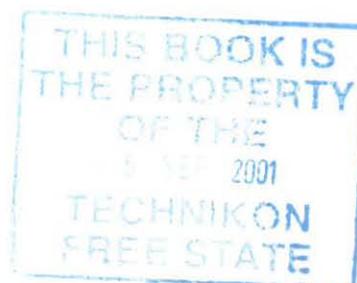


JASON STONIER

**Documentary Photography in a school
setting**

**A mini-thesis for the subject
VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS
III**

**Department Photography
Faculty of Human Sciences
Technikon
Freestate
1999**



I hereby declare that the work contained in this mini-thesis is my own independent work and that all sources consulted or cited have been indicated in full.

Signature: 

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1. INTRODUCTION



1.1 WHAT IS DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY?

This is quite a broad subject to look at. Documentary obviously meaning to document something or somebody. In other words, it deals with the natural history of man. Archaeological, industrial, travel, social behaviour etc. So, then you should be able to call your holiday pictures documentary photographs. Well, it is not that simple. Documentary is basically split into two forms. The one being socially motivated and the other politically motivated.¹

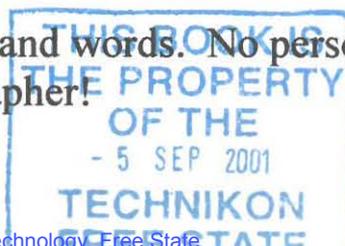
We walk down crowded streets interacting with other human beings every day. So few of us however, take notice of the other nervous souls that share our habitat. No one sees the middle aged men and women who stand in the hot sun minding peoples cars for a few cents change. These are people who were earning full time salaries a few years ago. It may sound inappropriate to mention car watchers but, can you imagine doing their job for a week?

No one takes notice of the haggard bundles of children flowering on sidewalks. No one sees the hunger and pain in their eyes. It is this that documentary photography tries to capture. Not only the pretty family portrait, but the emotion of real life!²

People are blind to the corruption flooding our political sphere. No one notices how the governing bodies that are suppose to be high ranking officials have their cell phones cut off. Why? They cannot pay their bills because, not even the government knows were they have disappeared to. Someone needs to make a statement. This is were the trusty Documentary photographer comes in. Always there to catch the unusual and the unwary who think they could get away with something on the sly.³

Millions of Rands in taxes disappear without trace while aged men and women stand for hours waiting for unsure pensions. The documentary photographer is there to capture the hope and despair on their faces.

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. No person knows this as well as a documentary photographer!



Photographic images have been rearranging their lives for a long time. Photographs have a swifter impact than words. They share the power of images in general, which have always played havoc with the human mind and heart, and they have the added force of evident accuracy.⁴

1.2. WHY IS THE AUTHOR SPECIALISING IN DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY?

“No man is an island unto himself.” You are not meant to go through life as a hermit. The people around you shape your world. Their state of being also influences you. No matter how cold you are towards the women asking for work, she touches your subconscious emotions.

This is why documentary photography has such an attraction to the author. It is not only art and beauty. It is also ‘life’. It is only when you realize the importance of these social images that you can grow emotionally and as a human being.

Documentary images also serve as a school of learning. Somebody has to show the people who take things for granted that life is not all honesty and a bed of roses. The author’s work in this mini-thesis about the education system in our province, shows that the so called, equal rights, equal education of the country is in fact a real problem. How can we have ‘equality’ in society, when the foundation of mankind is offering so much more to some than others. The author intends to make statements and to try and make people see the things that are wrong.

There is, however, more than one side to this picture (as there always is). There has been growth and development in the children and even the adults of this great nation. Schools have opened their doors to ALL. Total amalgamation and acceptance might not always be the case, but, the first bricks are being laid. Many people are trying to sort out their differences by working and cooperating to form a better living environment. But, are we doing enough?

The author is a young man hoping to one day have a family. What type of education system will South Africa have for them. Will he have to find better elsewhere? He will not be able to answer this question, but he does hope to stir up some emotional subconscious somewhere.

The author was inspired by these words of Henry Luce, 1936. “ To see life: To see the world: To eyewitness great events: To see strange things...To see and take pleasure in seeing: To see and be amazed: To see and be instructed: Thus to see, and be shown, is now the will and new expectancy of half mankind.”⁵

1.3. HOW TO APPROACH THE SUBJECT

Firstly, keep your eyes open at all times. You never know when something interesting could happen. Secondly, always have your camera on your person and keep spare batteries. Thirdly, if you see something or someone interesting, do not hesitate to go and ask to can take some pictures. The worst thing they can say is ‘no’. This is followed by a hasty exit of the premises. You can never be wrong in asking before taking a few frames. When photographing police or armed forces always ask, or you could have a spot of bother. The author heard of cameras that mysteriously disappear with film inside. So, do not get into trouble and do not be sarcastic if you do. It always gives you an advantage if you have a press badge or work for a newspaper.

There are many places that you will want to photograph but, will need special permission to do so. For instance, hospitals and government buildings, as well as police stations and the insides of these buildings. So play by the rules and only when necessary may you slightly bend them.⁶

The author was quite shocked one day when having covered a National Teachers Union march, on inquiring if the local rag was interested in his photographs. They said that, only if there was someone killed or if there was violence. That is how people must see the world today, through violent eyes. Well, yes, violence sells magazines and newspapers but, does it entertain us? Of course it

does. Who are our piers, “Ran



minator” blowing their way onto our screens.

For the author though it is enjoyable to take the images and see the people looking at them and saying ‘wow’. That moves him. He gained by seeing this. He wants to give people knowledge that they do not yet have. His work is not at all violent but rather what he calls, different. He really sees a lot of bad things he does not have to make a statement about. Every body knows that a woman is raped every 30 seconds in South Africa, our “Rainbow nation”. They know that in the Gauteng a car is hijacked every 52 seconds and in many cases these attacks cause death.

In our rural areas some children have to start walking to school at 3.30 am. because they live so far away. At many schools classrooms are crowded with about fifty pupils per classroom. Individualized attention is not possible. The new Curriculum 2000 will, in most cases, remain an impossible dream. Teachers are underpaid and overworked. The result? A lowering of education standards. Why then is the government suspending thousands of temporary teachers posts?

On the other side of this coin, parents who can afford it are assuring excellent education in certain ‘privileged’ schools.⁷

1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE SCRIPT

This mini thesis has not only technical hints and photographic jargon. It is also about the work that the Author has done and the people that have influenced him in the way he thinks. He also discusses some well-known photographers who laid the foundations of photography as an art. He also looks at how to market your work in exhibitions and to present them to the public. Where to go to get the best photographs, and how to get them. Who to speak to and when.

