The McFarlands: "One Season".

John Edwin May

East Tennessee State University

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The McFarlands

“One Season”

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Art and Design
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Fine Arts

by
John Edwin May
May 2010

Mike Smith, Chair
Wayne Dyer
Patricia Mink

Keywords: Digital, Documentary, Photography
ABSTRACT

The McFarlands

“One Season”

by

John Edwin May

This thesis is in support of the Master of Fine Arts exhibition entitled
The McFarlands at East Tennessee State University, Slocumb Galleries, Johnson City, Tennessee, November 5th – 9th, 2007. This artist’s photographic survey, which lasted approximately two years, investigated the lifeworld of a family in a rural Appalachian town. His photographic work depicts the subjects working on their farm growing tobacco and their relationships within the family unit.

The artist discusses his work in terms of historical and contemporary influences with an emphasis on the relationship to the work of Lewis W. Hine, Wright Morris, Mary Ellen Mark, and David M. Spear.

The thesis includes images and discussion of four works.
DEDICATION

To a great friend and colleague, Steven Hamilton Roberts.

1958-2008
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful acknowledgements are made to the following sources for permission to reproduce photographs in this paper: Lewis W. Hine, Collection Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, ©2003 Arizona Board of Regents, Mary Ellen Mark, and David M. Spear.

I would like to express appreciation to Dr. Richard Cary, I thank you for your time and thought.

Lastly, a special thank you to Victoria for loving support during this endeavor.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

One of the earliest recollections in my life at age six was standing at the edge of what seemed like a vast landscape that stretched beyond the sky. In actuality it was the painted canvas background of a photographer. My next-door neighbor and friend of my parents, Hal Cooner, owned a photography studio in Hazard, Kentucky. My grassy backyard extended to Mr. Cooner’s photography studio. His studio was full of light stands, tripods, cameras, and other photographic equipment. This afforded me complete access to a small town photography studio, which provided hours of wonder. With no siblings and living in a business area, playmates were rare. I relied on my imagination and curiosity to occupy my time. I was always a welcomed guest in what seemed like a magic place, this nearby photography studio. Mr. Cooner was very kind and patient with someone of my age who would ask him numerous questions. There were rules. I could not get close to the camera atop the tripod, walk on or near the background, or go near the always-closed darkroom. This was an invisible border, a forbidden space. I had to rely on my imagination to guess what happened under the dark cloth he used to look through the camera or what took place in that denied darkroom. This curiosity remained and kept me wanting to learn more about photography. This interest has never faded.

I remember standing for what seemed like hours watching Mr. Cooner photograph someone. With his gray hair and full beard and methodic mannerisms, he seemed so wise. Mr. Cooner would move lights and reflectors around, make camera adjustments, and disappear under a large black cloth and then silence… When he vanished under the cloth to focus the image on
the ground glass, I wanted to look through that camera too. I wanted to know what he was doing under that cloth. Being too shy and respectful, I never asked to look through his camera, but I can remember positioning myself close to it while no one was in the studio. My curiosity was intensified and reinforced. I desperately wanted to look through his camera.

When he would rip off the focusing cloth, it was as if he became another person. He changed from the deliberate, precise technician to an animated entertainer quickly moving about. He changed out exposed film holders for new ones and made changes to the camera settings. The photographer started to interact with the subjects. Mr. Cooner started giving instructions to his sitters. He would change the pose and adjust their clothes. He gave instructions on how to position their bodies, where to look, and when to smile. At this time, all I knew about photography was to *say cheese* and smile at the camera. There was so much I did not understand about the photographer and the photographed.

He processed the film and made photographs in the studio’s darkroom, a place I could not go, that forbidden space. At my age, I could not understand the safety issues of chemicals and why Mr. Cooner needed to protect me. I had to rely on my imagination. Like the dark cloth covered camera hiding activity from my view, the darkroom door was likewise hiding the activity inside. These only heightened my curiosity. I could not understand him going into the darkroom with what he called *film* and appearing later with *pictures*. He seemed to be like that man I saw on television who gave a scarecrow a brain, gave a tin man a heart, gave a Lion courage, and attempted to take Dorothy and Toto home. This man was like the Wizard of Oz. What type of magic was occurring in that room?
To this day, whether I’m working in the darkroom printing or at my computer system, I have retained that excitement. I am transported back into my early youth of amazement and wonder as I watch my photograph slowly appear in the developer tray illuminated by the dim, amber safelight or slowly inch out from my inkjet printer.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

From Henry Fox Talbot’s recordings of botanical specimens to Louis Daguerre’s contribution of teaching, writing, and commercial incentives, photography has flourished since the discovery. The photograph, because of the accuracy of recording and representing what was in front of the camera, rapidly grew into widespread acceptance. This growth challenged both drawing and painting. This creation not only helped Talbot see the world, it spawned a new art form. This medium interested the philosophers, art historians and critics, and the museums.

