

Recording Life-in-Process

By MARGARET R. WEISS

CRITICS WHO separate "art that involves" from "art that detaches" would find it difficult to classify Dorothea Lange's photography. For its creative insigne—and no small part of its strength and durability—has been the immediacy with which it invites both emotional involvement and reflective detachment.

In essence, this defines the character of Dorothea Lange the woman as well as Lange the photographer. Her intuitive responses to the human condition were insights filtered through the prism of intelligence; her way of knowing was also her art of seeing.

Somewhere in her unpublished notes she had written, "A photographer's files are, in a sense, his autobiography." And the gallery walls of the Museum of Modern Art, where her first major retrospective has been installed, echo the truth of that observation.

The task of selecting 200 representative prints for the exhibit was her own private retrospective. "Learning out of my own past" was how she described the critical process of extracting from each documentary file those subjects that crystallized the essence of a situation rather than its particular circumstances. During months of sorting and sifting negatives, shifting and changing print arrangements on the huge wallboards above her files, she worked alone or with John Szarkowski, director of the museum's photography department—but always against time in the shadow of terminal illness.

Now as the exhibition viewer ad-

vances from panel to panel, from wall to wall, what he sees represents the visual autobiography of Dorothea Lange. Implicit is the prologue: Even while still a student at the New York Training School for Teachers, she had decided to become a photographer. With a gift camera from Arnold Genthe and the basics of photography taught by Clarence H. White at Columbia, she made her way from a rented chicken-coop darkroom on the Palisades to a portrait studio of her own in San Francisco.

The confining studio, static portraiture, posed subjects, synthetic backgrounds—these could not long satisfy one convinced that life meant life-in-process. For Lange, people existed in a rhythmic flow of relationships; man lived in symbiosis with his physical and social environment. It was to reveal this organic reality that she used her camera, producing what her friend George P. Elliott has termed "art for life's sake." Not concerned with abstract symbols, she sought out, scrutinized, and really saw individuals. Her subjects became prototypes—even archetypes in some instances—but not stereotypes. There was a fine distinction made between the meaningful detail and the merely incidental.

It was these qualities in her early self-assigned coverage of the San Francisco scene that brought her photography its first exhibition at Willard Van Dyke's studio in 1934, and in turn the attention of Paul S. Taylor, a University of California economics professor whose co-worker and wife she became a year later. Serving as visual reporter for their col-



—Paul S. Taylor

Dorothea Lange in 1953
—"art for life's sake."

Lange Photos Courtesy Museum of Modern Arts.

laborative social-research projects, she grew increasingly aware of how powerful an instrument of communication and persuasion the camera could be.

IN the decade that followed, many readers were to sense that power as they looked at her incisive documentation of migratory workers, of Japanese-American relocation camps, of the United Nations Conference. Later, too, there were longer, more leisurely nongovernment assignments—photo essays on "The New California," on Mormon communities, on Ireland, and on the peoples of Asia, Egypt, and South America—and the continuing pictorial chronicling of her own family and home.

"Whether Dorothea's camera focused on stoop labor in the lettuce fields, delegates around the conference table, villagers in the Nile Valley, or patients in a Venezuelan government hospital." Professor Taylor remarked during a recent visit to New York, "her special 'seeing' was seeing *relationships*. That's what mattered most to her: the relationships of people to people, people to place—to season—to home and garden, photo to photo, subject to subject, tonality to tonality."

The museum retrospective conveys much of this to the viewer. Themed wall legends and panel arrangements signal "relatedness," which readies the eye for seeing more intrinsic relationships.

Dorothea Lange's visual autobiography would not be complete without an epilogue. And she left us one in *Project I*—her blueprint for "a national cultural resource in the form of a file of photographs." The project's photographic unit would comb the country documenting all aspects of contemporary urban life, not only outward appearance but inner values, purposes, and dangers. She has shown the way.



Sharecroppers, Eutaw, Alabama, 1937.



