, and a would-be film maker on at least two occasions during the 1930s, in quite separate contexts. His first effort was made during a voyage as official photographer aboard the schooner *Cressida* that took him to the Marquesas Islands, to Tahiti, and to the neighboring Society Islands, in the first four months of 1932. His second engagement with film came in the fall and winter of 1936, when he tried to develop a number of film projects, first with Ben Shahn and then with James Agee, the proposed scenarios ranging from Resettlement Administration greenbelt rehousing projects, to unemployment and slums, to a film version of the tenant farmer book. From spring 1943 to September 1945, Evans also worked as a cinema critic for *Time*. For Evans's involvements with film, see Mellow 153–56, 336–43, 469–75. Tellingly, after returning from the South Pacific and after viewing his footage, Evans wrote to his friend Hanns Skolle on 19 May 1932: "Movies are more difficult than I realized. I seem to be able to get striking individual pictures but have difficulty in composing any significant sequence" (qtd. in Mellow 156).
  110. For the best of these in recent years, see Trachtenberg, "A Book Nearly Anonymous." While taking up Kirstein's notion of the dialectics of montage, Trachtenberg himself concedes, "The very openness of *American Photographs* implies skepticism toward closed forms and fixed meanings" (258).
  111. For the interlinked functions of the Greek archive [arkheion] as magistrate's house, guardian of records, and place of adjudication, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, esp. 1–5.

112. See Evans to Stryker, 21 April, 15 June, and 17 June 1938 (Stryker Papers, NDA 25).
113. Mabry's letter continues: "since we are rather pressed for time and Mr. Evans is at work on another book we have decided to use only those extra prints which he happens to have in New York." Mabry was replying to a letter from Stryker, dated 16 June 1938, that gave permission for the inclusion of photographs made under Resettlement Administration auspices in the Museum's exhibition and that offered to make arrangements for Evans to make his own prints from file negatives. See also note 73 above.
114. This is a one-page manuscript on the verso of a note from Evans's house cleaner, Jacqueline, concerning her hours of work and pay (43 cents per hour).
115. For a precise description of the development and structure of the file, see "Appendix: The FSA–OWI Collection," in Fleischhauer and Brannan 330–42. For a reading of the file as "one of the prime cultural artefacts of the New Deal," see Trachtenberg, "From Image To Story: Reading the File."  
In Stryker's working picture file, mounted and captioned prints were stored in vertical storage cabinets, mostly placed by state and assignment, but some grouped by subject. The inefficiency and confusion of this arrangement led Stryker to hire the museum librarian and archivist, Paul Vanderbilt, in 1942 to restructure and systematize the filing system. Vanderbilt first organized the augmented picture collection into twenty-two thousand lots, more or less corresponding to the original shooting assignments or image sets, and preserved these primary groupings on microfilm, setting some aside for storage. He then oversaw the redistribution of some eighty-eight thousand prints from Stryker's original pool into a "classified file," arranged in six broad geographical regions, in a sequence of nine subdivided subject categories descending from "The Land," through "Cities and Towns," "People as Such," "Houses and Living Conditions," to "Transportation," "Work," "Organized Society," "War," and a range of social and intellectual institutions and practices.
116. Quoted from "Still Photography," a memorandum prepared by Roy Stryker for budgetary purposes, undated, p. 1.
117. Evans's photograph does, however, in an indirect way, undo Stryker's later claim that, in its focus on the local, the ordinary, and the everyday, there is in the entire photographic collection "no record of big people" and "absolutely no celebrities." Cf. Stryker, "The FSA Collection of Photographs" 8.
118. Hurley quotes the interview with John Vachon conducted by Richard K. Doud in New York on 28 April 1965 (Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.).
119. The full caption reads: "Atlanta, Ga. May 1938. Houses and advertisements. LC-USF-34-8447-D. John Vachon."
120. Cf. Rosenheim, "'The Cruel Radiance of What Is': Walker Evans and the South" 83; and Mellow 300. The Kimball House, 33 Pryor Street, Atlanta, was a local landmark dating back to 1870 but rebuilt around 1883. One block from the Five Points business hub, it was also a popular rendez-vous for political leaders from the nearby Capitol. See Works Progress Administration Federal Writers Program, *Georgia: The WPA Guide To Its Towns And Countryside* 174.  
A Danish-born photographer and poster designer, and a one-time pupil of Berenice Abbott, Peter Sekaer had started working for Evans on 19 August 1935, helping to print and mount the sets of photographs of African Sculpture that Evans was contracted to produce for the Museum of Modern Art, New York. In Washington, that same year, while negotiating for his own position, Evans tried to get Sekaer a government job but, in his diary for 10 October, recorded "trouble," the next day adding that he did not think it would prove as good an offer as his own (see Evans diary, Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.97). In the event, without any government position, Sekaer made the trip south with Evans in February 1936, photographing alongside him, when he could get a decent vantage point, and also capturing Evans at work with his view camera, as he had before in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in November 1935. Sekaer's photograph of Evans, head beneath his black cloth, is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1994.305.1). See also Peter Sekaer, *American Pictures*.