From Eadweard Muybridge’s *Galloping Horse, Motion Study 1878* to Harold E. Edgerton’s *Firing an Antique Revolver 1936*, photography revealed the unseen. An ethnological style flourished, as the cameras became smaller, the film emulsions more sensitive to light, and the invention of the portable flash unit. The documentary photograph became a tool of proof, literally, a document. Beaumont Newhall wrote of this by stating, “The quality of authenticity implicit in a photograph may give it special value as evidence, or proof. Such a photograph can be called documentary…”(Newhall 235). Edward Curtis documented the Blackfoot North American Indians. E. J. Bellocq documented New Orleans prostitutes in the Storyville red light district. Horace Poolaw being the first Native American professional photographer documented the Kiowa tribe. James Van Der Zee opened a Harlem studio and documented his African-American community. These social investigations revealed the lives of people and their culture. Whatever the human condition the voyeuristic nature of our being compels us to look.
If I could tell the story in words, I wouldn’t need to lug a camera.

*Lewis W. Hine* (Sontag 185)

One influential photographer for my work is Lewis W. Hine. Hine was ruthless in using photography to reveal and persuade. Hine is noted for working with the National Child Labor Committee. Essentially, Hine took up a cause of unfair labor practices and abuses of children in the industrial workforce. As a trained sociologist, this plight caused Hine to *stand up* for the young subjects he photographed. While helpless children worked for a substandard wage, Hine hoped to use his photography to bring about laws that would protect his subjects. Once the viewers saw these images, they too would be persuaded to act on behalf of the children. This type of documentary is a subjective interpretation (Hall 83). The photographer has a motive to bring about social change or thought. I view my work, *One Season*, as that of a documentary that is objective (Hall 81). I wanted nothing more than to photograph a family that grew tobacco in the current economy and depict their lives. The McFarlands granted me access to photograph their lives. It was a challenge to get close enough to be subjective and distant enough to remain objective. My photographs in the context of the paradigms of subjective and objective interpretation are rendered in authority. My photographs render what was in front of my camera lens.
In Hine’s photograph *Child in Carolina Cotton Mill, 1908*, Detail (Fig 1), one is taken into a factory that depicts a child working at a colossal sewing machine. In the background we see an adult looking in the direction of the camera, rendered out of focus, watching the photographer and the photographed. As a viewer, I feel uneasy for a youthful girl to be working in such close proximity to large machinery. The photograph documents a child at work not at play. Her tangled hair and facial expression reveal her mundane task of observing and tending to the machine. By making this image in such a subjective way, Hine knew the viewer’s humanism and compassion would enter into the complex juxtaposition. With this image in our memory, could anyone allow these child laborers to continue work without protection? While *One Season* is photographed more from an objective realm, it does have the strong visual appeal as that of Hine’s photographs. The subjects are photographed at the location of the moment, easily recognizable, and maintain strong visual compositional skills.

Hine can be noted for another element of photography’s evolution. Hine followed closely behind the reportage style of Jacob Riis that shocked viewers. While other contemporaries concerned in the Photo-Secession debated of art photography, Hine sought to document one’s life experiences. His desire led to a successful career. Today, Hine’s work is synonymous with documentary photography. He wanted his work to educate viewers and at the same time allow these viewers to observe while misfortunate people endured. “Hine’s
…sympathetic social documentary photography…provided a model for the famous Farm Security Administration project” (Trachtenberg 109). Roy Stryker, who enlisted notable photographers such as, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Russell Lee, and others, headed this FSA. Hine’s photographic concern can best be described by Allen Trachtenberg in his book, *Reading American Photographs*. He states, “Hine…saw himself not as an individual genius breaking convention but as a working photographer performing a certain kind of cultural (and political) labor; he focused his work not on the photograph in exhibition but on the published image—not the single photograph as a fine print…but on the published image”(Trachtenberg 218).