He also presents a collection of his own photographs and ideas on the subject of the school situation in South Africa.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION



2.1 LOCATIONS FOR DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

This is sometimes a very difficult thing. Nobody doing something wrong wants their picture taken. Many people living in poverty and in a subsistence level however, love cameras and people taking pictures of them in their world of cold nights and drunken oblivion.

In the city many news breaking events take place under most of our noses. The photographer should always take note of the building that he is in and if he is allowed to have a camera. For instance, government buildings are not allowed to be photographed on the inside. Also hospitals and police stations are not to be photographed at all.

Also keep in mind that a provincial newspaper would probably not be interested in national news. They want events closer to home. You do not have to look all that far.⁸

But still, this should not hamper the documentary photographer. He should have friends in the right places. This is essential as a lot happens behind closed doors. So make as many friends as you can. It will definitely help to know many people in many different fields and levels of life.

For the author's subject he had to get permission from all the school principals before photographing any school buildings or pupils. Finding schools was however not difficult. He tried to vary the different types of schools he photographed. There are private schools, public schools, low-budget schools, high-budget schools etc.⁹

2.2 CONTACTS

These vary with the amount of people you know. Any one friend is a potential contact. This person's cousin could work in "Pick 'n Pay", That cousin might know someone that works in an abattoir. He might know someone else, etc. Get out there and speak to people about all kinds of subjects. Find out what they think about things that you want to cover. They soon will open doors that you never knew existed.

Go and see your local police station. The author does not promise that they will help you but it is always worth a try. Now a few police officers. Especially, in a sticky situation! Every town has a police media liaison section. These people are not very useful. You need photographs, not news coverage or articles. So, when you hear the sirens and see flashing lights you have to jump in your car and chase after them.

For the author's project it was vital that he either knew somebody who could assist him or made 'friends' very quickly. Not everybody wants their picture taken!

Contacts come with time. They are people you meet on assignments and with whom you cultivate a working friendship.¹⁰

2.3 SCOOPS

The Oxford dictionary defines scoop as “large profit made quickly or in anticipation of competitors; Exclusive piece of news for a newspaper.”

Hard news photographers make it their business to be where news is going to happen, even if it means going into Palestine or Beirut and risking a bullet. Very occasionally an amateur may capture something – such as the film of J. F Kennedy's assassination. Most of the time however, world figures are surrounded by a large amount of pressmen. You have almost no chance of taking something unpredictable.¹¹

So to get the scoop you need to be at the right place at the right time. Other wise, you will only have old news and nobody reads old news because they have already seen it on the TV. Some of the more old school documentary photographers are not into reportage. Scoops are not as important to them. We hunt more social game to make statements about every day people that live around us. It is not important to be there at a certain time because what we are looking for happens everyday.¹²

Another aspect to consider is whether documentary photography can be seen as art or not. The author definitely thinks that photography is an art. Any image that creates an emotion of some sort, he feels is art. Be it Leonardo Da Vinci's art works or Salvador Dalli's sculpture in motion. Also consider Doratheia Lange's photographic work on the woman and mothers in the depression. The author 'feels' them all and that is art.

In the early stages of its development photography did not have to work too hard because only the reproduction of photogrpahy was considered an art. After a while paintings were made from photographs. It started becoming something which was merely copied. Later photographers started using art to convey emotion and feeling.

“A camera is for us what the brush is to the painter, or the pen to the poet....” (Frantisek Drtikol)¹³

3 CHOICE OF FILM



Black and white photography is in a healthy state. There are probably more first-class photographers working in black and white than have ever been. In the 1950's and 1960's, everyone was familiar with black and white. It was believed that real photographers only used black and white. In the early 1970's came the great colour explosion. Despite this however, the use of black and white kept rising. Ilford was the first major company to realise this and continued research and development in black and white. Black and white is used for mainly two reasons. Firstly, for the unique effects obtained only in monochrome and secondly, for commercial reasons. Black and white can capture a greater range of tones than colour, with a rich, subtle gradation in those tones. A fine monochrome has a sensuous quality which cannot be duplicated in colour. A monochrome also has more scope for the artist to impress his or her personality on the picture. The picture is more distanced from reality and we can see the subject as the photographer realized it.¹⁴

Monochrome is also cheaper to reproduce than colour. It is also easier to transmit monochrome images electronically. Commercially, black and white photographs give a bigger impact. That is why so many advertisements are done in black and white.

The author prefers to use black and white images. They hold a special feel for him. Maybe it is the tones they give or the grain. He finds developing sometimes tedious and even irritating, but when you get it right it's worth all the effort in the world. The Ilford film that he uses can be easily up rated and push processed with almost no trouble at all.¹⁵

3.2 COLOUR FILM

Today most documentary photographers use colour every now and then for that really, in your face, coverage. Things that would not make as much of an impression as it would on black and white film. Last year a photographer won the Fugji pro-photo press award for his photo of a gangster being set alight by members of Pagad. This was a truly amazing colour image. The author uses a small amount of colour.

Especially for photographing p
well. Colour has it's set backs s
light. But, it is very effective with flash.¹⁶



ids that it really works
casts from different

THIS BOOK IS
THE PROPERTY
OF THE
- 5 SEP 2001
TECHNIKON
FREE STATE

4 EQUIPMENT

4.1 Introduction.

If one looks at the black and white images of early travel and documentary photographers, you would notice the different formats of the time. Ansel Adams for instance worked mostly in a large format (4"x5"). Jacob Riss worked with the old box camera taking pictures of workers in the 1800's, once again, working in no less than 6"x 7" format. Then photography developed drastically. Film became smaller and easier to develop. More people got involved and photography became trend in many places. In my opinion the greatest change happened when photojournalism appeared in the early 1900's. Over the decades photojournalists have shocked and stunned us with images of war and violence, of innocent slaughter and bloodshed.¹⁷

Today most photojournalists use 35mm format cameras. The last thing you need when in a rioting crowd of people is to be weighed down by a bulky camera and tripod. Quick and easy the 35mm developed in minutes and ready for the presses.

Depending on the assignment, one would not usually need a tripod, but for those who do low light documentary you might well need one for the clearest results. The single lens reflex camera is one of the widest selling cameras today. Quick and quiet, their shutters fire constantly all over the world capturing all kinds of images. In the documentary that the author did, he needed a tripod or a unipod in some cases, like inside the classroom. Mostly he hand held most of his work because it was shot in strong light outdoors.¹⁸

4.2 Cameras

Yes, the author certainly also has a 35mm SLR and it works well for him. Most of his work is in that format. He has always wanted to try 120mm format but has not yet had the opportunity. There are a few reasons for not yet trying. People might be uncomfortable with such a big camera. Documentary is all about the naturalness of people. This would be a bit tricky to do in a larger format than 35mm.¹⁹

Some press companies have their photographers use digital cameras. This is obviously the new wave in imaging. Linked up to your laptop

computer it can transmit image in a matter of minutes the front page of the newspaper can be transmitted from Gahanna to New York. They can be ready for the presses in minutes. All this is done by computers. However, the quality lacks in printing digital work because the printers of today cost so much and they still do not have the same quality as a photo. Many professionals use medium or large format cameras. 120mm roll film is still very popular and gives much better quality than a 35mm negative.