121. See Evans's "Itemized Schedule of Travel and Other Expenses," 6 May 1936 (Stryker Papers, NDA 25). See also Evans diary, 1935 (Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.97).
122. See Stryker to Evans at the Corroll Hotel in Vicksburg, Mississippi (end of February 1936). See also Stryker to Evans at St. Marys, Florida [sic] (at the end of March or the beginning of April 1936) (Stryker Papers, NDA 25). Evans eventually arrived back in Washington, D.C., on Monday, 13 April 1936, having clocked 4,064 miles in his car since leaving Gulfport. See Rosenheim, "'The Cruel Radiance of What Is': Walker Evans and the South" 85.
123. See Evans's letter to Roy Stryker, from New York City, 16 July 1937, correcting the impression that Ernestine Evans had been with him in Mississippi and Alabama (Stryker Papers, NDA 25).
124. African Americans made up one-third of Atlanta's population in the late 1930s, living in segregated but not clearly defined city districts. For Evans's photographs, see, for example, the various views of "Negro Houses" in Atlanta (LC-USF-342-8032-E/8033-A/8034-A/8035-A/8036-A and 8037-A). "Negro Section, Atlanta" (LC-USF-342-8033-A) would later be reproduced in *Georgia: The WPA Guide* between pages 292 and 293, though it would be erroneously attributed to the U.S. Housing Administration. The photograph, "Negro Barber Shop Interior, Atlanta, 1936" (LC-USF-342-8100-A), would be included in Part One of *American Photographs* as plate 6. Compare Peter Sekaer's "Negroes' Barber Shop, Atlanta, Georgia," March 1936, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts.
125. Not all of these negatives were sent to Washington, since only the Cherokee Auto Parts Store appears in the Resettlement Administration file (LC-USF-342-8102-A). The other prints are now in the Walker Evans Archive at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1994.257.37, 1994.257.88, 1994.253.346.2-4, 1994.253.346.5, 1994.253.346.1).
126. See, in particular, Vol. 3, *The Decisive Battles*, "To Atlanta" (104-38); and, for example, the plates: "The Ruins of Hood's Retreat—Demolished Cars and Rolling-Mill" (135); "The Atlanta Bank Before the March to the Sea" (215); and "Ruins in Atlanta" (221). The notion of "photographic evidence" is underlined in Vol. 1, in the "Editorial Introduction" by Francis Trevelyan Miller (18), in Henry Wysham Lanier's essay, "Photographing The Civil War" (30-54), and in George Haven Putnam's "The Photographic Record as History" (60-84), where Putnam writes: "These vivid pictures bring past history into the present tense" (60). In Pittsburg, in December 1935, Evans also picked up Charles Frey's souvenir album of Richmond, published by Chisholm Brothers in Portland, Maine, which he was eager to compare with the New York volumes: see Evans's diary entry for Tuesday, 3 December 1935 (Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.97).
127. See "A Negro house in the Greek Revival style, New Orleans, Louisiana," January 1936 (LC-USF-342-1284-A) and "The outskirts of the factory district, New Orleans, Louisiana," February 1936 (LC-USF-342-1297-A). Traveling for the Resettlement Administration the previous year, in Carrollton, Kentucky, Evans had also noted: "Courthouse square/ Main street 1870 architecture/ Movie on main st. posters/ wild west" (Evans diary, 7 December 1935, Evans Archive, Diaries, 1994.250.97).
128. See, for example: "Liberty Theater front, New Orleans, Louisiana," December 1935 (LC-USF342-1285-A); "Billboard, Birmingham, Alabama," March 1936 (LC-USF-342-8091-A); and the later "Movie Poster, Vicinity Moundville, Alabama," summer 1936 (LC-USF-33-31340-M2).
129. This information is from RA Exposure Records, Evans Archive, 1994.250.148. Evans carried the printed forms with him and filled them in somewhat sporadically. Forty-one such record sheets, covering the years 1935 and 1936, are in the Walker Evans Archive in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. When completely filled out, they registered the camera used, the negative number, the date, the place, a memorandum of the subject, the lens used, the shutter speed, the filter, aperture, light conditions, and time of day. No other RA/FSA photographer seems to have used these forms, perhaps because they were more reliable at keeping their own records for the Washington photo-lab.
130. Though Vachon's image is not quite in focus, what we also see is that damage to the house on the right, to the balcony and to the house's siding, seems to have been repaired. On the other hand, the