> It was clear to me, however, that a writer who wanted a picture of something might well take it rather than describe it.

*Wright Morris*

*Wright Morris*

Wright Morris’s work has always fascinated me and enriched my appreciation of the black and white photograph. Now I am drawn to his work with even more enthusiasm, because he was passionate about photographing what he perceived as vanishing or disappearing. Another element of Morris’s work I find appealing is his *visual writing*. By visual writing I mean the use of words to evoke a visual image. This visual writing lead me to his photographs, which directly informed my work. His writing style was like his photographic style, visually concrete.
He was aware of the visual concreteness of his own writing just as much as he was of his photographs that were known to be very precise. Morris’s writing possessed *brio* that Barthes defined as, “the will to bliss: just where it exceeds demand, transcends prattle, and whereby it attempts to overflow, to break through the constraints… of language” and opens the door to the visual (Barthes 13).

In *Photographs & Words*, Morris describes photographing in Georgia, “…The basking Southern heat, the soft golden light, the way structures and people appeared to be saturated with a scent of a past as dense as leaf smoke, smoldering and drug-like, in which everybody was a willing compliant victim” (Morris 27). This visual writing enhanced Morris’s photographic work. Morris wrote, “It was clear to me… that a writer who wanted a picture of something might well take it rather than describe it.” (Morris 16). This means to me that photography can be a type of knowledge.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes talked about photographs that had *punctum* (Barthes 21). He used this word to refer to photographs that had unforgettable meaning and meticulous visual memory for individuals. The qualities of Morris’s work and in particular the following three photographs are relevant to my work. They are carefully composted yet look free from the camera operator’s control. There is spontaneity to the images, a moment suspended in time in which to look and gain knowledge and understanding.
Morris’s photograph *Uncle Harry, Home Place, Norfolk, Nebraska, 1947* (Fig 2) has this presence for me. At first glance, it seems so effortless. It is the moment that is signified. The man is entering into the dark abyss and Morris’s shutter was pressed at the exact moment when the subject moves from outside the shed into the inside, from the known into the unknown. This is the first image in his book, *Photographs & Words* (1982). It is carefully composed yet possesses the essence of a fleeting moment. We view the slightly humped, silver haired, elderly gentleman walking into a shed. The harsh overhead light is streaming almost straight down…there is quietness about the image. The light is describing the coat as well as the weathered wood that frames his subject.

Strong vertical and horizontal lines of the shed surround the man. A small-cropped window placed high describes the right side of the image, while a large cropped door to the left describes the entrance. A tipped over, dented pail to the right, with its roundness, fills the composition in the lower right corner. Morris’s vision with his *aura of detachment* along with observing one’s daily life makes a metaphor for stepping into the unknown.

In the photographs *Through the Lace Curtain; Home Place 1947* (Fig 3) and *Model T with California Top; Ed’s Place 1947* (Fig 4) one continues to see an aura of detachment. Through this element, Morris looks in as an outsider onto familiar places. In the photograph, *Through the Lace Curtain; Home Place, 1947*, the viewer is a backroom voyeur in the house. Looking through the doorway and curtain, the viewer is detached.
yet sees an intimate scene of an elderly person in a private moment. Morris crosses a forbidden border photographically but not literally. Morris remains in the backroom, but the camera seeps into the space of the subject. Morris is allowing the viewer to look into what appears to be the living room through lace curtains. A man sits smoking a pipe in a rocking chair. Because of the curtains, which could symbolize the uncertainty of the detached viewer, we can only see part of the out of focus man. It is the lace curtains that are in focus. The well-lit living room makes the curtains appear black, as the room from which the image is made is dark. A chair, just on the far side of the curtains, moves the viewer through to the living room and the discovery of the man via the beautiful curved lines in the armrests. The curtain however keeps us apart and entertains our interest.

I see the quaint view of the living room through those curtains, as a tableau of history. The antique-looking chair has the same impact. I am transported back into my past of entering my grandparents’ home. For a fragile moment this space is familiar, the seated figure is familiar, and I know if I venture beyond the lace curtains, I will be in an unfamiliar place. The image is placed in this context by the way in which Morris made the image. He placed the camera in a dim room that displayed a well-lit area. There we could see a figure with another darken room beyond. The viewer must stay where Morris placed his camera. The photograph’s title is so appropriate; by looking through the curtains I can see my home place. Morris’s detachment has rendered this scene with a universality that enables me to become attached and involved because of my personal memory.