The cameras are big and sometimes too tedious to use. So decide on whether you want quality or fast mediocre quality 35mm. In this script the photographs are all shot on 35mm Nikon cameras. The author finds it suitable to remain under 8x10 inch size prints.²⁰

4.3 Tripods

This piece of equipment is basically part of every photographer's kit. You sometimes need it or you do not. Sometimes the lighting is just too low and camera shake can easily blur the shot you want. There are many different makes and models of tripod. The author's choice is a three kilogram Manfrotto shifting head linked to a Manfrotto tripod able to hold eight kilograms. He finds that Manfrotto tripods are very sturdy and robust. The last thing you want from a tripod is for it to fall over with your brand new camera on it. Although it may sound trivial, he insists that the legs on the Manfrotto extend with a screw type clamp. These types are more durable than the modern clip or snap type clamps. He finds that in most low light situations a tripod is almost invaluable to any photographer. This gives the quality that you really need, plus the sharpness is more guaranteed than a hand held shot. For the classroom shots the author found his tripod very inhibiting, so he used a unipod. The concept of a unipod is not as simple as it sounds. You still get camera shake with it.²¹

4.4 Flash

In the author's experience with flash, he has mainly used popup flash (on camera flash). This gave the necessary high lights, to fill in dark shadows in eyes when harsh lighting was apparent. Flash can bring out color when the picture is otherwise dull. The use of a polarizing

filter is necessary to saturate the tone. Sometimes direct flash can cause loss of detail in darker areas, bouncing it off a nearby wall can create a nice diffused light. Flash does not help with black and white photography. It tends to easily go flat or Grey.²²

Some of the work the author has included has flash in it but he uses a lot of black and white images.

4.5 Motor drives

Motor drive systems are also used. This enables the photographer to fire his shutter like an automatic gun, the newer model 35mm cameras can fire anything up to 5 frames a second. For the author's sport documentary, like the netball shots he used a Nikon with a motor drive function which helped him get a variety of shots including the ones he wanted. Motor drives are however, quite expensive to buy separately.²³

4.6 Film

Here it is also purely by choice that the author photographs in black and white. This film he feels conveys a melancholy mood. Many of the great photojournalists photograph a lot of colour and it definitely works but for him, he would rather photograph in black and white to convey a subtler mood.

The pictures that are in colour are extremely vivid and some are quite sickening. It is quite obvious that they are used for pure sensationalism. Films come in most speeds (ISO). The author's choice is 125 – 1600 black and white films. The author uses high speed Ilford HP5 400 ISO. The grain from continuous agitation is sometimes superb. For more portrait type images the author uses Ilford FP4 125 ISO. This gives a very fine feel and captures detail very well. Be careful of camera shake when photographing in low light. The author finds that the films uprate and push process very easily. He rates a 125 ISO film at 400 ISO on his camera. The camera then exposes according to a 400 ISO film, thus, getting more detail. The trick is, when developing, to use stock or change the developing time that would have been used for 400 ISO film. There is



nothing worse than hassling with pictures. For this reason the author uses the Ilford HP5 400 film at the time. The reason he works in black and white as well, is that the print often makes you want to look at it more and more. You discover something new or some new detail every time you look. Colour has a more immediate effect. It is also quite emotive. Black and white has a different appeal to it, and in the long run, is more effective.²⁴

4.7 Lenses

There are so many lenses on the market for your 35mm camera that it seems impossible to choose the right one. There are lenses for sport photography through to astrophotography. So which one do you get?

As a documentary photographer, the author uses a 80mm- 200mm Nikkor lens rated at F 5.6. This is a good lens, enabling you to get close ups without actually having to get in close to the subject. Be careful of low light. The auto focus on that type of Nikon lens is really not that good and you may have to change to manual focus during your assignment. Many journalists carry wide angle lenses with them, but, most of the work is done by a lens the same focal length as the authors. Robert Cappa said, "If your pictures aren't good enough, then you aren't close enough." It is a lot easier to get in the action with a zoom lens, right up close filling the frame. In the classroom photographs, in the mini-thesis, the author resorted to his camera's standard 35mm-75mm lens. This was close enough to capture the atmosphere in the photographs.²⁵

5 METHODS OF PERSUASION

5.1 The decisive (critical) moment

In many pictures the position of each element in the frame is critical to the success or failure of the composition. However when elements are continuously changing, the most effective may be the critical moment you decide to release the shutter.

Look at sport photography. What would a picture of James Small be if he were not diving over the line at that precise moment.

The angle of the image may also be a benefit or a disadvantage to the picture. For instance when photographing a politician, one would be able to make him look good or bad depending on the angle you photograph from. Low angles can be used to show power or tyranny and high angles can show submissive tendencies.

Sometimes a scene may only need one vital ingredient to complete the picture. You will need to combine patience with constant alertness until the missing element appears.²⁶



5 Marketing yourself and your images

A few fine art photographers seek to enhance the value of their work by announcing limited editions, after which the negative is destroyed. After a while however, the quality begins to deteriorate. If you are so good that the quality of your printing is clear, the edition will be self limiting.

Many photographers dream of an exhibition. But what is an exhibition? An ego trip? A way of trying to get future work? A way of promoting your favourite cause? Well, yes to all three. But above all, it is an artistic statement. What you as photographer have to do is decide what attracts people to the photographs. The people who come to your exhibition may be just sheltering from a rainstorm. People are attracted by subjects that they are interested in. It is the photographers job to provide originality, excitement and enjoyment.

The easiest way to get an exhibition is to simply ask. Do not, however, set your sights too high. Find a location which will attract the type of audience you are aiming at. Build up a proper portfolio to sell your services and sell your labour at a fair rate .²⁷



6 Documentary Photographers who have influenced the Author



The three photographers the author has chosen all have one thing in common.

They all three concentrated on haggard living conditions of people, especially children. If we consider the times wherein these photographers lived and worked, we can also study the progress which has been made in photography over the last century. Jacob Riis lived and worked during the late 1800's. Lewis Hine lived and worked around the first world war. Dorothea Lange lived and worked around the second world war. Each of these photographers made a difference in their own way.