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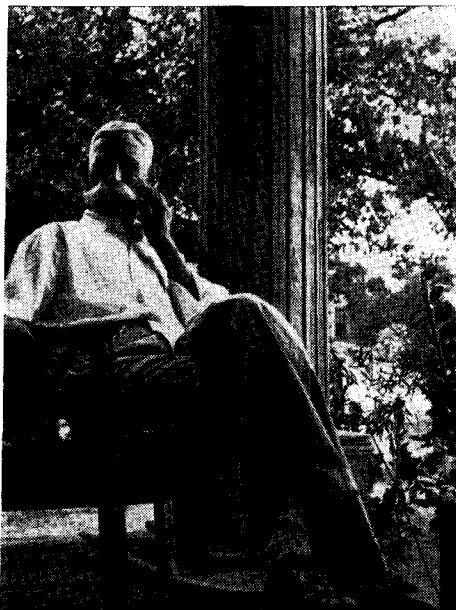
1. Bad Trouble over the Weekend. 1964

2. Greenville, Mississippi. 1938

3. Nile Village, Egypt. 1963

4. Country Road, County Clare, Ireland. 1954

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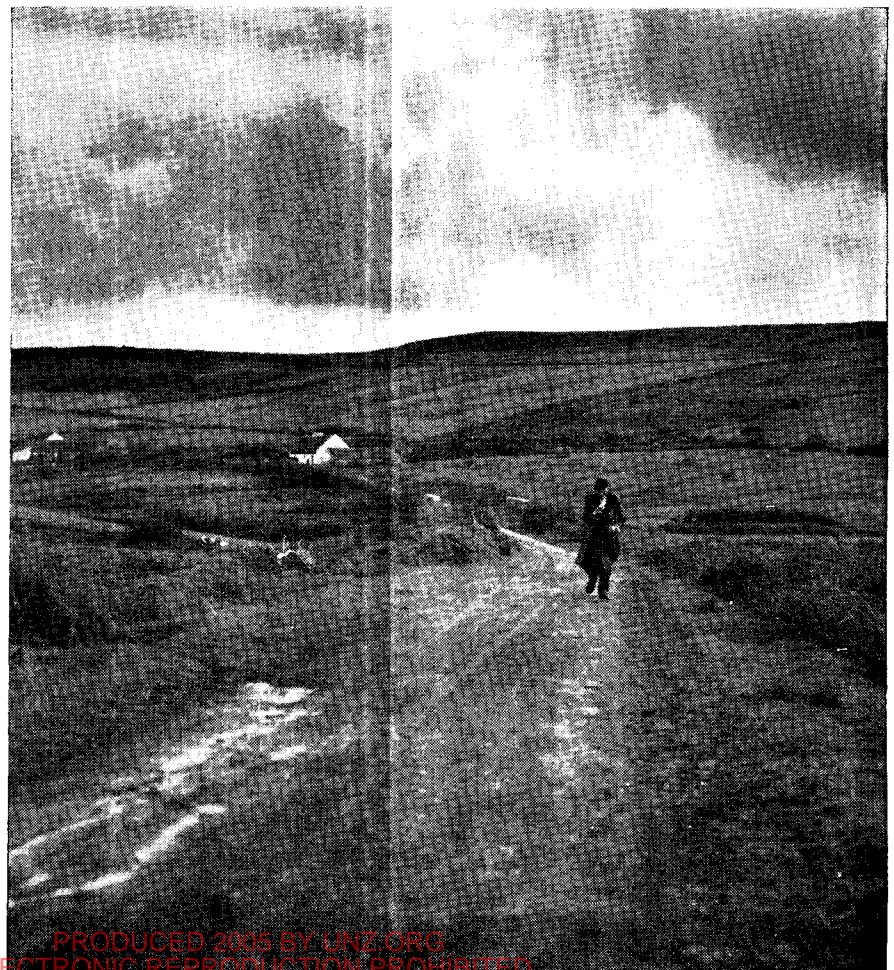
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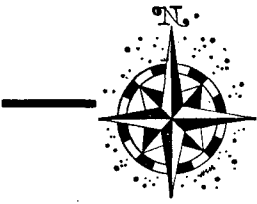