In the series of photographs of Ed’s Place, Morris makes one of his most significant images, *Model T with California Top, Ed’s Place, 1947* (Fig 4). John Szarkowski in *Looking at*
Photographs, 100 Pictures from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art writes, “There is in Morris’s picture a quality of ceremony and ritual that speaks to the car’s historic and symbolic role” (Szarkowski 148). To me, Morris was photographing a changing world in this image. His insight into the families moving to the large cities and leaving behind the farm tells the role that the car played. The car is shown with the muddy tires. The shed in the distance with open doors gives the viewer a slight view inside. This was the exact emphasis Roy Stryker told his FSA photographers that shaped documentary photography. I followed this advice with One Season as well. Stryker explains:

An ordinary silo is an insistent temptation for the angle shot from below – converging lines, dramatic light, red filtered clouds. Yet such a picture has little value beyond the satisfaction the photographer may feel in having made a possible “salon print.” On the other hand, imagine the same silo photographed so that it stands in proper size relationship to the farmhouse and the fields behind, with light used to bring out the structure and the quality of the day, and with the farmer and his hired man unloading corn in the foreground. You will then have a photograph which tells the story of the silo.

(Puckett 10).

I believe that Morris knew of the importance and simple beauty of this image and included his shadow to tell us, I noticed this first and made the photograph.
CHAPTER 3
CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES

I wanted to make these images more intimate, more empathetic...more into their world.

David M. Spear

David M. Spear

A contemporary documentary photographer, David M. Spear, has produced work that has influenced my photographic essay, One Season. Spear, a Madison county North Carolina native, has photographs in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the New Orleans Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Art in Houston, and the Ackland Museum in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Spear’s work that is most relevant to my work is the book, The Neugents “Close to Home” (1993). Spear over the span of six years photographed the Neugents in the context of their daily lives. This approach gave me new ideas to investigate in my work. He crossed forbidden borderlines that Morris did not. Spear saw something in the Neugents and I later discovered in my work; how to depict and reveal a lifeworld. Ted Honderich explains lifeworld when he states, “…the structured realm of beliefs, assumptions, feelings, values, and cultural practices that construct meaning in everyday life” (Honderich 189). These cultural practices include the visual universal experiences that made up my work with the McFarlands. To do this, one must be detached of the circumstance of the photographed but maintain one’s personal vision while being subjective. While Appalachian families have been photographed
before, the individuals in this particular family, the Neugents, had not. I set out to incorporate this knowledge into my essay.

Through the use of the camera, Spear places the viewer at the scene. His approach was to portray the Neugents the way they lived their own experiences. We see Mamie Neugent many times throughout the book. She bluntly appears as Spear saw her. We just happen to be present when Mamie gives her grandson a bath or when she sits down at the kitchen table. Her portrait is the first photograph in the book, as seen in Figure 5, *Mamie Neugent*. As Spear tells us, this photograph depicts Mamie a bit apprehensive. She sits at the kitchen table and seems to be looking past the camera lens to the photographer. One can almost see the lack of trust in her eyes. The photograph is rich in value, but because of the darkness in the room, the illuminated form of her face is enhanced. The window light reveals the facial wrinkles of a seasoned laborer. Her uneasy gaze is haunting, with her aged, sagging eyebrows. The moment is elevated into a questioning statement for the viewer to contemplate her past, turbulent life.

In another portrait of Mamie she is seen more relaxed, leaning back in a cane chair, slightly to the left of center, resting one arm, staring straight into the camera lens, *Mamie Neugent, 1989* (Fig 6). She is shown wearing a hat, her face full of wrinkles with safety pins adorning her dress. The resting arm has loose skin pressed up against the rib of the chair.
The varicose hand hangs from the arm blurred, outside of the depth of field. The light and the careful print manipulation draw the viewer straight into her face. In the distant, gloomy background, we can make out a figure, Troy, also sitting. Spear has lined up Mamie’s head with a side-lit refrigerator that again makes the viewer take notice of Mamie’s gaze.

One element of particular humor is the photograph, *Lee Neugent 1991* (Fig. 7). Lee is practically in the center of the frame lined up with a kitchen cabinet in the blurred background. On top of the cabinet is one of the many Neugent cats washing itself by rubbing its head with its paw. Lee, while looking out to his left, is rubbing his head with his left hand at the same time. The cat and a man rubbing themselves in much the same way in the kitchen have an air of serendipity.