6.1 JACOB RIIS

Jacob Riis first tried as a police reporter in New York to expose the misery of the under privileged living in the crime invested slums of the lower East-side. Riis found however that people were more affected by what they could see on a photograph than the written word. He decided to take to the streets at night and photographed by flashlight. Everyone was frightened by the ghostly night photographers who appeared and vanished just as quickly.

In 1880 reproduction techniques were not yet good enough to be printed in newspapers. In 1890 Riis published his famous book "how the other half lives." Seventeen of the illustrations were halftones. They were very poor quality, lacking detail and sharpness. Some of the photos were substituted by drawings made from them. Because of the poor quality, Riis' photos were not recognized until 1947. Alexander Alland made enlargements from the original glass negatives. Riis was now only noted as a photographer of importance.²⁸

Riis was one of the first American photographers to use 'Blitzlichtpulver' - flashlight powder. It was invented in Germany in 1887 by Adolf Miethe and Johannes Gaedicke. Piffard had modified the German formula. Lye sprinkled guncotton with twice



its weight of magnesium powder tray and ignited the mixture. Because it burned in was an improvement over the magnesium flare. The blinding flash reveals with pitiless detail the sordid interiors. It also shows good detail on the faces of those photographed.

The photographs are honest to the last detail. They are direct, penetrating and as raw as the sordid scenes they represent. He had to put up with many unwilling models who often tried to remove him by force. His biggest problem with children was that they always wanted to 'pose' as soon as a camera was spotted. It was hard to capture them in a natural state.

Riis was always sympathetic to the people he was photographing. He aimed not only to inform us with his photos, but to move us. They are at once interpretations and records. Although they are no longer topical, they contain qualities that will last as long as man is concerned with his brother.²⁹

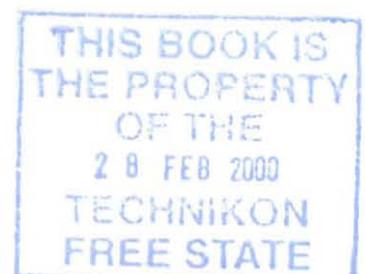


Fig. 1

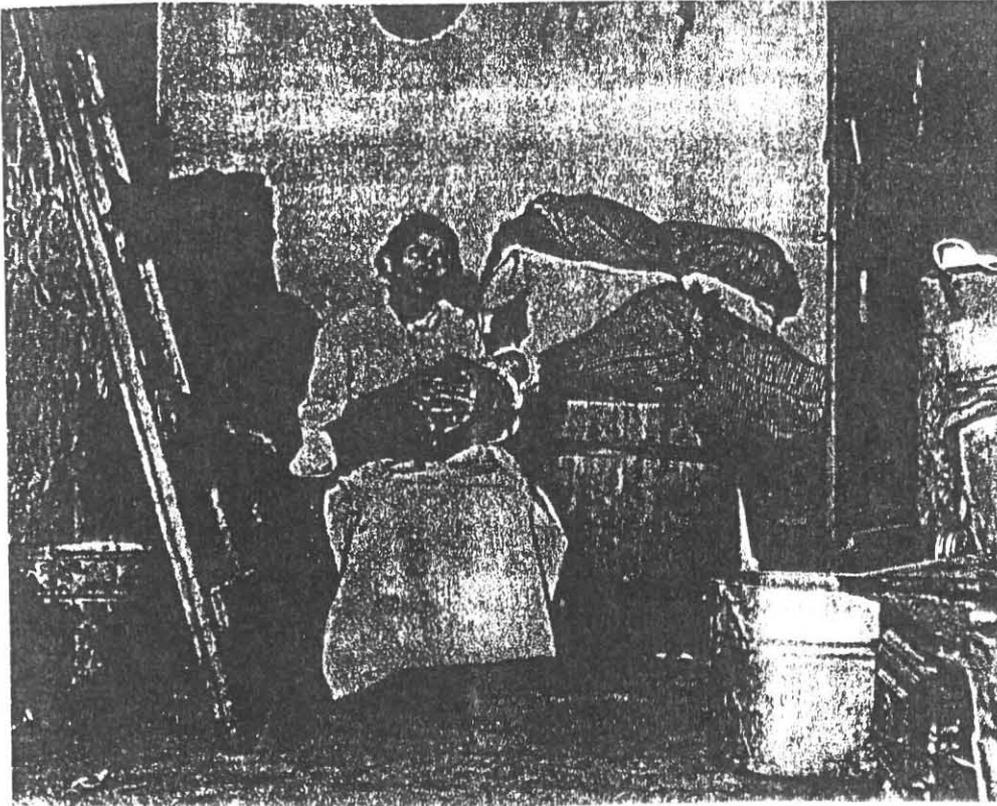
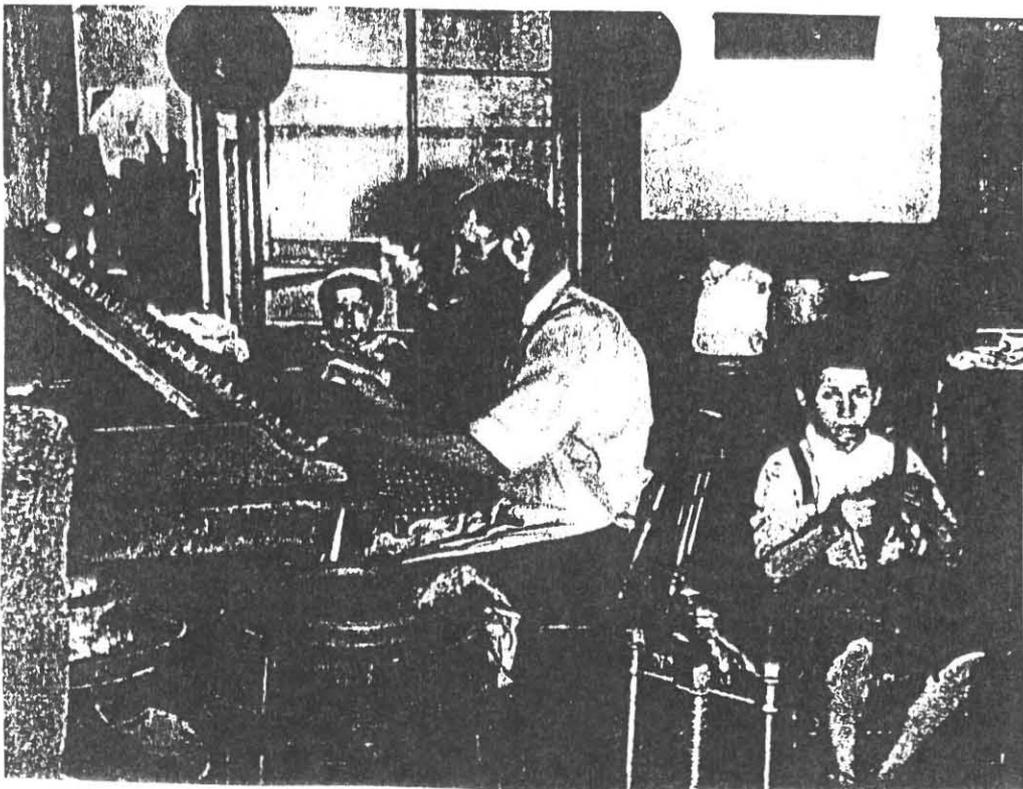