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900 Years and All That

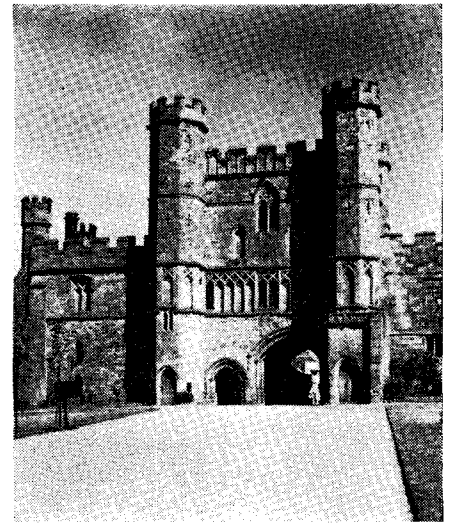
IF THE RAF had faltered in the Battle of Britain, and if Hitler had been successful with his plans to cross the Channel, the Germans would have accomplished the first successful invasion of England since 1066. But Hitler chose to retire behind the guns and wires of Festung Europa, and the stunning accomplishment of William the Conqueror, who sent 650 flatboats across the Channel bearing his knights and his horses, his men-at-arms and his prefabricated fortresses to do battle on English soil, remains a date to be remembered in all history.

It was only an eight-hour fracas that started at nine and was over at five, but in the course of what is now one working day, and probably without time out for lunch, William the Conqueror defeated Harold Godwin and changed England's destiny for all time. So far-reaching were the effects that 1066 is remembered in Britain as indelibly as 1492 and 1776 are on this side of the sea. It normally takes very little to inspire a festival in Britain—I shouldn't wonder if they plan to celebrate the invention of the bowler one day—so a date as portentous as the 900th anniversary of 1066, which falls this year, requires a celebration in full bravura.

There are now sixteen towns called Hastings in the world, but the progenitor of them all, a seaside resort some six

miles from the 900-year-old battlefield, has been planning ahead for this year for almost a lifetime. A triodrome, whatever that is, will be erected to house a diorama of the battle. A pictorial embroidery must by now be nearing completion, a product of London's Royal School of Needlework which is requiring 243 feet to display eighty-one pictures of the great events of British history beginning with the Norman conquest. The nearby town called Battle is planning a *Son et Lumière* portrayal at the Abbey built by William after his success in the invasion. The altar rests on the very spot where Harold fell. At Pevensey, the largest gathering of small craft since Dunkirk will congregate to commemorate William's landing. At last report, subject to the state of digestion in the higher echelons at Paris, there will be a deputization of dignitaries from France.

Some sort of commemoration is being planned for cities in one way or another associated with the fateful day 900 years ago, and they include Caen, Rouen, Dives-Sur-Mer, and London. William was crowned in Westminster Abbey, which is also commemorating its 900th anniversary. The abbey was the idea of Edward the Confessor, last of the Saxon kings who had preceded Harold on the throne. Edward had planned to make a pilgrimage to Rome, but not really being disposed to make the journey, he re-



ceived a dispensation on condition that he found an abbey. The abbey was completed almost as Edward died and he was buried in it. But Edward died having promised his throne both to Harold and William. Edward was hardly dead a full day before the council of the rulers of the people met and gave the throne to Harold. In the early fall of that momentous year, William sailed against Harold and on Christmas Day he was crowned king at Westminster Abbey.

Edward the Confessor had died leaving no heirs, but of all England's provincial people who were just learning to live together, he was by far the most powerful. Kings were not then rulers but fighters, and Harold was the best of them. Across the Channel, the fame of Duke William of Normandy had spread across the Continent. He had been promised the throne of England by Edward, and as if that were not enough reason to seize it, he won the concurrence of Philip I of France and of Pope Alexander II. The Pope allowed William to carry his banner, a sign that Alexander recognized William as the true king of England.

To complicate the intrigue there was also Tostig, Harold's brother. Harold had banished him from the kingdom and Tostig had retreated to Norway, where he lay pouting and waiting for a chance to even the score. There may have been some complicity with William, but Tostig was angry enough in his own right to cause trouble. In September, just before William mounted his own invasion force, Tostig sailed against Harold Godwin aboard the Viking ships of Harold III, King of Norway.

As the Scandinavians rowed up the Humber River they were met by the Northumbrians, but Tostig invaded York and crowned himself. Harold now raced forward to meet the invaders at Stamford Bridge outside of York. Tostig was killed and the Norwegians were repelled, but Harold lost many of his Housecarls, who were considered to be