Another memorable image in connection with my work in *One Season* is that of Mamie taking care of her hair, *Mamie Neugent / Lee Neugent 1988* (Fig 8). Mamie and her son Lee find themselves again in the kitchen. With a newspaper-covered table, Mamie is combing out her wet, long silver hair while washing it with
White Rain shampoo. Lee sits patiently waiting for Mamie to finish. This moment is a simple human event that becomes dramatic because of the place (the kitchen) and the presence of Lee.

Another interesting element to Spear’s imagery is the way he overcomes the Neugent’s predictability. Most photographs of Lee make him seem far off and unconcerned about his immediate surroundings.

In the photographs of *Washing Jacob, 1992* (Fig 9) and *Lee Neugent, 1992* (Fig 10) we see another side of Lee. He is shown holding Jacob, while Mamie attends to washing of the infant (Fig 9). Jacob is standing in the large stainless steel bowl that Mamie uses to wash her hair. Lee uses both hands to hold the infant Jacob upright, firm but gentle, as Mamie rinses Jacob’s nude, chubby body.

This gentleness appears again with the photograph of Lee in what seems to be a cold kitchen as he sits wearing a flannel shirt with a sweatshirt over it while donning a toboggan cap. Lee’s eyes appear dark with the room’s dim overhead light. His brow is intense as he gazes into his hands where he gently holds a young
puppy still with its eyes closed. A barren kitchen with a door ajar and Lee holding the little puppy depicts a very different side of Lee and his life as a whole. Spear accomplished his goal to, “…depict the Neugents as they live in their world” (Spear 6).

I much prefer to photograph people I care about.

Mary Ellen Mark

Mary Ellen Mark

Mary Ellen Mark’s name has become synonymous with contemporary documentary work. From her photographic start as the still photographer on the set of One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, she has achieved prominence in her documentary work throughout the world. In her photographic exhibitions and numerous books, she has recorded the human condition of a significant number of cultures. She has documented families in the streets of Los Angeles, twins at the Twins Festival in Twinsburg, Ohio, and Mother Teresa caring for the people of India who were poor, sick, and dying. This work is firmly based in the realm of objectivity. Her goal was to record what was in front of her camera.
In India, she did alter her aesthetic with the work of *Falkland Road*. Her purpose became similar to that of Hine as she became a concerned humanist (Rothstein 19). Hine photographed innocent children working in factories and Mark photographed enslaved young girls sold into prostitution as seen in *Falkland Road, Bombay, India, 1978-9* (Fig. 11). Her compassion for these surviving adolescent girls strengthened her desire to document the atrocity of parents selling their own children into sexual slavery. Mark revealed this mercilessness in a subjective, clear manner. Mark did not, nor could not, forget what she witnessed (documented). The essay, *Falkland Road* makes sure no one forgets. Mark, like Hine, took up a cause to bring about change to a social issue. By documenting what they saw, a record (document) was made. This revelation would inform viewers of such tragic events, thus documentary had a role in social education (Wells 89). Mark transported her viewers allegorically to India and took them down Falkland Road, an emotional journey into a world of terrible poverty.

In Mark’s photograph, *Girl Jumping Rope on the Burning Ghat, Benares, India, 1995* (Fig. 12), we are witness to two children, one of whom is jumping rope. The expression of
anguish on the child’s face jumping is perplexing. The jump that is metaphorically frozen in time is reminiscent of Henri Cartier-Bresson’s decisive moment. A bustling town on the waterfront is in the distance with people moving about. The dark figure on the left looks out of the photograph and echoes the sorrow in the rope-jumper. Mark explains, “The irony of the photograph was the children playing normal children’s games surrounded by the cremation grounds at the burning ghats.”

In One Season there was no dilemma of social discord. The McFarlands were going to raise tobacco no matter the income outlook. This particular year they would grow their tobacco crop unassisted by government subsidies. I objectively photographed an ordinary family and placed them in the context of a social issue, growing tobacco.