Fig. 2



6.2 LEWIS HINE



There are quite a few reasons why the author chose Lewis Hine as a photographer who inspired him. As a teacher he had dealt extensively with children and showed an obvious talent for getting along with them. He knew how to get the most from every situation regarding children. Hine had a very definite objective in making his photographs. They were to confront the public with examples of nice, lively children bravely performing their difficult work. Hine especially concentrated on children forced to work in factories, glass works, cotton mills, mines and other industrial plants.

Hine was used by the National Child Labour Council to help in the fight against child labour between 1908 and 1918. The history of photography had witnessed only a very few cases of such close agreement between client and photographer. For the first time the importance of photography to help combat social problems was realized.³⁰

Not only did Hine possess exceptional knowledge and skill in photography, but he was also familiar with the working world. Hine also developed methods to get a picture in poor light with the aid of flash powder.

Hine wanted to use his photos to change public opinion. To do this however, his photos had to be beyond suspicion of falsification. He estimated the childrens ages by their size. For this purpose he used the buttons on his jacket He knew exactly how high each one was. The studies by Hine and the NCLC were obviously not welcomed by industries in that time. Cheap labour would not be sacrificed.

Hine had a touch of actor in him and would use this quality to gain access to places where children worked. He talked to the children and found out as much as possible about conditions they were living and working in. When Hine was forbidden to enter he would disguise himself as an insurance agent or bible seller. He sometimes even claimed to be an industrial photographer. If no attempt to enter the premises worked, he would photograph the children walking home or to the plant. In 1916 and 1917, he traveled more than 50 000 miles to find suitable photos.



Hine loved his work because he is making a difference. He's child labour photos had set s to work to see if such things could be possible. Many people accused him of forgery but, many authorities decided to find out for themselves what conditions were like. The NCLC also recognized Hine's contribution. Owen Lovejoy, General Secretary of the NCLC wrote:
“ The work that you did under my direction was more responsible than any or all other efforts to bring the facts or conditions of child labour employment to public attention...”³¹

Fig. 3

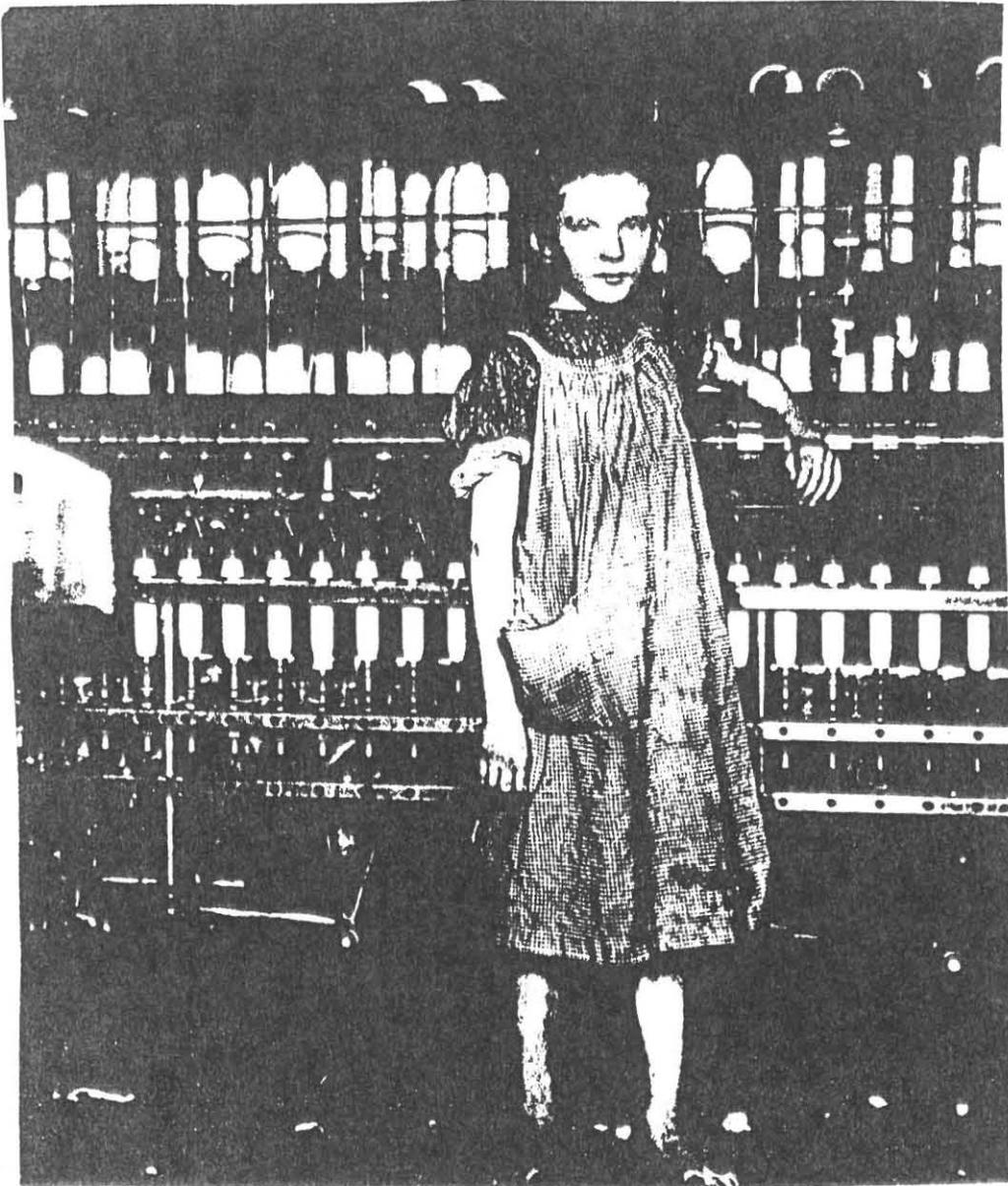


Fig. 4



6.3 DOROTHEA LANGE



The next photographer the author will be looking at is a woman who helped lay the foundation for documentary photography. Much of her work was done on the migrant workers in the 1930's. She was responsible for creating some of the most canonical images of the Depression. The photographs the author will be discussing are part of these.