upper balcony of the house on the left has been cleared, the curtains have been stripped from the window, and there is an air of abandonment about the place.

131. For Evans's camera technique, see Thompson 9–17. The two components of the triple convertible lens gave three possibilities: from "normal" (29 cm.) in combination, to long focus (40 cm.), to still longer (69 cm.).
132. For Rathbone, it is the black eye that provides the central metaphor, not only for what has happened to the houses, but for "a condition of love" that Evans, in flight from Jane Smith Ninas's husband, "now understood better than before" (116).
133. See *Dialogue Continuity on "Chatterbox"*, production #870, 19 December 1935 (New York State Archives, Albany, New York).
134. See *Carole Lombard in "Love Before Breakfast"*, picture #757, stamped 26 February 1936 (New York State Archives, Albany, New York).
135. Cf. Rathbone 116. Rathbone also titles her chapter on Evans's later marriage to Jane Smith Ninas and their life in New York City in the late 1930s and early 1940s, "Love Before Breakfast."  
Asked later in life by a University of Michigan student whether he photographed billboards with a sense of disdain or derision or whether he considered them beautiful, Evans replied; "Well, I love them, and I'm entertained by them. I feel they're stimulating and exciting and endearing" ("Walker Evans, Visiting Artist" 317).
136. See William Stott, *Documentary Expression* 218–23, 267–71. More surprising, perhaps, is that Paula Rabinowitz's "feminist" reading should find that Agee's and, later, Evans's "'vicious' critiques of Bourke-White were fully justified"; that Bourke-White's red coat, "presumably paid for by the profits from her book," "makes Agee's and Evans's project all the more morally superior"; and that "we are left feeling embarrassed by Bourke-White's efforts" (see Rabinowitz 70–71).
137. This is from a draft of chapter 12 of *Portrait of Myself* (13). A little earlier, in another passage deleted from the final text, Bourke-White recalls: "The Louisville flood [burst into the news almost overnight (handwritten insert)] [surged up so fast that there was no time to think about what the well-dressed photographer should wear to a flood. I was lucky to find I had a pair of old slacks at the office and an equally old sweater which I stuffed into a corner of my camera case (deleted)]" (12–13).
138. For details of Evans's consumer preferences in the 1950s and 1960s, see Rathbone 212, 216, 269; and Mellow 559. For correspondence on the car radio, see Evans's letter to Pyke Johnson, Editor-in-Chief, Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, 20 July 1961 (Evans Archive, American Photographs exhibition and book reissue, 1962, 1994.250.58, folder #15).
139. See, for example, Maharidge and Williamson.
140. See Margaret Bourke-White, "Notes on Photographs," in Caldwell and Bourke-White, *You Have Seen Their Faces* 51–54; and *Portrait of Myself* 126–27. For Evans's remarks as quoted by Stott, see Stott 223.
141. The 1931 exhibition was "Photographs by Three Americans," the third photographer being their mutual friend Ralph Steiner. In 1937, both Bourke-White and Evans were selected by Beaumont Newhall to contribute representative sets of prints to the exhibition, *Photography 1839–1937*, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
142. On this, see Alan Trachtenberg's brief but instructive foreword to the reprint of Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White's *You Have Seen Their Faces* (v–viii).
143. For their considerable assistance, I wish to thank the staff of the Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, and of the E. S. Bird Library, Department of Special Collections, at Syracuse University. I owe a special debt, however, to the generosity of colleagues in the Department of Photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,

New York, above all to Jeff Rosenheim, whose insight into the work of Walker Evans and knowledge of the Walker Evans Archive have no rival.

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