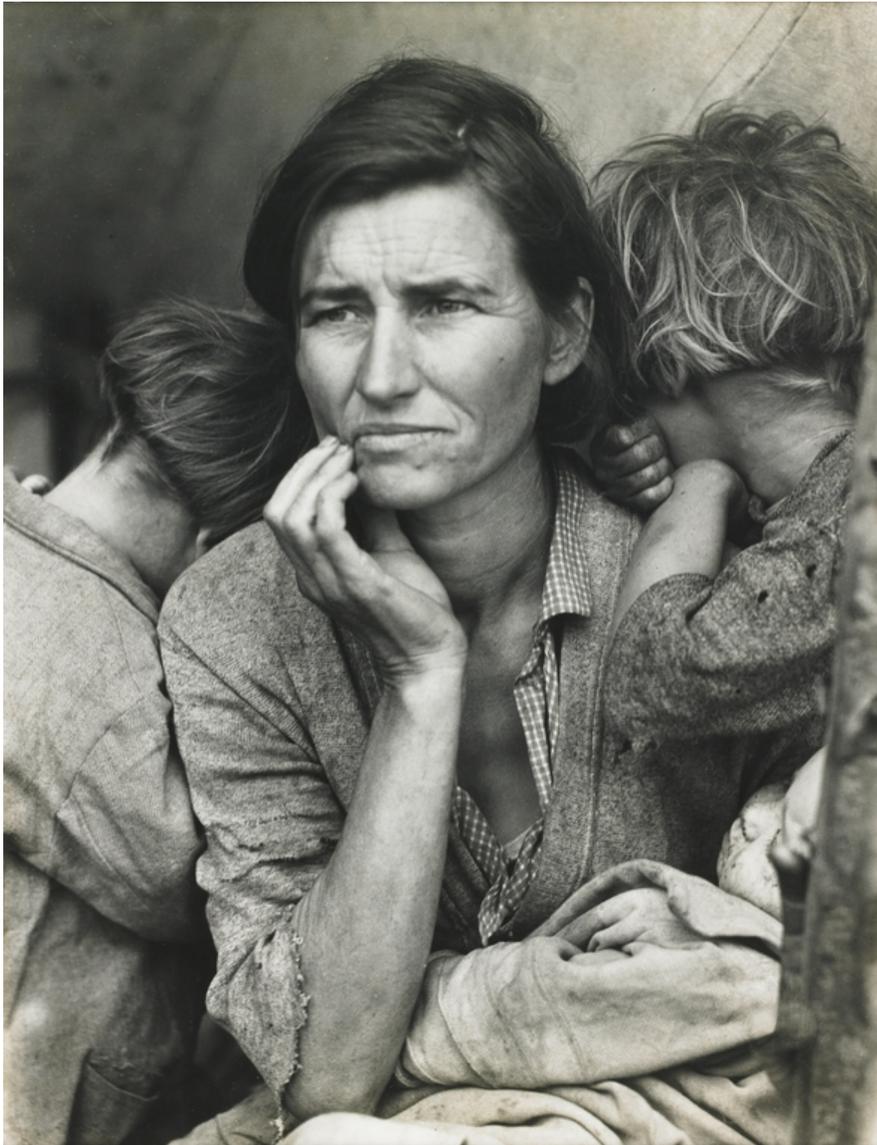


Learning to Look: A Exsted

Amber Exsted, Arts 1229, Fall 2009

Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California



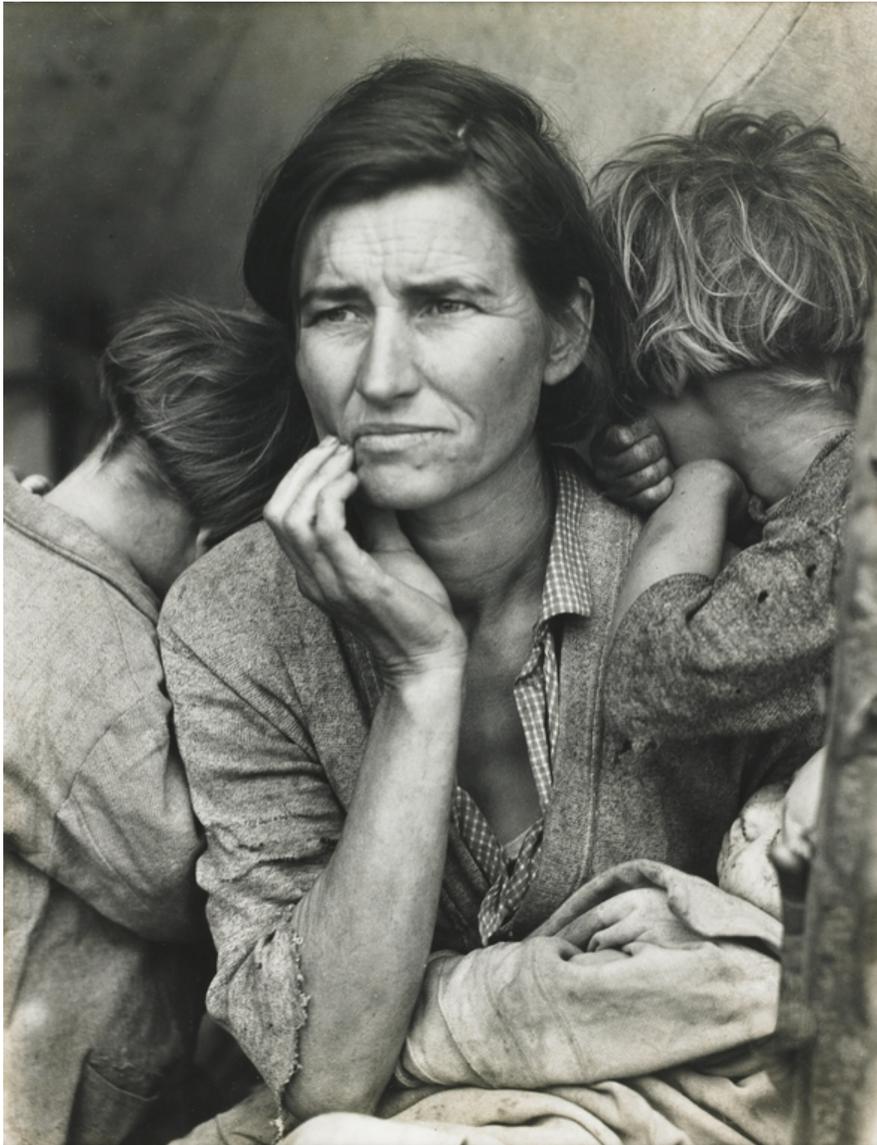
To be honest, I chose this slide because I have seen it before. I remember talking about and looking at it in my history class. I knew it was a photograph taken during the depression, and I feel much sympathy towards the people who suffered through such a difficult point in time. There was not much information given on the site that described the slide, therefore, the information did not change my opinion of it.