Even a secular culture finds something sacred in the bond between mother and child. It is so basic to all human experience and charged with potential for tenderness and compassion. No doubt, much of the power of this photograph lies in its echoes of the Madonna and child. The figures are compressed within the frame, the children literally dependant on their mother. Two of them turn their faces away, emphasizing the intense concentration of the woman's expression.³²

Lange had not wanted to stop for these pictures. She was speeding home from photographing migrant workers when she saw a sign that said "Pea-pickers Camp". She asked enough questions to find out that the pea crop had frozen and everyone was out of work..

Lange took six exposures, moving closer each time. She had carefully calculated these pictures. The mother who was thirty-two had seven children. Four of them were there at the moment. She took one picture of the mother and baby alone and two middle-distance shots of the mother and one child facing us. These were good pictures but, the landscape was a bit distracting. Only when Lange moved in tight and put both children into the picture with their heads turned away, did all the elements work together. It created a symbolic image of family and poverty.

As soon as she had printed the pictures, she took them to an editor. He alerted the United press and they contacted the relief authorities. Immediately food was dispatched to the camp.

Migrant mother rapidly became a classic and was exhibited at the Museum of art in 1941. The image was reproduced so many times that Lange complained about it. She did not want to be known as a one- picture photographer. The subject, never identified by Lange,

was named Florence Thompson.
great expectation that they migh



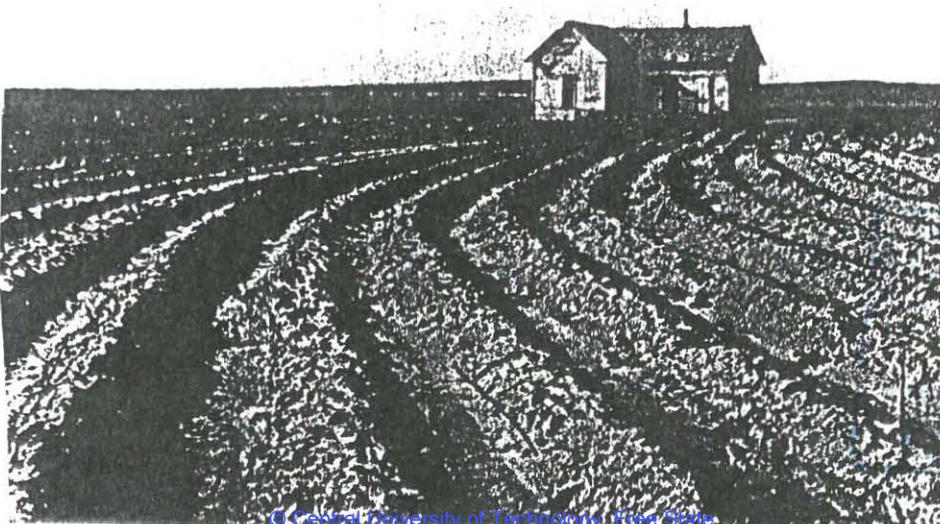
carried with them the
to action.

The emotional force of this monumental composition can be recognized immediately. It is a picture of 'farm security'. It forces you to wonder about what this woman was thinking. She has all the suffering of mankind in her but, all the perseverance too. A restraint and a strange courage. You can see anything you want to in her. She is immortal.³³

Fig. 5



Fig. 6



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7 Personal notes on Documentary Photography in Bloemfontein and surrounding areas.

The city of Bloemfontein is an amazing pool of happenings for the documentary photographer. Every weekend there is something new and exciting that happens. This is, for example, the first city to send a sexual offender to jail with a life sentence for rape in the new South Africa.

This is not what the author is after in this script. In Bloemfontein people are very individualistic and you have to get permission to photograph certain things. People are strange and untrusting creatures. This photographer noticed how, at certain places like the Civic Center, if you showed too much interest, they think you want to bomb it, slander it or give it bad publicity. If you need to photograph a place such as this, make sure that you go there with lots of film, so you will not have to do it again. Places such as Army Bases are almost impossible to photograph. It is very hard to get permission and it helps to have a contact in the right place.

The schools the author visited did not give him too much trouble and allowed him do his work. There were schools at which the author needed permission from the parents or the school controlling body. This took time but eventually paid off. Then there were schools that did not want anything to do with the author taking pictures in their classes because of poor conditions.

The author was shocked to read in the “Volksblad” that all the Free States textbooks are late and only due in May of 2000. How are our children supposed to learn without books? Is this the education we want for our children?

The author visited five schools in rural areas and five schools in town. The rural schools were laid back and quite friendly. He was shocked to see the working conditions for the children as well as the