As cable television organizations flourished and turned to more entertaining topics, the picture magazines lost popularity. Mark and Spear have turned to the documentary book as a vehicle to bring their photography to the public. Historically, Hine’s early work was similar to a news photojournalist; each day he would seek out new subjects. In 1930 he selected one of his most critical projects, photographing the workers of the Empire State Building. This body of work resulted in his innovative picture book, Men at Work (Hirsch 270). These early books allowed contemporary photographers to gain information and replicate this knowledge in their own projects. In my opinion, a reason for the documentary book’s fascination is the element of time. A book allows the photographer to thoroughly investigate (document) the subject and gain understanding of the subject over a period of time. Spear photographed the Neugents for over six years. Mark worked on Ward 81 for over two months and invested years photographing Mother
Teresa in India. My *One Season* essay has been approximately fourteen months. The lacuna in my series with the McFarlands is time.

While studying my contemporaries, I began to establish my aesthetic. I learned what Robert Cole’s advice was for individuals doing documentary work. He writes, “The heart of the matter for someone doing documentary work is the pursuit of what James Agee called *human actuality*—rendering and representing for others what has been witnessed, heard, overheard, or sensed” (Cole 87).
CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION OF SELECTED PHOTOGRAPHS

To make a photograph the photographer must be in the presence of the subject.

Peter Galassi (Galassi 7)

A common thread throughout some families in the South is raising tobacco. From the time this country was founded tobacco has been raised for personal consumption as well as a source of income. Government subsidies for tobacco farmers were terminated in 2006. 2007 was the first year farmers earned exactly what monies their crop made at auction. The McFarlands “One Season” came about from a desire to photograph a family-operated tobacco farm in rural Appalachia without the protection of subsidies. In Sneedville, Tennessee I met such a family. The family consists of a husband and wife, Rick and Tracey, one son, Nathan, and two daughters, Tiffany and Hannah. Tiffany was married and lived nearby. They rely on the income their tobacco crop produces. The project started at our first meeting in December 2005 with subsidies in place as they were sorting tobacco leaves to take to auction. From that date forward I have been photographing the McFarlands on their farm near Sneedville, Tennessee.

At first, I sought to make photographs like those a family member would have taken for enjoyment to be viewed at immediate family gatherings i.e., the snapshot. With the influence of Morris and Spear, I made photographs that were important to the family and served my artistic purposes. I photographed the complete process of growing tobacco as the McFarlands practiced.
From planting the seeds to hanging the cut tobacco in the barn, to driving the tobacco to the auction warehouse in Greeneville, Tennessee. In the process, I also photographed their lives.

*Untitled Plate 9* (Fig 13) is Tiffany resting from topping tobacco. A lot of time is spent at this location because of the shade trees with their protection from the sweltering heat. This moment is beautiful. Hazy summer sun illuminates the field in the background, which provides a descriptive backlit element to her wavy blond hair, pulled back on the sides to keep it from her face. She is dressed to stay cool. She sits surrounded by foliage. In the background a truck sits in a growth of weeds.

The portrait was made absent of wind, just the hot sun surrounding the shade of a large tree, a cool place to rest. Where is she looking? She is rendered in an elusive, indeterminate, state.

Spear’s work influenced my photography by intense observation and learning when to photograph and reveal nuances. In Figure 8, Spear photographed Mamie washing her hair in the kitchen while Lee watches. Nothing profound but the image contains an abundance of information. It is the fact of an elderly woman washing her hair in the kitchen while a family member sits and watches. A soapy bowl of water, White Rain shampoo, Quaker Oats, Zesta crackers, and a radio with the electrical cord wrapped around the handle sits atop a newspaper covered table, which adds to the scene’s important detail.
Upon close examination, a cat and egg container sit on top of the refrigerator with a small owl thermometer on the freezer compartment. The main element is when Spear chose to press the camera’s shutter. Mamie is slumped over and has her thick, wet hair all combed forward and with a quick jerk of the comb tries to detangle the tips. Her left hand has a tight grip full of hair, while the comb in the right hand snaps the hair ends sending small, soapy water droplets off to the right. It is the moment that frustration takes over her temperament. We sense her predicament. Spear metaphorically sat the viewer down at the table across from Lee while Mamie washed her hair. Likewise, I placed my viewer across from Tiffany, allowing them to observe her in a quite, isolated moment.

My project revolves around the entire family but especially the person depicted here, Hannah. In *Untitled Plate 14* (Fig 14) she stands, holding a large tobacco leaf, measuring its size. The draped leaf is rendered with ample detail as the stems could be viewed as rib-like bones as she playfully covered her torso. There is a fact that occurs often in this series; rarely are my
subjects depicted alone. This suggests the family is close, their work demands it. The sound of the camera’s shutter interrupted the moment: she went back to work.