I find this slide very emotional- another reason why I chose it. When I look at the slide, I see a mother desperately trying to care for her children. She is dirty, worn out, and just plain exhausted. She wears tattered clothing, and her children bury their faces behind her for protection. It just displays how hard life was back during the depression, and how our lives today could be worse. Her lean face signifies she is food deprived, most likely due to the fact that she is providing for her children, rather than herself.

Three questions I have about this work of art are:

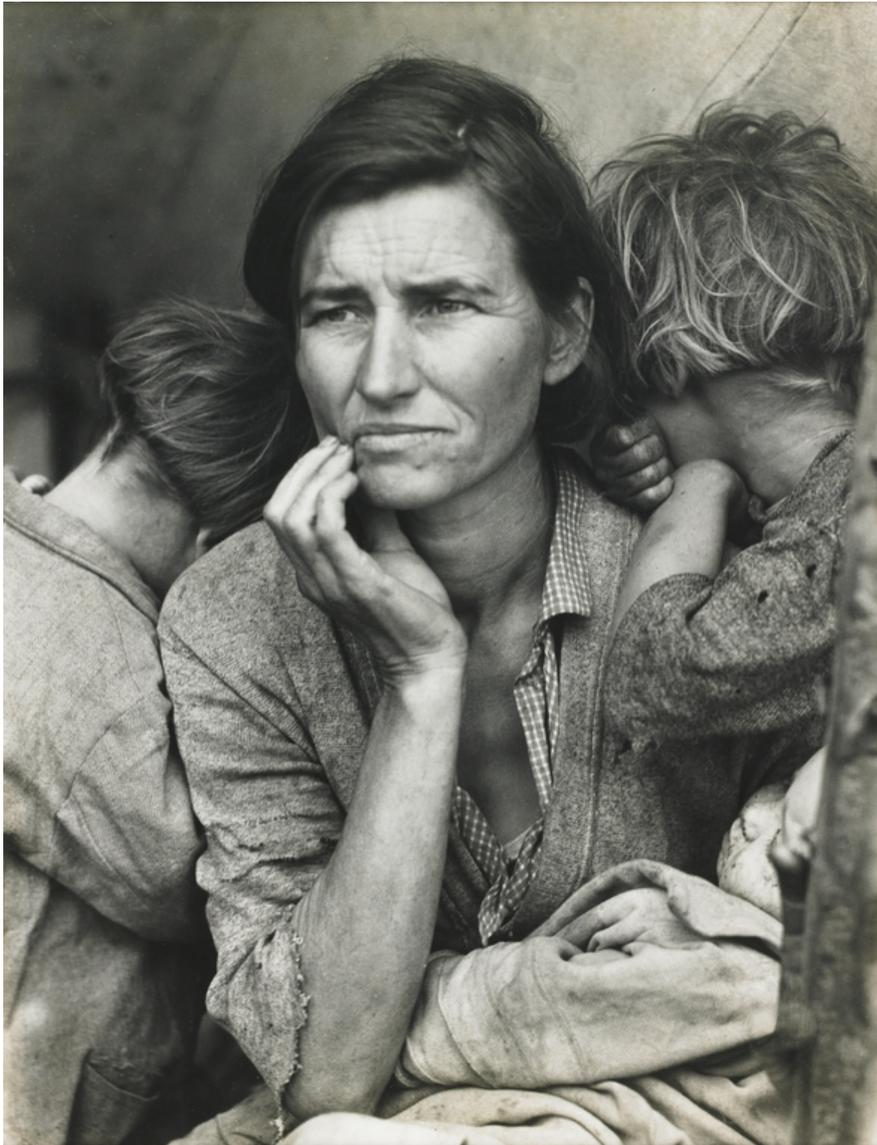
1. What was the mother thinking so strongly about?
2. Where was her husband?
3. What was the photographer feeling when taking the picture?