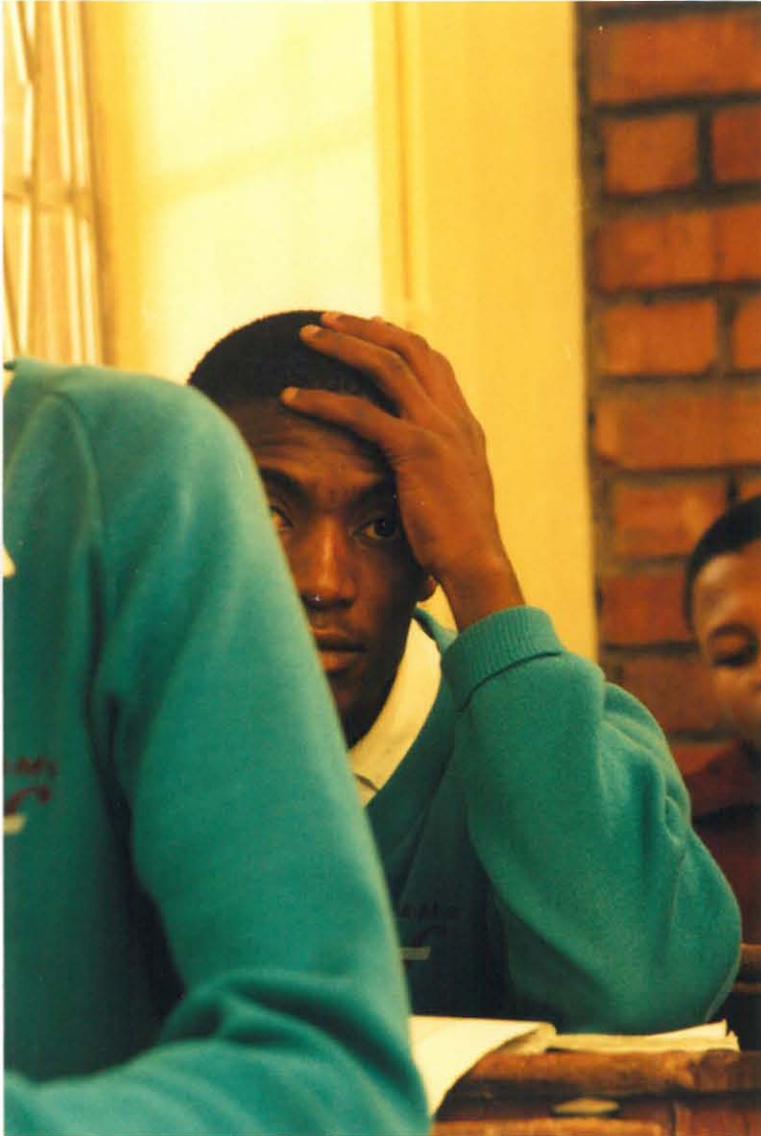


teachers. Some places do not have windows to keep out the cold. C and some do not have pupils where the windows were. Target practice one pupil explained. So it is not one sided.

Many children, especially boys, disrespect black female teachers. It is said in the traditional black culture that a woman's place is at home. How can one combat this tribal aspect? 'Africa time' is also a problem. Lack of punctuality at schools leads to discipline problems.

Teaching methods and textbooks are also very 'European'. Many children find it hard to relate to. It is only now with implementation of the new curriculum that this problem is being addressed.

Fig. 7



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Figure 7. 'In class'

Film: Fuji Superia ISO400 color print film.

Place: On location in Bloemfontien.

Shutter speed: 125th of a second.

Aperture: f 4,5

4845



Fig. 8

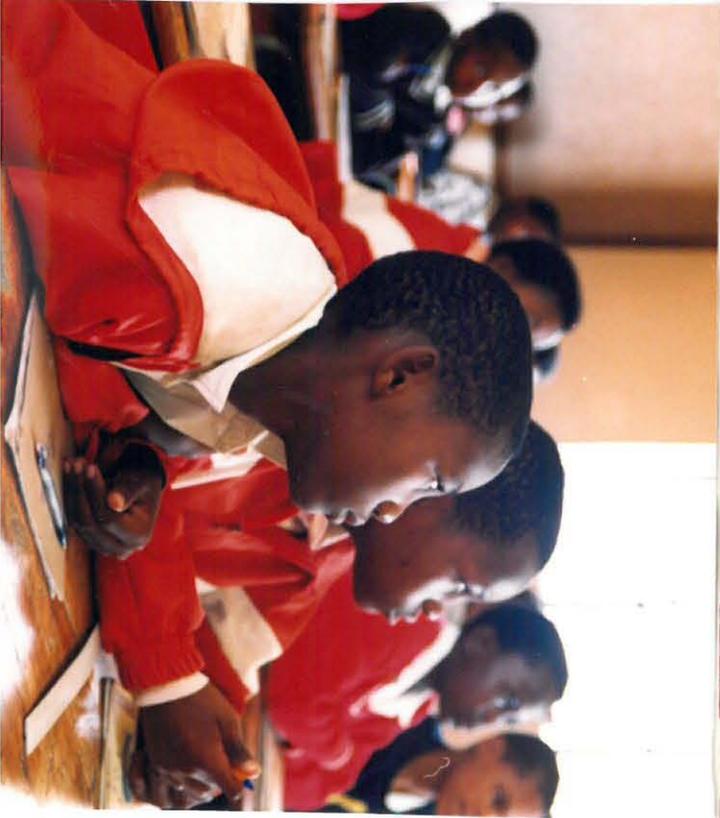


Figure 8. 'Four picture story'

Film: Konica Centuria ISO400 color print film.

Place: On location in Bloemfontien.

Shutter speed: 30th -125th of a second.

Aperture: f 4,5 - 5,6

Fig. 9



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Figure 9. 'Crowded classroom'

Film: Ilford HP5 ISO400 black and white print film.

Place: On location in Bloemfontien.

Shutter speed: 60th of a second.

Aperture: f 5,6

Fig. 10

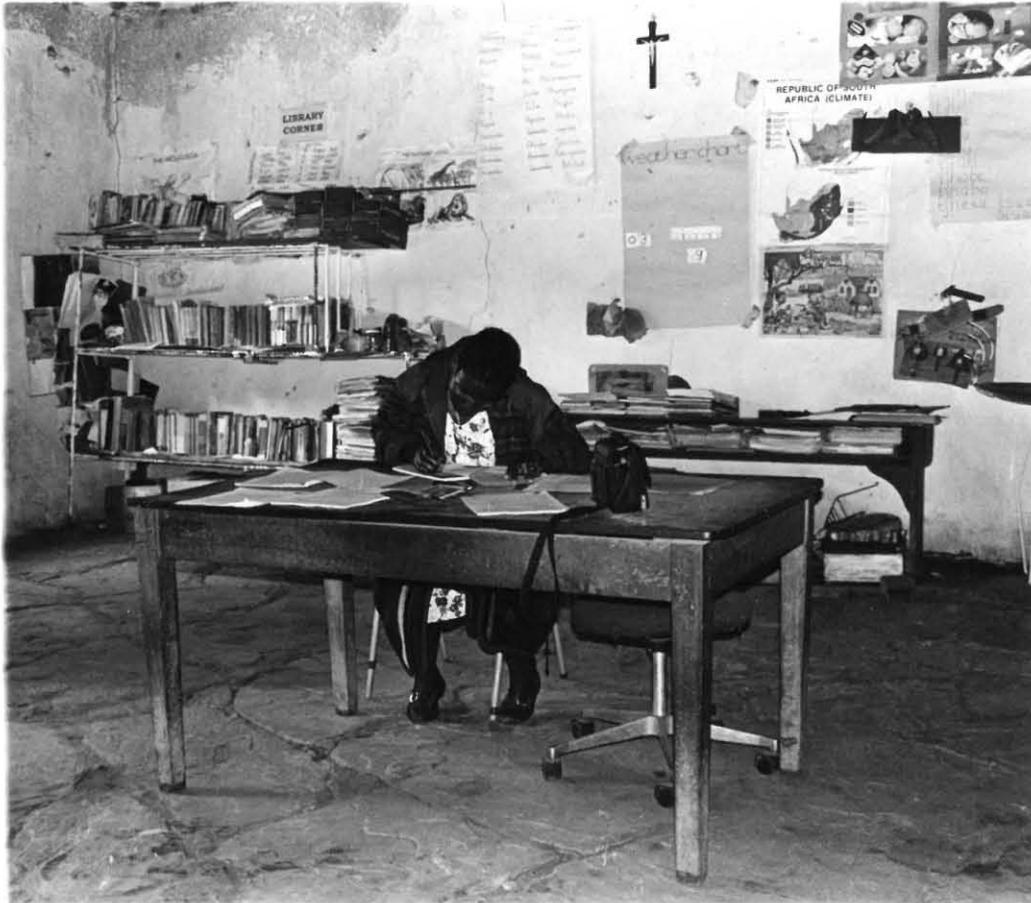


Figure 10. 'Alone at last'

Film: Ilford HP5 ISO400 black and white print film
rated to ISO800.

