

Earl Warren Oral History Project
California Social Scientist
Volume I: Education, Field Research, and Family

Paul Schuster Taylor

Interviews Conducted by Suzanne B. Riess in 1970

http://www.oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=ft5q2nb29x&brand=oac4&doc.view=entire_text

— 238a —

DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

Dorothea Lange

Documentary photography records the social scene of our time. It mirrors the present and documents for the future. Its focus is man in his relation to mankind. It records his customs at work, at war, at play, or his round of activities through twenty-four hours of the day, the cycle of the seasons, or the span of a life. It portrays his institutions — family, church, government, political organizations, social clubs, labor unions. It shows not merely their facades, but seeks to reveal the manner in which they function, absorb the life, hold the loyalty, and influence the behavior of human beings. It is concerned with methods of work and the dependence of workmen on each other and on their employers. It is pre-eminently suited to build a record of change. Advancing technology raises standards of living, creates unemployment, changes the face of cities and of the agricultural landscape. The evidence of these trends — the simultaneous existence of past, present, and portent of the future — is conspicuous in old and new forms, old and new customs, on every hand. Documentary photography stands on its own merits and has validity by itself. A single photographic print may be "news," a "portrait," "art," or "documentary" — any of these, all of them, or none. Among the tools of social science — graphs, statistics, maps, and text — documentation by photograph now is assuming place. Documentary photography invites and needs participation by amateurs as well as by professionals. Only through the interested work of amateurs who choose themes and follow them can documentation by the camera of our age and our complex society be intimate, pervasive, and adequate.

— 240 —

Taylor: Well, Dorothea was universal, you see. She wasn't just a photographer, she was a human being. She was an artist. She was a photographer and her ear was as good as her eye. Her whole being was in her work and her relations with me, and her relations with her family. She lived so intensely. All the time.