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In this slide, I see a woman and three children, the basics of the photograph. But, I also see a tree, a dirty blanket, some kind of tarp or shelter behind, dirty children, dirty clothing, structures of her face, such as eyes, nose, mouth, eyebrows, eyelashes, imperfections of her chin, as well as her hair, her hair line, what seems to be a mole on her cheek, her arm, and elbow, fingers and fingernails, a pocket on the jacket of the child on the left, creases in the forehead of the woman, her ears and one ear of the child on the left, one hand and an arm of the child on the right, and there seems to be some kind of object or structure on the left behind the child, but it is so distorted, I am unable to make it out. In the clothing, I see some kind of white or light colored undershirt, covered with a plaid shirt, covered with a jacket with horizontal lines in it. The child on the right has a shirt that seems to fit snugly, while the child on the right has a jacket that seems to fit quite loosely. I also see the third child in the mother's arms, also dirty and worn down.

Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California



Sorrow, despair, hunger and pain- these are the emotions and feelings that are displayed in this photograph. A woman trying to support her three children on her own, during a devastating time in history.

Torn, dirty and tattered clothes the mother wears signifies a difficult struggle of some sort. She is obviously struggling for food, not only for herself, but for her starving children as well. She ponders her life, lifestyle and perhaps where her husband could be. (Maybe she is widowed? The photograph does not really say.) Husband is the word of choice because it is unlikely she is single, due to the fact that she has three children. This photograph is black and white, signifying that the picture is older. This therefore states that it is unlikely for the woman to be divorced, or the possibility that she never married. It is understood that not every black and white photograph is older, but the clothing, hairstyles of the children, and the filthiness support this assumption.

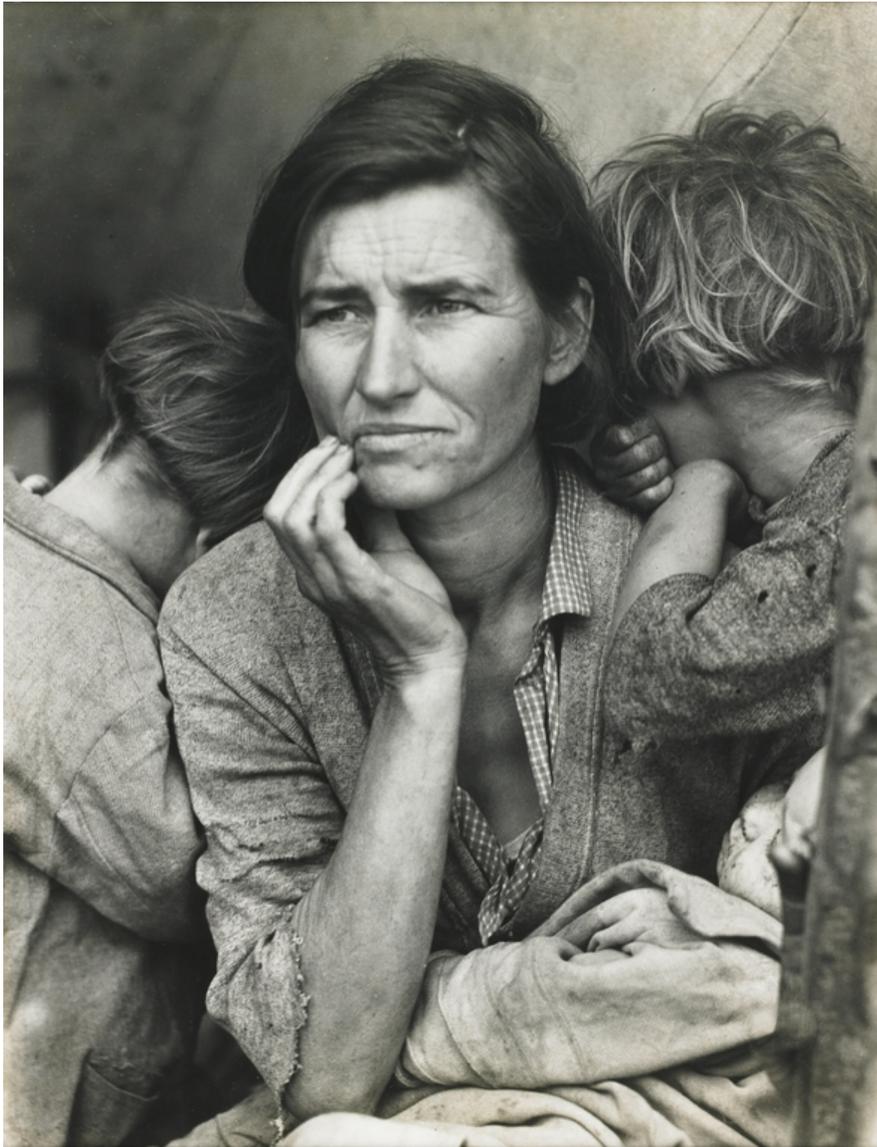
Without a husband, the woman is alone. That means the children are alone as well. All they have is their mother, which is easily interpreted due to the fact that the older children hide their faces behind her. She is the children's security. The children rely on their mother one-hundred percent, while the mother relies upon herself just the same.