While tobacco is present in the photograph *Untitled Plate 16* (Fig 15), it is not the overriding subject. A figure emerging from the dark void of the hung tobacco is deceptive. The viewer cannot distinguish gender. The perspiration drenched, sleeveless tee shirt and hat disguise the person. The flowing hair out from beneath this hat informs the viewer. A figure stands on a sagging support, directly above her. Only worn boots and soiled jeans reveal these lower legs. This juxtaposed enigma of the woman below and someone’s legs above seems perplexing. What is seen? The stance of the figure implies motion…is she running from or to something? It may symbolize a *curtain call* for an actress, as she appears from behind the dark curtain to step out onto center stage for all to see and appreciate. She stands not in front of a curtain, rather a crop of curing tobacco. A stage worker stands silently.

In *Untitled Plate 13* (Figure 16), I came to the realization that I may not need the family in every photograph. Whereas Spear chose to include the Neugent family in all his photographs, I chose to differ and emulate Morris’s work. I made images in which the viewer could metaphorically see the McFarlands. The photograph transports the viewer from atop the barn loft down across the full tobacco wagon, past the empty driver’s seat of the tractor, across the field, out into the vastness of the farm. While no family member is seen,
they are everywhere... in the loaded wagon, at the tractor’s black steering wheel, in the truck to transverse home, and among the trampled down weeds where they walked in and around the barn. Morris’s work, *Drawer with Silverware, Home Place 1947* (Fig17) we see a photograph of a newspaper-lined drawer of eating utensils all arranged by type and softly illuminated.

While Morris’s image is void of a person, we see the owner’s thoughtful placement and categorization of the silverware. Metaphorically, we see this person’s hand organizing the drawer. Newspaper was folded and placed down into the drawer before the utensils. Newspaper instead of shelf paper lining the drawer addresses the unconcern of the person. Again, this was what Stryker was explaining, discussing the story telling ability a well-made photograph contains.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Photography can provide the most precious documents existing, and no one can contest its value from that point of view. If it is practiced by a man of taste, the photograph will have the appearance of art...

Photography should register and give us documents.

Henri Matisse
Camera Work 1908

My vivification of the McFarland family was to depict their lives as they farmed the cash crop tobacco. Going back making photographs on numerous occasions and placing them in the context of my exhibit One Season, I altered time. One can view this body of work and see the various stages of growing tobacco. Within moments, one can observe over sixteen months of time elapse. Only the medium of photography can stop this passage and allow the viewer to look and examine a particular moment. Henri Cartier-Bresson explained this best when he wrote, “To take a photograph means to recognize – simultaneously and within a fraction of a second– both the fact itself and the rigorous organization of visually perceived forms that give it meaning” (Marien 258).

My work here demonstrates an accomplishment of my documentary photography. Balancing the irony of recording a witnessed event and detaching ones self to aestheticize the photographic nature of it enabled the completion of the first stage of the work.
Martha Rosler quoted John Szarkowski eloquently in her critique of documentary photography. Her article *In, Around, and Afterthoughts* appears the anthology, *The Photography Reader*. She writes:

Most of those who were called documentary photographers a generation ago...made their pictures in the service of a social cause....to show what was wrong with the world, and to persuade their fellows to take action and make it right....A new generation of photographers has directed the documentary approach toward more personal ends. Their aim has not been to reform life, but to know it...

(Rosler 270)

Two such past generation photographers Szarkowski is referencing are the notables Jacob Riis and Lewis W. Hine. Riis photographed (documented) New York immigrants living in poverty-stricken conditions while Hine brought attention to factories employing children in laborious and sometimes dangerous conditions. Both brought about social change and made images that exist as truthful documents, they happened before the camera, and visual works of art by the photographer aestheticizing the moment. The new generation exists, where Spear photographed his neighbors and Mark made images of twins at festivals. I include myself in this new group of documentary photographers that make photographs of our interests, documents our world, and accumulate knowledge.
Untitled Plates 3 & 4
Untitled Plates 5 & 6
Untitled Plates 7 & 8
Untitled Plates 13 & 14
Untitled Plates 19 & 20
Untitled Plates 21 & 22
Untitled Plates 23 & 24
Tracey / Rick
Tiffany / Nathan
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