Place: On location outside Bloemfontein.

Shutter speed: 60th of a second.

Aperture: f 4,5

Fig. 11

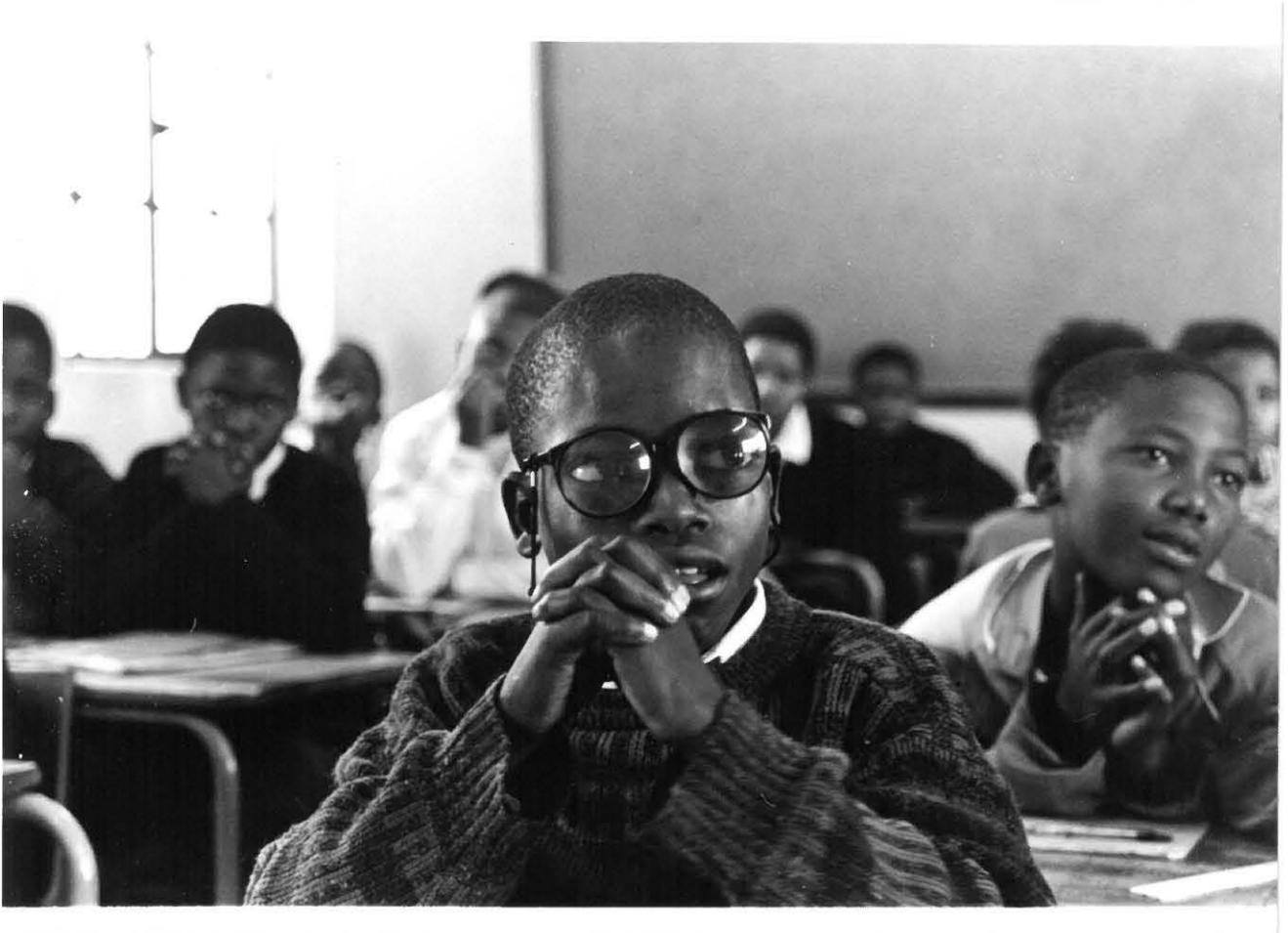


Figure 11. 'Comprehension'

Film: Ilford HP5 ISO400 black and white print film
rated to ISO800.

Place: On location in Bloemfontein.

Shutter speed: 125th of a second.

Aperture: f 5,6

Fig. 12



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Figure 12. 'Break time'

Film: Ilford HP5 ISO400 black and white print film.

Place: On location in Bloemfontein.

Shutter speed: 500th of a second.

Aperture: f 22

The photograph is a highly efficient means of cultural communication. It has the advantages of credibility, easy mass distribution and instant convertibility into a symbol. Since visual imagery is more readily abstracted than sensations of smell, sound or taste the mind is accustomed to using images as ideas. People cherish photographs, and the culture relies every more heavily on them, in part because they are so readily converted.

Civilization uses visual symbols, such as the cross and the Swastika to communicate a complex group of ideas. As international trade and vast movements of people have complicated the problems of spoken communication, visual signs have taken over. There are signs everywhere; no-smoking, ladies or men's room, road signs etc. Photographs are not as simple but they can cross language barriers just as easily. With their enormous capacity to contain, compress and symbolize events or ideologies, photographs become the signs and signposts of modern society.³⁴

In this same way the author is trying to point out to you that the South African education system is not really all that it seems. People rarely see past dropping their kids off at school. Maybe it is the sometimes vast age barrier amongst the children in the same class. Is the new curriculum 2005 the system that will aid our teachers in doing their jobs more efficiently?

The author's opinion is a definite no. He thinks that the children and the country is not ready for curriculum 2005. This system is used by first world countries with stable economies. Our country is not that stable yet and this could very well hamper the learning process and not in fact aid it. Older children definitely think that they are superior to the others because they are older. This causes tension in the class room.

The problem of inefficiency lies with the administrative department. This inefficiency must be resolved before a new education system is introduced. Why are temporary teachers being laid off? We need people to teach. So many questions, so few answers.

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