As she relies upon herself, she becomes stressed and frustrated, which can be interpreted by her facial expression. As she gazes into the distance and ponders, it looks almost as if a tear will stream down her face at any

moment. Not a tear of sorrow either. Rather, a tear of frustration and helplessness will fall instead. Not that she does not have sorrow among other feelings such as hunger, pain and despair- it is obvious that she does. But, the creases in her forehead are harder, and her eyebrows are tightly pulled together. This facial expression is too hard and weather-worn to be an expression of sorrow.

Weather-worn or not, this woman pushes on. She has survived this far-she is determined to make it through. Rough times may have been difficult on her, but they have made her stronger. She may question her capacity for responsibility from time to time, but she can do this and she knows she can. All she has to do is stand up and keep trying. Just keep pushing forward.

Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California



Besides grey, this photograph obviously contains no color. Black and white are present, but those are not necessarily colors. But, the absence of color is what makes this photograph so intense. If this photograph contained color, the picture would not be dramatic enough for the photographer **or** the observer. Take the clothing for example. If the woman wore a red shirt, the photograph would not seem as aged as intended in black and white. If the entire photograph were in color, the photograph would display an entirely different message. Perhaps the photograph would look as if the woman and her children are simply sitting down on a hot day, and/or after a hard-days' work. Color is one visual element of choice. Not because the photograph contains extraordinary color, rather the picture contains extraordinary absence of instead.

Almost every photograph, drawing or painting has an emphasis or focal point of some degree. Not every observer may agree on what the focus is, but in this particular photograph, many observers would agree. The focal point of this photograph would most likely be the woman's face. As soon as the observer's glance falls upon the photograph, the face of the woman is observed first. The photographer took the photograph at a moment in time where the woman was closer to the camera than the children. Also, her face is the only fully visible one. Therefore, her facial features become the most interesting, due to the fact the her face **is** the only full visible one.

Even though this photograph contains little to no color, light

and value is of great importance. The dark hair of the woman compliments her face, causing her face to appear even brighter than originally intended. For even though her face is approximately the same brightness as the blanket and child resting on her lap, the dark hair of both herself and her other two children causes her face to glow. Light and value is also another contribution to the focal point of the photograph. Her face is brighter, therefore, is observed first. The skin of the older children is relatively darker than the woman's, causing more of a background than an inclusion in the photograph. The photographer captured the photograph at the perfect angle, in which the majority of the light was directly in the middle and to the front of the photograph. This way, the woman appears to be the basis of the photograph, and obviously the most interesting and important.

These choices of absence of color, choice of focal point and location of light value, really have created a masterpiece. This photograph is truly amazing. At first glance, I thought this photograph was simply interesting. But, the more I gazed and analyzed the photograph, the more I appreciated and understood. This photograph really makes me value my life. The majority of things in my possession are things I want, not that I **need**. This woman **needs** food, water, shelter and even a bath. I feel sympathy for the people who suffered through the depression, and I feel very fortunate for the lifestyle I live and the things I have in my possession. I believe that there is not one thing that should have been done differently to make this picture better or more dramatic. This photograph is perfect the way it is, and I walk away from the picture with great appreciation in my heart and an experience I will never

forget.